5

Diverse Families/Similar Families

Descendants of Thomas ◆
Jefferson gather at Monticello.

I teach at a private liberal arts university in the Midwest. My students are predominantly white, and many come from wealthy families. As a way of introducing the topic of race in a sociology course I teach, I ask the class a series of questions. First, I ask them to list the features they think characterize African American families, Latino/a families, and Asian American families.

They have little trouble identifying long lists of differentiating traits, though they're quick to point out that most are stereotypes they don't believe. Some of the stereotypes are positive, such as "Asian American families are supportive and tight-knit"; others are distinctly negative, such as "African American families are weak and unstable."

I then ask the students to list the traits that typify white families. Here the discussion usually grinds to an awkward halt. The question troubles them. But I don't come to their rescue. I let them struggle. After a while, some variation of the following conversation typically ensues:

> *Student:* What kind of white family are you talking about? . . . There are too many kinds of white families and it'd be impossible to generalize.
> *Me:* OK, what kinds of white families are there?
> *Student:* Some white families are poor and they're different from rich families.
> *Me:* Uh huh. Go on.
> *Student:* Some white families are very religious and others aren't. Also they might be of different nationalities, live in different parts of the country. You know, they're all different. There's no way you can come up with common traits.
> *Me:* You're absolutely right! [The student usually beams with pride at this point for being a good sociologist.] But why didn't you ask me what kind of African American family or Latino/a family or Asian family I had in mind when I asked you to characterize them? Surely there are rich Asian and poor Asian families. There must be religious Latino/a and nonreligious Latino/a families out there. There are African American families that live in big cities and others that live on farms. (Newman, 2007, p. 15)

My point in these conversations is not to humiliate my students or put them on the spot (though they'd probably disagree); it is to illustrate how intertwined race and ethnicity are with our perceptions of family. Being a member of a majority racial group conferred on my students the privilege of thinking about their "whiteness" in terms of individual differences and not in terms of common group traits. Yet when considering other groups, they were more inclined to form broad generalizations, even though there is just as much diversity among African American, Latino/a, and Asian families as there is among white families. The lesson is clear: It's as misleading and erroneous to talk about *the* African American family, *the* Latino/a family, or *the* Asian American family as it is to talk about *the* white family or, for that matter, *the* American family.

My students aren't the only ones who have difficulties describing white families. The U.S. Bureau of the Census publishes a compendium of population statistics each year called the *Statistical Abstract of the United States.* The index contains family-related entries for "black population," "American Indian, Alaska Native population," "Asian and Pacific Islander population," "Native Hawaiian population," and "Hispanic origin population" but not for "white population."

Clearly white families—or more accurately, white, middle-class families—are the standard against which we measure "other" families. We tend to consider as "variations" the family patterns that differ markedly from the idealized image of the white, middle-class family—whether the differences are based on race, ethnicity, religion, or

something else. People often view these differences either as curiosities that need to be examined, as "dysfunctional" barriers to a minority group's success that members must overcome, or as "shortcomings" upon which to blame many social ills.

But does that mean we should disregard all ethnoracial (or for that matter, religious) differences and simply view all families as, well, families? No. Although we should be careful not to overgeneralize, race and ethnicity do provide important links to inequality and, ultimately, to family experiences.

This chapter examines the roles of racial, ethnic, and religious identity in family structure, focusing on both the commonalities and the differences across groups. We'll discover that describing the effects of race, ethnicity and religion on family experiences simply as a matter of "differences" is woefully inadequate when we consider some of the historical and societal complexities that both divide and unite families with diverse backgrounds.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RACE AND ETHNICITY

To most people, **race** is a category of individuals who share common inborn biological traits, such as skin color; color and texture of hair; and shape of eyes, nose, or head. We generally assume that people we place in the same racial category also share behavioral, psychological, and personality traits that are linked to their physical similarities. Sociologists typically use the term **ethnicity** to refer to the non-biological traits—such as shared ancestry, culture, history, language, patterns of behavior, and beliefs—that provide members of a group with a sense of common identity. Whereas we think of ethnicity as something we learn from other people, we commonly think of race as an inherited and permanent biological characteristic that we can easily use to divide people into mutually exclusive groups (Newman, 2007).

