

Chapter 1

Racial Scaffolding: Conceptual Overview



“The land of the free” is a widely held and loudly sung sentiment about the United States. It is an ideal that has become a credo that draws diverse peoples from around the globe to this uniquely created nation. However, the unique history and development of the United States of America have led to the establishment of a nation in which freedom and equality are not universally enjoyed by all its people. This is a central paradox built into the constitution by the founding fathers that continues to haunt the nation today.

The founding fathers were a group of white Anglo-Saxon protestant males who had established themselves as the landed gentry in the American British colonies. They were seeking independence from the English monarchy and from a system of governance that they viewed as oppressive. In their Declaration of Independence they pronounced, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Their aim was to establish a nation in which they and their heirs would be free to live as they desired under a system of self-governance. In making this declaration, they gave no thought to extending these rights to individuals outside their peer group of white landholding males residing in the British colonies in America. Their document did not address the contradiction of implementing a system of “Life, Liberty and Freedom” for themselves, and implementing a restrictive oppressive society for individuals outside of their select in-group.

Consequently, as this newly established country evolved, it developed a myriad of practices and policies that institutionalized the central paradox that not all its residents had equal rights to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The truth is that, although it is touted as “the land of the free,” the United States has never been a nation in which all its peoples have been “free” or “equal.” For those of Anglo-Saxon protestant ancestry who have had power and privilege, the United States has indeed been the “land of the free.” The rules, norms, and standards for a society are established by those in power. Thus, over time, all the structures of American society have been set up to support white identity. This support provides privileges that others are not privy to. White privilege has been the norm in this country because whites have continually been the dominant group. In contrast, freedom and equality have been elusive for those without power or

privilege—those who lived on this land before the arrival of European colonists or who subsequently came to these shores from other regions of the world. Over time, rights and privileges have been extended to individuals from other ancestral heritages. However, over the long term and as a group, it is whites who have benefited politically, financially, personally, socially, and generally within the institutional structures that govern this country.

Beginning with the English colonists and continuing to the present day, the need of white Americans to retain power, resources, and social status has ingrained in the American psyche a psychological perception of “the other” as marginal, inferior, and, therefore, not worthy of occupying positions that require thoughtful and intelligent actions. Consequently, even when persons who are members of subordinate groups obtain power positions, they continue to be perceived as “the other” and often face tactical maneuvers that can stymie, protract, or devalue cogent well-conceived ideas and possible positive change. These tactics, along with established laws and policies, form a scaffolding that supports institutionalized racism in this country. This book explains and examines how the continuing lack of freedom and equality of those perceived as “the other” is perpetuated and reinforced by institutional scaffolding based on the uniquely American social construction of race. The following case exemplifies the fractured nature of freedom and equality in the United States and illuminates the social construction of racism.

The Case of Trayvon Martin

In 2012 as he talked on his cellphone while walking through his middle-class Florida neighborhood, 17 year-old Trayvon Martin, an African-American youth was gunned down by an overzealous neighborhood watch coordinator. His murderer, George Zimmerman, was acquitted (Rubin, 2013). The murder of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of his murderer confronted America with the fact it is still not a post-racial social society. This murder was a sad reminder of how far the United States has yet to go to eliminate racism.

The Trayvon Martin case unfolds as a symbol of contemporary race relations in the United States. Cho (2008) describes post-racialism as a “twenty-first century ideology that reflects a belief that, due to the significant racial progress that has been made, the state need not engage in race-based decision-making or adopt race-based remedies, and that society eschew race as a central organizing principle of social action. Central to post-racialism is the idea that “racial thinking and racial remedies are no longer needed because the nation has...transcended racial divisions of past generations” (Cho, 2008, p. 458). Post-racialists may be correct that we have come a long way, but they are not correct when they claim that race no longer matters and should not be acknowledged.

From the time of Trayvon Martin’s murder until the acquittal of Zimmerman, and even now, the case represents poignant symbolism of the enduring legacy of how racism is enacted in America. Regardless of the lack of a conviction for Zimmerman, if Martin had been white, it is unlikely that Zimmerman would have stated, as he did during the trial, that Martin was “real suspicious,” “up to no good,” and “on drugs or something.”

