

Preface

MORE THAN A GENERATION AFTER THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, WE CONTINUE to lack a clear and unitary conceptual language for discussing racial domination. We continue to be tongue-tied when it comes to race and, as a result, are constrained from fully understanding our society and fellow citizens. We are even strangers to ourselves.

Old ways of thinking about race and ethnicity no longer seem to apply in a society that has moved well beyond the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, a society that now confronts problems of racial division in some ways far more complex and ambiguous than those of straightforward segregation or bigotry (persistent as those tendencies may still be in the present day). What is needed is a new way of thinking about race for a society itself quite new. This book addresses that pressing need. It is our hope that *Racial Domination, Racial Progress* provides a more effective language with which to think and talk about—and effectively to address—the problem of racial domination in today’s society. In the following pages, we plumb the depths of this problem—its origins and history, its hidden dynamics, the ways it guides our daily lives—so as to be able to dissect its meanings and significance with intelligence, confidence, and conviction.

In doing so, we break with current textbooks in several ways. We rely on innovative advances in modern social thought, advances taking place not only in sociology but also in philosophy, anthropology, political science, economics, history, and literary and art criticism—not to mention exciting developments in such literatures as whiteness studies, critical race theory, cultural studies, woman-of-color feminism, and postcolonial studies. We fuse this social thought with music, literature, poetry, and popular culture. In this book you can find the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu alongside spoken-word poetry; American pragmatist philosophy followed by country music lyrics; ideas from the likes of W. E. B. Du Bois, Toni Morrison, Alejandro Portes, Ella Baker, Edward Said, and Ruth Frankenberg

(to list but a few) applied to modern society. *Racial Domination, Racial Progress* is steeped in the most up-to-date social-scientific research on race and ethnicity, as well as in examples from contemporary life, including youth culture. We have taken seriously American sociologist C. Wright Mills's famous dictum that "data is everywhere" and have called on social science to illuminate racial domination in all areas of social life.

Racial Domination, Racial Progress confronts some of today's most controversial and misunderstood issues, including immigration, affirmative action, racial segregation, interracial relationships, political representation, racialized poverty and affluence, educational inequality, incarceration, terrorism, cultural appropriation, civil society, religion, marriage and divorce, and racial identity formation. Throughout, it treats racial domination not as some "hot topic" issue to be debated in loose, unsystematic fashion but as a complex sociological phenomenon properly understood only through critical socioanalysis that arrives at conclusions after sifting carefully through the best available evidence.

Racial Domination, Racial Progress is uncompromisingly intersectional. It refuses artificially to separate the sociology of race and ethnicity from those of class and gender, while never losing sight of racial domination as its primary object of analysis. It highlights how racial domination overlaps other forms of domination based on economic standing and gender (as well as religion, nationality, and sexuality), and it does so because these bases of division are inextricably bound up with the career of racial domination.

This book's organization is nothing like that of other textbooks on race and ethnicity. Instead of proceeding, chapter by chapter, from one racial group to the next—which would only naturalize very unnatural racial divisions, emphasize our differences at the expense of our many similarities, and render the sociology of race and ethnicity nothing more than a collection of isolated snapshots of different groups—it pursues the analysis of racial domination into many of the different areas or fields of life of our society. Examining how race is a matter not of separate entities but of *systems of social relations*, it unpacks how racial domination works in the political, economic, residential, legal, educational, aesthetic, associational, and intimate fields of social life. In each of these fields, it analyses how white privilege is institutionalized and naturalized, such that it becomes invisible even to itself.

At bottom, this book is about the workings of racial domination in contemporary America (although many of its analytical concepts and sociological ideas can be applied to other national contexts). It offers you a comprehensive overview of the causal mechanisms or processes whereby racial divisions are established, reproduced, and in some cases transformed. In doing so, it necessarily engages in a serious and sustained way with history. As American novelist William Faulkner wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."¹ In this

book, historical processes are not relegated to a single introductory chapter; rather, historical processes inform the entire work and are explicitly addressed in each chapter.

Racial Domination, Racial Progress is not written in the uninspired and detached tone of scholastic disinterest. It does not reduce one of today's most sociologically complicated, emotionally charged, and politically frustrating topics to a collection of bold-faced terms and facts you memorize for the midterm. Rather, this book—one is tempted to call it a non-textbook textbook—seeks to connect with you, its readers, in a way that combines disciplined reasoning with a sense of engagement and passion, conveying sophisticated ideas in a clear and compelling fashion. (Accordingly, the book works just as well in lower division courses as it does in more advanced settings.) Conventional textbooks on race and ethnicity stimulate a type of reading that can only be called *contemplative*, a reading that devotes academic interest to social problems without ever being touched by them or resonating deeply with them. Such a reading ends when it ends; it goes nowhere. By contrast, we seek to stimulate *generative* readings, which simultaneously engage the world you find intimately familiar and yet also effect a sharp rupture with that world, defamiliarizing the familiar and helping you to arrive at a deeper sociological understanding of your world, offering solutions and strategies so that we all can work toward racial justice.