But the concept of race is neither as natural nor as straightforward as this definition implies. Some people who consider themselves "white," for example, may have darker skin and kinkier hair than some people who consider themselves "black." And it turns out that there may be as much or more biological variation *within* so-called races as there is *between* them. In addition, since the earliest humans appeared, they have consistently tended to migrate and interbreed. Some surveys estimate that at least 75% of U.S. blacks have some white ancestry (cited in Mathews, 1996). The famous naturalist Charles Darwin (1871/1971) wrote that despite external differences, it is virtually impossible to identify clear, distinctive racial characteristics. Indeed, there is no gene for race. No gene is 100% of one form in one racial group and 100% of a different form in another racial group (Brown, 1998). Certainly there are physical differences between people who identify themselves as members of different races. But it's our collective imagination that organizes, attaches meaning to, and perhaps alters the meanings of those differences.

So what ultimately ties people together in a particular racial group is not a set of shared physical characteristics—because there aren't any shared by all members of a particular racial group—but the shared experience of being identified by others as members of that group (Piper, 1992). During the process of growing up and creating an identity for ourselves, we learn three important things: the boundaries that distinguish group members from nonmembers, the perceived position of our group within society, and whether membership in our group is something to take pride in or be ashamed of (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998). In other words, race is a social construction.

■ **race**
A category of individuals labeled and treated as similar because of some common inborn biological traits, such as skin color, texture of hair, and shape of eyes, nose, or head.

■ **ethnicity**
The nonbiological traits–such as shared ancestry, culture, history, language, patterns of behavior, and beliefs–that provide members of a group with a sense of common identity.

We can see the fluid, socially constructed nature of race in historical changes in the categories used by the U.S. government in its decennial population censuses (Lee, 1993). In 1870, there were five races: White, Colored (black), Mulatto (people with some black blood), Chinese, and Indian. White people's concern with race-mixing and racial purity led to changes in the social rules used for determining the status of mixed race people, particularly in the South. The 1890 census thus listed eight races, half applying to black or partly black populations: White, Colored (black), Mulatto (people with three-eighths to five-eighths black blood), Quadroon (people who have one-fourth black blood), Octoroon (people with one-eighth black blood), Chinese, Japanese, and Indian. In 1900, Mulatto, Quadroon, and Octoroon were dropped, so that any amount of "black blood" meant a person had to be classified as "black." Between 1930 and 2000, some racial classifications (such as Hindu, Eskimo, and Mexican) appeared and disappeared. Others (Filipino, Korean, Hawaiian) made an appearance and have stayed ever since. Individuals filling out the 2000 census form had a wide array of racial categories from which to choose: White, Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Native Hawaiian, Guamanian or Chamorro, or Samoan (Newman, 2007).

Racial/ethnic categories in the U.S. Census are still fairly arbitrary. For instance, there is no "Asian" category; instead Asian Americans must choose a specific nationality. However, "Blacks" and "Whites" are not required to indicate their nation of origin. Latino/a is not included at all in the list of races on the latest census form. With the exception of the category "Mexican" in 1930, Spanish-speaking people have routinely been classified as "white." But because Latino/as can be members of any race, the Census Bureau now allows for "Hispanic origin," although as an ethnicity not a race.

■ TAKING A CLOSER LOOK

Multiracial Identities

I n 1992 the U.S. Bureau of the Census reported that for the first time in history the number of biracial babies increased at a faster rate than the number of single-race babies (Marmor, 1996). Between 1970 and 2000, the number of children whose parents are of different races grew from 900,000 to over 3 million (Lee & Edmonston, 2005).