Whether he was aware of this or not, race likely influenced Zimmerman's perception that Martin posed a threat of criminality (Lee, 2013, p. 111). Race also may have influenced the government's decision not to arrest Zimmerman. Had Zimmerman been an African American who shot an unarmed white teenager during a fist fight, it is unlikely that the police would have released Zimmerman without any charges.

This paradox points out the deep racial schism in American society and epitomizes the fragmented nature of the American soul and psyche as the nation confronts its oldest social problem in a new century. For example, the election of Barak Obama in 2008, as the first African American president of the United States, signaled to most Americans that the United States had entered a post-racial society. Yet extremist racist views and implicit biases (unconscious thoughts that surface in prejudicial ways) have continued to motivate anti-integration violence against its citizens. While many eras in American history have included moments of racial progress, occurring in the midst of violence, in this particular moment, the violent expression of racism alongside such obvious racial progress seems to defy logic.

Aversive racism theory (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986, 2004; Kovel, 1984) is a form of racism that provides one explanation for racial extremism in this post-civil rights era. Aversive racism is a form of present day bias in which individuals sympathize with victims of past injustice, support the principle of racial equality, and regard themselves as non-prejudiced, but at the same time possess negative feelings and beliefs about persons of color (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986, 2004). Conflicting views therefore coexist within a particular individual. Because such views are contradictory, aversive racists subconsciously suppress their negative views and will not discriminate unless they can ascribe nonracial reasons for their actions. Hence, Trayvon Martin was perceived as a threat. In finding George Zimmerman not guilty of murder or manslaughter, the jury agreed that the shooting of Trayvon Martin could have been justifiable because Zimmerman feared great bodily harm or death.

A broader explanation for this case is that there is a foundation of institutional racial scaffolding in the United States—racism stresses differences among individuals or groups; it is not the differences themselves that lead to subordination and systemic oppression, but the interpretation of differences in policy and law enforcement. In this way, racism can be viewed as persistent and evolving. Racist oppression is characterized by cultural, individual, and institutional components of oppression that are interlocking, systemic processes and behaviors within our society (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997; Wewiorski, 1995). These institutions shape individual lives, treat individuals differently, and offer unequal opportunities in the areas of housing, education, employment, economics, and within the judicial system. Institutional scaffolding contributes to and maintains the entrenchment of racism today. Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman exemplify individuals trapped in this interlocking system. If most people assume that young black males, in this instance Trayvon Martin, are armed and dangerous, then a defendant, such as George Zimmerman, claiming that he shot a young black male in self-defense, is more likely to be seen by the judge and jury as having acted reasonably, even if the young black male in question was not in fact a threat (Lee, 2013).

Racism in America

Historically, and continuing to the present, the common American *perception* is that this is a land of “freedom” that offers liberty and equality for all. However, the *reality* is that this freedom, in the past, and even now, exists to varying degrees as liberty and equality primarily for whites. This freedom was not extended to First Nation People¹ and Mexicans whose land was absconded and exploited, nor was it extended to Africans who were brought in shackles to provide the manual labor necessary to establish the country’s economic affluence; and, it did not include Chinese who were not officially enslaved but who legally were treated inhumanely as a people and as laborers. The Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution represented the landed gentry and, to a lesser extent, poor Europeans seeking greater wealth, and discounted those relegated as “other.” Policies and laws were established to curtail and restrict the liberties of persons who belonged to these groups of color. These legal and institutional structures formed the restrictive scaffolding that was initially established during the period of bondage and enslavement of Africans. The refinement and reinforcement of this scaffolding over time has led to the institutionalized ways in which all groups of color have been constrained historically and continue to be constrained today.

