since records began being kept in 2009. Such violence cannot be understood separate

from the political climate surrounding the 2016 presidential election. According to

Ibrahim Hooper of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, “We are seeing an

unbelievably toxic, anti-Muslim environment in our society that is being exploited

and encouraged by public figures like Donald Trump, Ben Carson, Rick Santorum,

and others” (Lazare 2015).

s the opening vignette reveals, race, immigration, incendiary political rhetoric, and hate

crimes are intimately and often dangerously interconnected. In this final chapter, we

explore the claim made by political pundits immediately after Barack Obama won the 2008

presidential election that we are a postracial society (Wingfield and Feagin 2010). Claiming to

be postracial is similar to claiming to be color-blind—it is a claim that race is no longer a major

factor in determining one’s life chances. This claim should be clearly in question, as evidence

of ongoing racial inequality in educational institutions, housing, criminal justice, and even the

sports world exists. This chapter will explore the future of race, the operation of racism and

whiteness in the political sphere, immigration, hate groups, reparations, and racial

reconciliation. Consider the following examples of both the ongoing significance of race in the

United States and significant racial progress:

• The Millennial Generation, those individuals born in the 1980s and 1990s, is the most

racially/ethnically diverse generation our country has ever known.

• Most African American elected officials are from predominantly black districts, and few

win elections in majority-white districts (Perry and Parent 1995).

• Although President Obama could not have won the presidency without white votes, he

did not win the majority of white votes in either 2008 or 2012.

• Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump successfully based his campaign on racist

and xenophobic sound bites, including characterizing Mexicans as rapists and criminals

and proposing to ban Muslims from entering the United States.

• In June 2016, Rick Tyler, an independent candidate for Congress from Tennessee, put up a

billboard with the phrase “Make America White Again” (Bever 2016).

• Anti-immigrant sentiment is racialized.

• A campaign to eliminate “the I word” (“illegal”) from public discourse has enjoyed

considerable success in its efforts to stop the description of human beings as “illegal” (as

in “illegal immigrants”).

• In West Allis, Wisconsin, dozens of black youth began attacking white people at a state

fair in August 2011 because the white people were “easy targets” (Cohen 2011).

• Between 2003 and 2007, attacks on Latinos grew by 40 percent, while the estimated

increase in their population was only 16 percent during the same period (Reddy 2008).

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE OF RACE

This book began with the argument that race is a social construction, meaning that the concept

of race changes across time and place. Groups categorized as racial minorities in 1840 (for

example, Irish Americans) are very different from the groups categorized as racial minorities

in 1980 (for example, Mexican Americans). How race is defined in Brazil differs substantially

from US racial categorization systems, as they have five official categories: branco (white),

pardo (brown), preto (black), amarelo (yellow), and indigenous. With that knowledge, it should

come as no surprise that sociologists make the argument that in the future, race will look

different than it does today. This means that groups that are currently racialized may not be,

and some groups that are not currently racialized may be; essentially, our census will count

racial groups differently than it does today. While no one can say for sure what groups will be

racialized and what groups will become white, this chapter explores some predictions

sociologists offer on what the future may hold. Not all sociologists agree on what the racial

future looks like specifically, but there is consensus that we are not now, nor are we likely to

be in the near future, a postracial society.

In Chapter 1, we challenged the media interpretation of Pew Research Center data that

declared whites will be a “minority” by 2050. One of the reasons this assumption is unlikely to

prove true is because sociologists predict that the definition of who is “white” will change

(Yancey 2003). Like Irish, Jewish, and Italian Americans in the past, some groups who are

currently defined as “nonwhite” today will become white.

Becoming White in the Twenty-First Century

Sociologist George Yancey (2003) argues that the groups most likely to become white in the

next forty years are Latinos and Asian Americans. His argument is based on the recognition

that African Americans face a greater degree of alienation than other racial groups. Latinos

without African features and Asian Americans do not face the same degree of alienation in the

United States as African Americans do, although they undeniably face prejudice and racism.

In addition, Yancey argues that Latinos and Asian Americans are more likely to become

white for several reasons. The first is that Latinos have some European heritage, which likely

results in more social acceptance of them. There has also been a long trend toward exogamy,

marrying outside one’s group, among Latinos (see Chapter 11). An additional argument can be

made that Latinos are of value to the dominant group due to their sheer size alone. Whites

may actually encourage the assimilation of Latinos, as they did the Irish in the mid-1800s,

because it is in the political interest of whites to assimilate them rather than having them

remain a sizable minority group. Certainly becoming white is alluring to minority groups

because of the privileges attached to it, but it can also be beneficial to the dominant group in

securing their power. This argument should not be taken to imply that all minority groups

desire to distance themselves from their culture and “become white,” just that the privileges

associated with whiteness can be alluring.