For centuries the United States has adhered to what sociologists call a **hypodescent rule** to determine the racial identity of people with mixed-race backgrounds; that is, an individual is always assigned the status of the subordinate group. Common law in the 19th-century South determined that a "single drop of black blood" made a person black. Today, some ethnic groups informally establish identity in a different way. Among older Japanese Americans, a child who is predominantly Japanese with some white blood is considered white by the rest of the community and is not fully admitted into the ethnic group. Not surprisingly, a study of 1,500 offspring of Asian Anglo couples found that the majority of these children (52%) identified themselves as Anglo. The rest viewed themselves as Asian (38%) or a combination of the two (10%) (Saenz, Hwang, Aguirre, & Anderson, 1995).

In the mid-1990s, biracial individuals began lobbying Congress and the Bureau of the Census to add a multiracial category to the 2000 census form.

■ **hypodescent rule**
A determinant of racial identity of people with mixed-race backgrounds, whereby an individual is always assigned the status of the subordinate group.

They argued that the change would add visibility and legitimacy to a racial identity that has historically been ignored. But many civil rights organizations objected to the inclusion of a multiracial category (Farley, 2002). They worried that it would reduce the number of U.S. citizens claiming to belong to long-recognized minority groups, dilute the culture and political power of those groups, and make it more difficult to enforce civil rights laws (Mathews, 1996).

In the end, the civil rights organizations won. For the 2000 census, the government decided not to add a multiracial category to official forms. Instead it adopted a policy allowing people to identify themselves on the census form as members of more than one race. The new guidelines specify that those who check "white" and another category will be counted as members of the minority group (Holmes, 2000). According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2008), 1.6% of the population—or about 4.7 million people—identify themselves as belonging to two or more races. As you might expect, people under the age of 18 were more than twice as likely as people over 50 to thus identify themselves (Jones & Smith, 2001; Lee & Bean, 2004).

Some sociologists caution, however, that the Census Bureau's method of measuring multiracial identity—checking two or more race categories—does not adequately reflect the way multiracial people personally experience race. The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, which contains information on the racial identity of a nationwide sample of more than 11,000 adolescents, shows that the way people racially classify themselves can be fluid, changing from context to context (Harris & Sim, 2002). For example, almost twice as many adolescents identify themselves as multiracial when they're interviewed at school than when they're interviewed at home. Furthermore, nearly 15% expressed different racial identities across different settings. This research is important because it shows that the census data on multiracial identity don't necessarily account for everyone who self-identifies as multiracial in everyday situations.

RACE, RACISM, AND FAMILY

Ethnoracial identity is not enough to explain people's family experiences. The historical conditions under which any group enters U.S. society are also crucial in determining the degree of economic success and achievement it will experience, which in turn influences family and community life. Not surprisingly, throughout history, those groups whose skin color and traditions are very different from those of the white majority face harsher obstacles upon arrival. Some have been treated with derision and suspicion; others have been forced from their land, persecuted, or even enslaved.

So some ethnoracial minority groups have had to adapt their families to deal with hardships imposed by the larger society. Extended families, single parenthood, "fictive kin," dual-earner couples, and many other deviations from the mainstream culture's family ideal are among adaptations these groups have made to demanding societal circumstances. Even though these patterns are products of historical conditions and don't reflect diminished importance of family (K. Newman, 2005), observers often blame them for a particular group's social and economic difficulties:

Latinos, among whom extended family networks play a crucial role in integrating family and community, [are] criticized for being too "familistic"—their lack of social progress . . . blamed on family values which [keep] them tied to family rather than economic advancement. African-American families [are] criticized as "matriarchal" because of the strong role grandmothers [play] in extended family networks. (Dill, Baca Zinn, & Patton, 1994, p. 16)

But are family patterns found in ethnoracial minority groups really all that unique? If so, what are the social, historical, and economic conditions that created these differences?

Native American Families

The story of Native Americans includes racially inspired massacres, the takeover of their ancestral lands, their confinement on reservations, and unending government manipulation. Successive waves of white settlers seeking westward expansion in the 18th and 19th centuries pushed Native Americans off any land that the settlers considered desirable. A commonly held European belief that Native Americans were "savages" who should be displaced to make way for civilized whites provided the ideological justification for conquering them.