Racism is dynamic, multidimensional, and complex. It is dynamic in that its form is constantly changing. Its energetic force morphs, emerges, and permeates the systemic, societal, structural, and psychological existence of this country and, therefore, influences and guides the direction of the United States. Racism is multidimensional because there is depth of conflict (such as in ideologies, cultures, traditions, mores, belief systems, and allocation of resources) and breadth of construction (for example, psychological, social, institutional, group, and individual). This myriad of social influences and barrage of perpetual structural stimuli are what make racism extremely complex and a powerful social force.

Over the years, many authors (for example, Alexander, 2012; Allport, 1981; Bell, 1997; Bell, Castañeda, & Zúñiga, 2010; Feagin, 1989, 2000; Paynter, Hautaniemi, & Muller, 1994; Pinderhughes, 1989; Sue et al., 2007; Tourse, 2016; Trouellot in Gregory, 1994; Walter et al., 2017; Wewiorski, 1995; Yamato, 2004) have defined and discussed racism and the innumerable dynamic and multidimensional intricacies that make up its complex nature. Examples of the various types of racism make its complexity more evident and pronounced. We have already discussed a modern type of racism, aversive racism, in our discussion of the Trayvon Martin case. The literature explicates several other types of racism that emphasize either behavior,

¹Indigenous peoples, also known as first peoples, aboriginal peoples, native peoples, or autochthonous peoples, are ethnic groups who are descended from and identify with the original inhabitants of a given region, in contrast to groups that have settled, occupied, or colonized the area more recently (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2008). In the authors attempt to develop an anti-racism book with understanding of these terms we have chosen to identify these groups as First Nation People because this label is more preferential than the term Native American. This is the authors’ attempt to utilize terms that are embraced by the people and not just the language constructed by the federal government.

context, or feeling. These types are overlapping and interconnected, and highlight the complex and varied ways in which racism can be manifest and understood. Most notable of these various racism forms, including aversive racism, are dominative, normative/symbolic, cultural, and institutional.

Dominative or *old-fashioned* racism is overt and was very present in the United States—from the colonial period through the 1960s civil rights era—with whites dominating and discriminating against people of color, and in particular, initially, First Nation Peoples, Africans, Mexicans, and Chinese. The dominative type of racism is expressed in overt misuse of power, exploitation, and extermination of subordinate groups. Dominative racism still exists and still promotes inequitable justice but most often now it is cloaked in robes reflecting contemporary styles of oppression (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), such as incarceration (see Alexander, 2012); police brutality as exemplified in incidents occurring in 2014 in Ferguson, MO (see Schmidt, Apuzzo, & Bosman, 2014) and Staten Island, NY (see Goldstein & Schweber, 2014); migrant/itinerant farming (see Capp's analysis Migration Policy Institute, Capps, 2015); high unemployment (see Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014), and poor or inept health care (see Fadiman, 2012; Skloot, 2011).

After the Civil Rights Era, racism morphed, took a more *modern* tack, and re-emerged in various forms. Two such forms are normative/symbolic and cultural racism. In contrast with dominative racism, these forms are more covert, elusive, and more difficult to identify and prove. The *normative/symbolic* type of racism reflects the overarching American norms that are Anglo-Saxon in origin. These norms establish “expected behaviors that define what is adequate or not adequate” (Pinderhughes, 1989, p. 149) in the human condition. Kinder and Sanders in Bonilla-Silva (2014, p. 6) indicate that this racism revolves around moral character, and is imbued with norms that address and hold sway for the dominant group and leave subordinate groups prone to stereotypes that reflect deficiency, incompetence, and an inability to carry forth the spirit of American individualism. As the old saying goes, subordinate groups should “pull themselves up by their boot straps.” But, the counterpoint to this saying is that one has to have *access* to boots in order to pull them up. Normative/symbolic racism does not allow access, just false erroneous rationales by whites for the supposed inadequacies of people of color.