Asian Americans are similar to Southern/Eastern Europeans who were incorporated into an

expanded definition of whiteness in the past, according to Yancey (2003). One of the

similarities is that the bulk of Asian Americans have entered the United States during roughly

the same era, the post-1965 period, making their experiences with racism similar to one

another’s, rather than having their experiences span multiple generations. Other arguments

look to the high interracial marriage rates among Asian Americans, particularly Asian

American women, as discussed in Chapter 11, and their model minority status as explanations

for their likelihood to become white.

Triracial Stratification System

Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2010) makes a different argument for the future of race in

America than the previous one offered by sociologist George Yancey, one he refers to as the

Latin Americanization thesis. This thesis argues that the United States is shifting from a

binary white/nonwhite racial system to a triracial stratification system, similar to that which is

found in many Latin American and Caribbean countries. Bonilla-Silva argues that instead of a

binary racial status hierarchy with whites at the top and nonwhites at the bottom, in this

triracial stratification system, whites will be at the top, an intermediary group of “honorary

whites” in the middle, and a nonwhite group at the bottom. Unlike Yancey, Bonilla-Silva

argues that while some Latinos and Asian Americans are more likely to assimilate into

whiteness, not all people and groups that fall under those umbrella categories will be classified

as white.

In Bonilla-Silva’s triracial stratification system, the white group will be composed of

traditional whites, any new white immigrants, and some Latinos, specifically those who are

totally assimilated. Also included in this category are lighter-skinned multiracial individuals.

The honorary whites will comprise most light-skinned Latinos, Japanese Americans, Korean

Americans, Asian Indians, Chinese Americans, and most Middle-Eastern Americans. The

bottom rung of the racial hierarchy will be composed of blacks, dark-skinned Latinos with

visible African ancestry, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Filipinos, and Laotians (see Table 12.1).

“WHITES” “HONORARY WHITES” “COLLECTIVE BLACK/NONWHITE”

Whites Light-skinned Latinos Vietnamese Americans

New whites (Russians, Albanians,

etc.)

Japanese Americans

Korean Americans

Filipino Americans

Hmong Americans

Assimilated white Latinos Asian Indians Laotian Americans

Some multiracials Chinese Americans Dark-skinned Latinos

Assimilated (urban) Native

Americans

Middle Eastern

Americans

Blacks

New West Indians

A few Asian-origin people Most multiracials African immigrants

Reservation-bound Native Americans

TABLE 12.1: Preliminary Map of Triracial Order in the USA

SOURCE: Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2010. Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism & Racial

Inequality in Contemporary American, 3rd Edition. Rowman and Littlefield: Lanham, MA. (p.

180).

Some of the reasons Bonilla-Silva gives for his Latin Americanization thesis are that Latin

America has a long history of race mixing that coexists with rather than supplants white

supremacy. In other words, throughout Latin America, white supremacy still exists despite the

very different attitudes toward miscegenation. In Brazil, someone who is fair-skinned and has

European features generally benefits from white privilege. Thus, while many people argue

that the increase in interracial dating and marriages in the United States will result in the

dismantling of the racial hierarchy (discussed in Chapter 11), Bonilla-Silva argues that whites

will remain privileged and at the top of the triracial hierarchy. One piece of evidence he uses

to make his argument that some Asian Americans and some Latinos will become honorary

whites is that research finds that whites are significantly more likely to live near people who

would fall into the “honorary white” category than those who fall into the “collective

black/nonwhite” category (Bonilla-Silva 2010). For instance, dark-skinned Latinos face

residential segregation patterns similar to those of African Americans, whereas Latinos who

identify as white, such as Cubans and South Americans, are more likely to live in communities

with non-Hispanic whites (Logan 2003).

The racial stratification system in Latin America is based on colorism, which implies that

racial groups are internally stratified along the lines of skin color (with lighter-skinned people

receiving preferential treatment and darker-skinned people experiencing more

discrimination). The operation of colorism in the United States was discussed in Chapter 1.

Race and the Millennial Generation

The Millennial Generation, those born in the 1980s and 1990s, is the most racially and

ethnically diverse generation the United States has ever known, and they strongly favored

Barack Obama in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. In a series of focus groups

conducted by the Applied Research Center, millennials were asked their feelings about race

and, specifically, the claim that the United States is a postracial society. While there are

differences among millennials along race and class lines in their beliefs about how much race

remains a factor in today’s society, one of the overwhelming findings of this report is that a

large majority of young people surveyed believe that racism remains a significant force today,

particularly within the criminal justice system, educational institutions, economics, and in

immigration debates. Research discussed in the previous chapter describes members of this

generation as more comfortable with interracial dating, which is often used as evidence of

their sense that they are different from previous generations, yet they do not think our society

is postracial or that they are beyond race (Apollon 2011).