According to the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside." But despite the broad wording of this amendment, Native Americans were excluded from citizenship. In 1884 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Native Americans owed their allegiance to their tribe and so did not acquire American citizenship upon birth. Not until 1940 were all Native Americans born in the United States considered U.S. citizens (Haney López, 1996).

Most Native Americans have migrated from the reservations over the years, but about 18% remain and life there can be bleak (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007). Today, only African Americans have a higher poverty rate and only Latino/as have a higher school dropout rate than Native Americans (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008). Deaths from cirrhosis of the liver—a disease associated with severe alcoholism—are twice as high among Native Americans as among the rest of the population (National Center for Health Statistics, 2003). In such an environment, the maintenance of strong family ties, traditionally a key determinant of identity and status in most tribes, is difficult.

African American Families

Of all ethnoracial minorities in the United States today, African American families are the most negatively portrayed. The stereotypical image projects marital violence, broken homes, large numbers of children, and a resulting cycle of poverty, illegitimacy, crime, welfare, and unemployment. Black men, especially poor black men, are typically portrayed as being on the outer fringe, either uninterested in or incapable of participating in the lives of their families (Hamer, 2007). How accurate are these images, and how have they developed throughout history?

Slavery, Racism, and Blocked Opportunities

The experiences of African American families have been unique among ethnoracial groups in this country because of the direct and indirect effects of centuries of forced

Although slaves were forbidden to officially marry, many had secret wedding ceremonies.

servitude. Because slaves were not allowed to enter into binding legal contracts, for instance, there was no legal basis for marriages between them. Slave owners determined which slaves could (or even had to) "marry" and which "marriages" would be dissolved.

From their purely economic perspective, slave owners had an interest in keeping slave families intact. For one thing, it was believed that "married" slaves would want to have children. Children had economic value because they represented future slaves (Burnham, 1993; Staples, 1992). In addition, "married" slaves were thought to be more docile and less inclined to rebel or escape. However, when financial troubles forced the sale of slaves to raise capital, many slave owners had no misgivings about separating the very slave families they had once advocated. The threat of separation "hung like a dark cloud over every slave couple family" (Burnham, 1993, p. 146).

In this environment, African American families became an important means of survival and showed a remarkable capacity to adapt and endure. It was within families that slaves received sustaining affection, companionship, love, and support. It was here that they learned to cooperate with one another to avoid punishment and retained some degree of self-esteem.

Even when individual families were broken apart, the values of marriage and two-parent households persevered. Sociologist Herbert Gutman (1978) examined marriage licenses, birth records, and census data from 1855 to 1880 and found that two-parent, intact black families prevailed both during slavery and after emancipation. In counties and towns in Virginia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Alabama, between 70 and 85% of black households contained both a mother and a father.

After slavery, blacks had the freedom to legally marry, and they did so in large numbers. Just about every element of black society—churches, newspapers, social

organizations—worked hard to convince newly freed blacks of the virtue of formalizing their marriages (Hill, 2005). Children were of special value to emancipated slaves, who could easily remember having their children sold away during slavery. Indeed, by 1917, 90% of all black children were born into existing marriages (Staples, 1992).

During the late 19th century, the strong role of women in black families emerged. Racism and legal, social, and economic exclusion made it extremely difficult for black men to find employment adequate to support their families and to maintain their dominance in them. Survival dictated that black women enter the labor force. In 1900, 41% of black women were in the labor force compared to 16% of white women (cited in Staples, 1992).

Despite the difficulties left over from slavery, African Americans were able to create impressive norms of family life over the years. At the same time, though, their family structures were widely disparaged in the larger society. Negative images received a sort of official legitimacy in 1965 when Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then an assistant U.S. Secretary of Labor, wrote a report titled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action.* When this book was written, the South was still highly segregated. And in the North as well as the South, blacks were at the bottom of all relevant social and economic categories. It's not surprising, therefore, that politicians at the time would cite deficiencies in black families as the key cause of their social and economic disadvantages.