Cultural racism has been defined as “any message or image prevalent in society that promotes the false but constant idea that White is the standard, ideal, normal” (McGoldrick & Hardy, 2008, p. 415). This brings about tension on all sides for the spurious belief by whites, which presupposes that the culture of others has deficits, and, for the “others,” it implies that their cultures are lacking and that the ideal exists outside of their own culture. Operating in and between conflicting cultures (the dominant and subordinate) can bring about discord and cultural distain (Lum, 2000). Ironically, some aspects of subordinate cultures are embraced by the dominant culture, which gives the impression that there is acceptance. Over their lifetimes the authors have observed that portions of the culture of subordinate groups are accepted (for instance types of music, style of housing, form of dress), but the people of these cultures are not accepted—they are kept at bay and exploited in ways that benefit the dominant group.

These and other types of racism are ingrained in American institutions—from governmental agencies and private business and industry, to basic accommodations. Racism is commonly disguised within unrecognized and known privileges as well as established power bases embedded in the structures and systems that represent the United States. Such institutions have held sway and manifest racial bias since the colonial period. *Institutional racism* is developed by individuals or groups of individuals who hold power and who reflect their individual racial biases consciously or unconsciously in the rules, regulations, policies, procedures, and practices that govern institutions. Jones (see Sue, 2006) suggests that this systemic structural scaffolding is “designed to subjugate, oppress, and force dependence of individuals and groups on a larger society ... [doing so] by sanctioning unequal goals, unequal status, and unequal access to goods and services” (p. 52).

The diffused, elusive, and entrenched nature of racism in this country makes it impossible for individuals to escape its presence in their lives. Racism is an intrinsic aspect of each person’s identity regardless of their race and whether they acknowledge, are aware of, or deny its existence (Roppolo, 2010; Tatum, 2013; Yamato, 2004).

As defined in this body of work, racism is an all-encompassing oppressive multidimensional construction that infiltrates the individual, societal, institutional and structural mind-set and physical/geographic construction of this country. It is also a system based on domination and subordination, which involves one group discriminating against other groups based on their racial heritage, physical characteristics and language facility. Its foundation in the United States is rooted in resource attainment and a benefits system (institutional policies and practices) that favor the racial group in power. In this country the favored group is those who benefit from white privilege.

We therefore agree with the proponents of Critical Race Theory (for instance, Abrams & Moio, 2009; Razack & Jeffery, 2002; Schiele, 2007; Yee, 2005) whose view is that racism as a social construction eclipses other forms of oppression (e.g., homophobia, classism, xenophobia, and sexism). Critical Race theory challenges the liberal claims of objectivity, neutrality, and color blindness of the law as it relates to all oppressive states (Schiele, 2007). Such perceptions normalize and perpetuate racism by ignoring the racial inequalities that infuse and direct the structural makeup of other types of oppressions. Giving equal weight to all types of oppression diminishes the importance and pernicious persistence of the endemic and foundational legacy of race upon which this country was founded and the significant effect of racism on all of our lives. It discounts the racialized historical values and beliefs that continue to support and drive this country’s social systems and psychological identity.

The core groups that historically experienced pejorative treatment based on race within the United States were First Nation Peoples, Africans, Mexicans, and Chinese. These are the groups upon which the racism mold was developed. Information about the historical racism experienced by these core groups provides a foundation for better understanding the continuing individual and systemic discriminatory treatment of all groups of color. Over time, the mold has shifted and changed, and the mold of racism has now incorporated other groups of color who have immigrated to the United States. Ignoring the history of racism with respect to these core groups discounts the extent to which white privilege and dominance have historically

defined this country. To deny and/or misconstrue the existence of racism minimizes the social and psychological importance of racism in the development of the United States on both the individual and the institutional level and allows for the perpetuation of the false perceptions that there is racial equality in this country.

Racism is not peculiar to just the United States, but the United States has its own unique form of racism that is rooted and embedded in this country's genesis. Racism supplies a strong but structurally flawed existence upon which the U.S. incorporates its founding values. The impact and influence of racism has long been recognized and the racial perceptions of years past are still dynamic and still occurring today.