We seek to offer you, in short, a way of thinking about racial domination that you can apply to your everyday lives and to equip you with critical thinking skills that allow you better to address the pressing problems of racial domination with sociologically informed insight. More, we hope to cultivate in you a sociological imagination, one that rejects easy explanations and that takes into account social and historical forces that operate on an expansive scale. This is the liberating power of sociology: it allows us to objectify and criticize all the social forces that direct our lives (in ways we previously did not recognize), so that we are no longer controlled by those forces or bewildered or rendered passive in the face of them.

Racial Domination, Racial Progress, then, is not simply about one of America's most powerful driving forces—racial domination—it is also about you, the part you play in today's ever-changing world. To better understand our society is to better understand ourselves. "If this is so," you might ponder, "how, then, should I read this book?" Let us offer you two guidelines with the aim of promoting generative readings of the text.

First, as you read, think about how you can apply what you have learned to your life. When stockbrokers monitor the economy, one question dominates their minds: "How does this affect my money?" When farmers study rainfall patterns, they ask themselves but one question: "How will this affect my crops?" It should be the same way with us. As you study this book, ask yourself: "How

does this information affect my life? How does it help me better to understand my innermost thoughts, relationships, family, and college experience? And, knowing what I now know, how might I throw a wrench into the gears of racial domination?" Worrying about what other people might think about this book—your classmates, friends back home, or some other readers "out there"—is no less premature and imprudent than the stockbroker worrying about other stockbrokers before checking her own stocks or a farmer fretting over another farmers' fields before caring for his own. It is commonplace for students in a course on the sociology of race and ethnicity to think the course really is for someone else. Nonwhite students tend to think such a course is intended for their white peers, while those white peers tend to think of the course as intended for students of color. A course such as this one, however, is meant for all students: immigrants and native-born citizens, white and nonwhite students, alike.

If you are a white student who thinks this course is about people of color, a study of the racialized Other, and who conceives of your own role in this class as that of a tourist in a foreign culture, think again. Much of this book is about white people, their racial privilege, and the career of whiteness. You are as much a part of the story of American race relations as your nonwhite peers; indeed, you are central to it. Likewise, if you are a nonwhite student who thinks this course is primarily meant to open the eyes of your white peers and if you think, perhaps having tasted the bitter fruit of racism, that you are here primarily to teach other students who "don't get it," think again. One does not become an expert on racial domination simply by virtue of being on the receiving end of the stick any more than an asthmatic becomes an expert on asthma simply by virtue of having it. Lucid insight into the nature of racial domination comes by way of rigorous study and analysis—the application of sociological methods of inquiry to complex problems—rather than being the inevitable result of one's position in the racial order. The point is that we all have something to learn in this class—and we all have something to teach. This book is not just about "them" but about you. It seeks to educate—and unsettle—the righteous along with the disengaged, those who have long discussed matters of racism as well as those who are just now joining the conversation.

Self-evaluation, therefore, comes first. That said—and this is the second guideline—do not be so concerned with your own life and experiences that you fail to grasp the whole. "The worst readers," German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once complained, "are those who proceed like plundering soldiers: they pick up a few things they can use, soil and confuse the rest, and blaspheme the whole."² The point is well taken. Sometimes we can fall into a pattern of reading in which we pay undue attention to what is said about our ethnic or racial group while skimming over the rest. In so doing, we can easily get hung up on a phrase here and a sentence there, thereby ignoring other important

information. A close reading is admirable, but let's not fixate on details at the expense of the bigger picture. Let's read, instead, not only to facilitate self-examination but also to understand better the histories, experiences, and sufferings of ethnic or racial groups other than our own.

We are living in an age in which racial domination persists. But we also are living in an age when racial domination has come under serious and sustained attack. We are living in an age when multicultural coalitions have formed and all people, regardless of race, have taken stands against racism. And many of the most powerful and important antiracist movements have been led by young people. Considerable progress has been made, but considerable work also remains unfinished. The prerequisite for reconstructing our society is learning about it—and to understand our changing and complex world, and our place within it, we must learn about the changing and complex nature of racial domination.

Let us begin a conversation, then, a conversation through thick and thin. This conversation might make you feel uncomfortable, since topics as important and as personal as race are often difficult to discuss. You might feel a bit unsteady and awkward, clumsy even. You might feel exposed and vulnerable. Your words might trip and stumble at times, and you might say things you later regret. Take courage in the fact that many of your classmates (and perhaps even your professors) feel the same way. This is a difficult conversation for all of us: white students often are left feeling guilty or nervous, and nonwhite students often are left feeling alone or frustrated, their heartbeats returning to a normal level sometimes only hours after a class discussion. But know, too, that we have to have this conversation. We have to interrogate race, lest we allow the cancer of racism to continue to poison the promising vitality of our American society.

Supplements

Visit our Online Learning Center website at www.mhhe.com/desmond1e for student and instructor resources.

FOR STUDENTS. Student resources include self-quizzes and Internet exercises.

FOR INSTRUCTORS. The password-protected instructor portion of the website includes a comprehensive instructor's manual, a computerized test bank, and PowerPoint lecture slides.

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