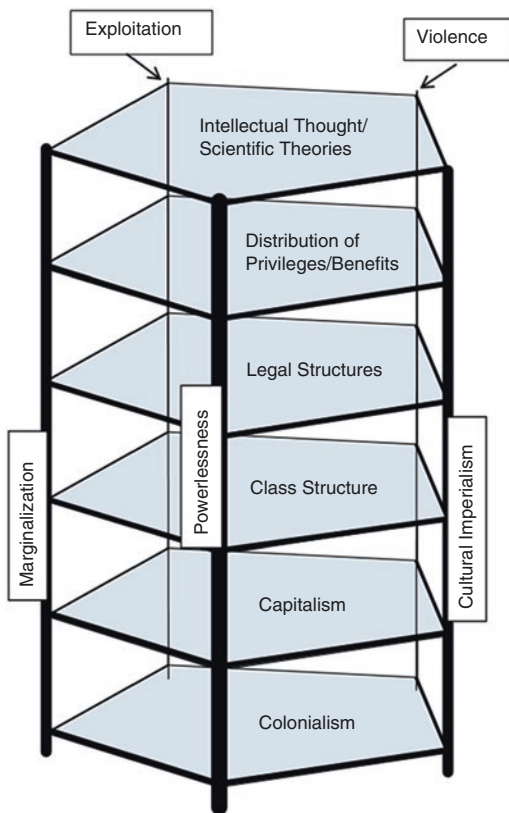
When defining racism earlier, the authors alluded to the multidimensional nature of oppression. It is the *scaffolding* anchored in that oppression that supports and maintains racial discrimination. Scaffolding is an unseen but integral aspect of racism that helps to prevent the collapse of this morphing entity. It involves thought processes, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs that are borne out of societal, group, and individual cues. Racism develops and evolves within the context of its place in history, but it remains a constant through time because of the scaffolding. Racism morphs, but the scaffolding continues to hold it in place.

In developmental psychology, scaffolding is conceptualized as a means to instructively mold a person's cognitive skill set from one level to a higher more advanced cognitive level of functioning (Davies, 2011; Vygotsky in McLeod, 2014). The structure of this scaffolding is made up of the resources, encouragement, guidance, and reinforcement that are provided by adults to support and shape children's learning of complex social concepts and behaviors. For example, children are born without any ideas about gender differences. They learn their gender identity, build ideas of gender differences, and shape their behavior over time through a cognitive process that is supported by the scaffolding provided by their significant caregivers.

In a similar way, at the societal level, there is scaffolding to support the development and evolution of racism. In the society, there are established norms and laws that historically reinforce institutional systems relative to race. For example, both individually and collectively as a society, we learn how the system of white privilege works and shape our behaviors to adapt to this existing system. Thus, our societal structures constitute the relatively permanent elements of the scaffolding that supports ongoing racism. With the support of this scaffolding, racism is able to evolve to more advanced forms, such as normative and cultural racism. It is the structural stability of the scaffolding, based on interchangeable parts and cross bracing, that has enabled and promoted the evolution of racism to forms that are now more sophisticated and often less capable of being identified (see Fig. 1.1).

Vygotsky believed that cognitive development differs across cultures and that it advances to higher planes through cultural interactions (McLeod, 2014). Vygotsky's theories stress the role of social interaction in the development of cognition over time (McLeod, 2014). For racism, it is the *lack* of cultural interaction and of genuine exploration of cultural differences, as well as the lack of efforts to understand such differences, that strengthens the basis for viewing "the other" negatively (Tourse, 2016). Social distance from "the other" promotes the possibility that the beliefs and perceptions of individuals will be influenced by the subtle and not so subtle reproachful societal cues received about different cultures.

Fig. 1.1 Scaffolding that supports racism in America



Social Construction

Race is a social construction. As such, it is based on societal cues from which there is bidirectional interaction. These relationships hinge on group and/or individual perceptions (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 2012). Social construction theory provides a conceptual framework that explains contemporary social events and social order as based on historical and cultural transactions and perceptions that are reflected in the interactions between and among individuals and groups. This idea grew out of the philosophical discussions of Berger and Luckmann (1967) on the objective and subjective nature of reality and the postmodern thought that history, as well as past and present social and language cues, play an integral part in interpersonal transactions (see Gergen in Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 2013, p. 330). A tenet of social construction theory is that one’s various positive and negative *subjective* views of events and images are perceived to be *objective* based on one’s individual or group history and historical experience with social interactions and social relationships. This subjective internalization of perceived reality then leads to objective legitimization and validation by individuals and those in power “as though [reality] were separate from the human processes that created it” (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 2013, p. 332). Thus, reality for individuals and groups, or as inculcated in institutions, is based on how such entities

perceive and relate to an event or events. Social Construction Theory thus explicates the existence and formation of our biases in the ways we think about and use categories and social cues to structure our experience and analysis of the world.

Consider the example of a car accident. Several people may have witnessed the accident and each will have his or her own view of what is the reality of the event. Based on these various eyewitness accounts, the law enforcement institution(s) may take yet another perspective. All these accounts are influenced by the internalized world views of each of the witnesses, the biases of the legal system, and by all of their relational perspectives on race, gender, religion, and other cultural attributes. By sifting through this myriad of perceptions, someone or some individuals will try to construct a more factual representation of the reality of the event.

The social construction of racism requires sifting through the historical and cultural evidence and facts, and analyzing their presence in today's society. As we have learned in the Trayvon Martin case, there were differing perspectives. For example, the public was divided over the not guilty verdict in the George Zimmerman trial and over the conversation about race that has surrounded it (Pew Research Center for People and Press 2013). The Pew Research Center conducted a study in July 17–21, 2013, with 1480 adults nationwide. They found that roughly as many people were satisfied with the outcome of the case (39%) as were dissatisfied (42%), and that nearly one-in-five (19%) had no opinion. Fifty-two percent of those surveyed reported that race was getting more attention in the case than it deserved, while 36% said the case raised important issues about race that need to be discussed. Perceptions also clearly differed by race. African Americans expressed a clear and strong reaction to the case and its meaning. By an 86% to 5% margin, African Americans were dissatisfied with Zimmerman's acquittal in the death of Trayvon Martin. Nearly eight-in-ten blacks (78%) said the case raised important issues about race that should be discussed. On the other hand, among whites, more were satisfied (49%) than were dissatisfied (30%) with the outcome of the Zimmerman trial. Just 28% of whites said the case raised important issues about race, while twice as many (60%) said the issue of race was getting more attention than it deserved. Reality continues to be capricious as perceived by individuals and groups, and the Trayvon Martin case provides a glimpse into how the social construction of race, as represented in the United States, exists.

Oppression

By definition, oppression is a means to assist those with power (the socially dominant group) in maintaining and legitimizing their existence by suppressing the individual, group, and institutional free-will of others (the socially subordinate groups). It is a tactic for diminishing the psychological and social strength of subordinate groups and for maintaining a labor force consonant with the will and need of the socially dominant group. Numerous definitions and perceptions exist that are consistent with this conceptualization of oppression (Hayes III, 2000; Pillari & Newsome Jr., 1998; Schiele, 1999; Swigonski, 1999; Turner, Singleton Jr., & Musick, 1990). Bell (1997) aptly notes that oppression is

pervasive, restrictive, hierarchical, a complex multiple cross-cutting relationship, is internalized, and reflects “isms.” The authors concur with Bell that “no one form of oppression is the base for all others, and no single definition includes [all of these features], but all are connected within a system that makes them possible” (p. 6) Oppression is a known and accepted concept that takes many forms, one of which is racial oppression.

Racial oppression in the United States had its genesis with the exploitation of First Nation Peoples (see for example Brown, 1978). It was then institutionalized and solidified in the young nation through practices and policies that supported the enslavement of persons of African descent (see for example Stamp, 1956). Over time, this uniquely American social and structural order became imbedded in an American way of life that continually reinforced, facilitated, and promoted ongoing racial oppression.

Expanded definitions of oppression that consider its manifestations in societal structures are explicated by Young (2000) (also see Schiele, 2007) and Feagin and Feagin (1999). Young’s oppressive mechanisms and Feagin’s and Feagin’s oppressive dimensions are consistent with our concept of scaffolding. In describing the faces of oppression, Young notes that structural oppression is also imbued with symbols, norms that are taken for granted, as well as behaviors and practices. She suggests that “[in] this extended structural sense, oppression refers to the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms” (p. 36). Young identifies five concepts for how oppression occurs:

- Exploitation
- Marginalization
- Powerlessness
- Cultural imperialism
- Violence

Using our concept of scaffolding, these mechanisms are the upright poles that help to stabilize the structure of the scaffold, and thus promote the perpetuation of racism (see Fig. 1.1). The various examples described below show how the interconnectedness of these areas of oppression helps to solidify racial scaffolding.

Exploitation results in the transfer of the value of the labor of a subordinate social group to the benefit of the dominant group. This is what happened with slavery and, in more sophisticated forms, with sharecropping and Jim Crow laws and practices. The prison industry of the criminal justice system (see Alexander, 2012) exemplifies exploitation today. Through a comprehensive targeted campaign termed “the war on drugs,” the government has incentivized incarceration to such an extent that this “war” now offers lucrative business opportunities for companies that have a cost-effective business model for warehousing prisoners who disproportionately are poor and persons of color.

Marginalization is the process of relegating people outside or at the margins of society and the labor system. First Nation tribes were marginalized by being forced to resettle on reservations that had barren terrain. In the labor system, marginalized workers tend to have subminimum wage earnings, irregular hours, unstable employment, and no fringe benefits. African Americans and Mexicans tend to be disproportionately represented in

such marginalized occupations as domestic help, farm workers (especially migrant workers), and day laborers. The median usual weekly earnings of foreign-born full-time wage and salary workers were \$643 in 2013, compared with \$805 for their native-born counterparts (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Differences in earnings reflect a variety of factors, including variations in the distributions of foreign-born and native-born workers by educational attainment, occupation, industry, and geographic region. Marginalization occurs when geographic areas occupied mainly by people of color are redlined and deemed not economically viable, thus making it difficult for residents to acquire loans from banks to improve or buy property. Another example of marginalization is the education of children from subordinate groups in substandard schools.

Powerlessness is the inability to influence the forces that shape one's life and is the result of how labor, resources, and influence are distributed. The dominant group in the United States has exerted its power through land appropriation and forced migration of Mexicans and First Nation people. The enslavement of Africans forced them into a condition of extreme powerlessness. After emancipation, those in power continued to disempower African Americans through a variety of legal and illegal disenfranchisement tactics, including violence, fraudulent electoral practices, poll taxes, literacy tests, restrictions on voting in primaries, voter registration restrictions, gerrymandering, and voter identification laws. "Driving while black" and other forms of racial profiling are police practices that have a disempowering effect. Unarmed African Americans are completely powerless as they are brutalized or fatally shot by the police. The general availability of video recording devices has enabled the recording of many such occurrences and led to a number of widely publicized cases, including those of Rodney King in 1992, Michael Brown in 2014, and Freddie Gray in 2015.

Cultural Imperialism promotes the establishment of widespread utilization of a dominant group's experience and culture such that they become the cultural norm. The cultural norm in the United States is the culture of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs). The United States has patterned much of its legal and governing system and structures on those of England. Despite being a country comprised predominantly of persons from non-English-speaking heritages, English is the established national language. Thus, official documents are written in English and public schools are taught in English. Although freedom of religion is a protected right, Christianity has become the "unofficial" religion of the United States. This is exemplified in the fact that Christmas Day, a Christian holy day, has been officially designated a national holiday.

Violence is used to maintain powerlessness so that exploitation, marginalization, and cultural imperialism can be sustained. Unprovoked violence based on racial bias has a long history in the United States. Various iterations of violence can be seen in the longstanding practice of lynching African Americans, in attacks on children during The Civil Rights Movement, in mob violence and massacres of First Nation people, African Americans, Mexicans and Chinese, and, more recently, in such cases as that of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Freddie Gray.

Feagin and Feagin (1999) suggest a comprehensive theory of racial oppression, drawing on the conceptual work of a number of power-conflict theorists, most notably W. E. B. Du Bois, Oliver C. Cos, and Robert Blauner. The conceptual frameworks of these theorists emphasize economic stratification, and power issues. Feagin and Feagin (1999, pp. 58–63) identify six component dimensions in the development of racial oppression:

- *Initiation of Oppression*—capitalism and colonialism create a context favorable to the development of a system of racial oppression
- *Mechanisms of Oppression*—genocidal actions, enslavement, and economic exploitation are supported by legal structures
- *Privileges of Oppression*—the oppressed group has unequal access to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” and the associated material and psychological benefits
- *Elite Maintenance of Oppression*—class structure reinforces the power of the white elite
- *Rationalization of Oppression*—establishment of an intellectual ideology emphasizing the inferiority of the subordinated group that is maintained by power elites and the media
- *Resistance to Oppression*—members of the oppressed group have an alternative perspective and engage in overt and covert confrontation with and opposition to members of the dominant group

These dimensions are consistent with our conceptualization of the supporting rungs in the scaffolding that sustains the continual evolution of racism as it adapts to the changing legal, social, economic, technological, and moral climate in the United States (see Fig. 1.1). We conceptualize the primary supporting rungs of the scaffold to be colonialism, capitalism, class structure, legal structures, the distribution of privileges and benefits, and prevailing intellectual thought and scientific theories.

The poles and rungs of the scaffolding support the operation of racism in all of the institutional structures within the society. The institutional sectors and domains in the society are connected and strongly influence each other within an interlocking meta-system that can be conceptualized as an institutional web (see Fig. 1.2). Because racism is present in so many interconnected institutions that are influencing each other, it becomes firmly established in all the sectors and levels of the society. The strong interlocking forces within the institutional web are reinforced by the durable and adaptable rungs and poles of the scaffolding. As the society changes and evolves, the types and manifestations of racism morph and adapt to the changing context. Individuals, groups, and organizations become ensnared in the systemic and pervasive racism that is sustained by both the institutional web and the scaffolding, consequently, once established within the societal infrastructure, racism is very difficult to eradicate.

Throughout this book we discuss major concepts that help explicate institutionalized racism in the US. Major concepts introduced in this chapter

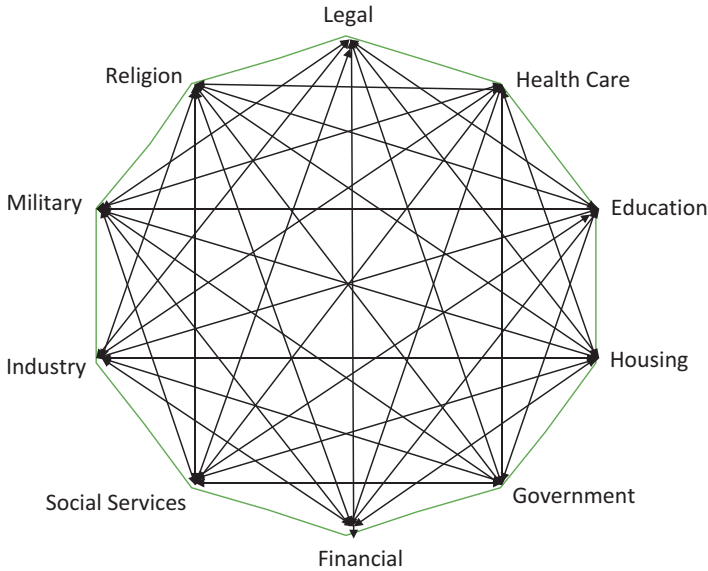


Fig. 1.2 Sectors of Society as an Interconnected Institutional Web (adapted from Wewiorski, 1995)

include social construction, oppression, scaffolding; and institutional web. Future chapters will introduce two additional major concepts: privilege and intersectionality.

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