Moynihan argued that the root of the problems blacks experienced was not economic deprivation but the inherent weakness and deterioration of black families. He described black families as a "tangled pathology," whose key feature was the absence of fathers and the unusually large amount of power held by women. Moynihan felt that this "variant" family structure resulted in, among other things, low self-image, low IQ, high rates of school dropouts, delinquency, unemployment, violent crime, and drug abuse—especially among sons.

This sentiment has not fallen out of favor. In 2005 a columnist (who happens to be black) wrote:

> You don't have to be Sherlock Holmes to know that some of the most serious problems facing Blacks in the United States—from poverty to incarceration rates to death at an early age—are linked in varying degrees to behavioral issues and the corrosion of black family life, especially the absence of fathers. (Herbert, 2005, p. 31)

To add fuel to the fire, the conditions Moynihan described with such alarm 4 decades ago seem to have gotten worse. Black families, it seems, have experienced broad trends and changes more rapidly and with greater intensity than other sectors of society (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). For instance, blacks have consistently had a lower marriage rate than whites and wait longer to marry. Yet blacks begin sexual activity and childbearing earlier. This combination has resulted in a dramatic racial difference in nonmarital births and single-parent households (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008).

However, it would be misleading to discuss these features of African American families without examining the broader economic effects of racial inequality, which continue to hamper educational advancement and block access to high-paying jobs. The unemployment rate for African Americans is twice that of whites, and blacks comprise almost 30% of the long-term unemployed in this country (Economic Policy Institute, 2006). For those who are employed, there's a greater chance of underemployment, inconsistent employment, and lower wages. As a result of these trends, 34.2% of African

American children live in poverty, compared to 17.1% in the general population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008).

Long-term exposure to these economic conditions can seriously affect family stability. Sociologists Stewart Tolnay and Kyle Crowder (1999) compared blacks living in northern inner-cities with those who recently migrated from the south. They found greater marital stability among those who had migrated. But they suggest that exposure to "destabilizing conditions" found in the north—such as higher rates of poverty, unemployment, and adults on public assistance—is likely to lead to greater marital instability and a decreased likelihood of children growing up with both parents present.

Unstable economic conditions can have a dramatic effect on marriage chances. When men don't work or don't earn sufficient wages, they may grow less interested in becoming husbands because they are constrained in their ability to perform the provider role in marriage (Hamer, 2007). Black single men who are in stable employment are twice as likely to marry as single men who are sporadically employed or unemployed (Testa & Krogh, 1995). In addition, black men's anxiety about being able to provide for their families also increases the likelihood of marital difficulties and divorce, particularly in early marriage (Hatchett, Veroff, & Douvan, 1995). This argument, of course, assumes that male employment is perceived to be a necessary requirement for marriage.

While black men have historically had limited employment opportunities, black women have seen their opportunities increase. In 2005, about 1.4 million black women were enrolled in American colleges and universities, compared to 774,000 black men (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008). Between 1977 and 1997, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to black men increased by 30%, while the number increased by 77% for black women (cited in "Report on Black America," 2000). Because they are relatively successful compared with black men, black women have less financial incentive to marry than other U.S. women. Consequently, they're much more likely to be single mothers than women in other ethnoracial groups (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008).

African American Family Diversity

The stereotype of black family pathology popularized by Moynihan more than 40 years ago persists today. For instance, when asked why African Americans are likely to suffer from low income, poor jobs, and inadequate housing, most non-African Americans reject the idea that blacks are intellectually inferior. But many continue to believe that African Americans lack the motivation or willpower to escape poverty (Figure 5.1).

The pervasive image of black family weakness ignores the diversity of African American family life. The African American population consists of families with widely different histories and experiences. Not all have ancestors who entered the country enslaved, for example. Some
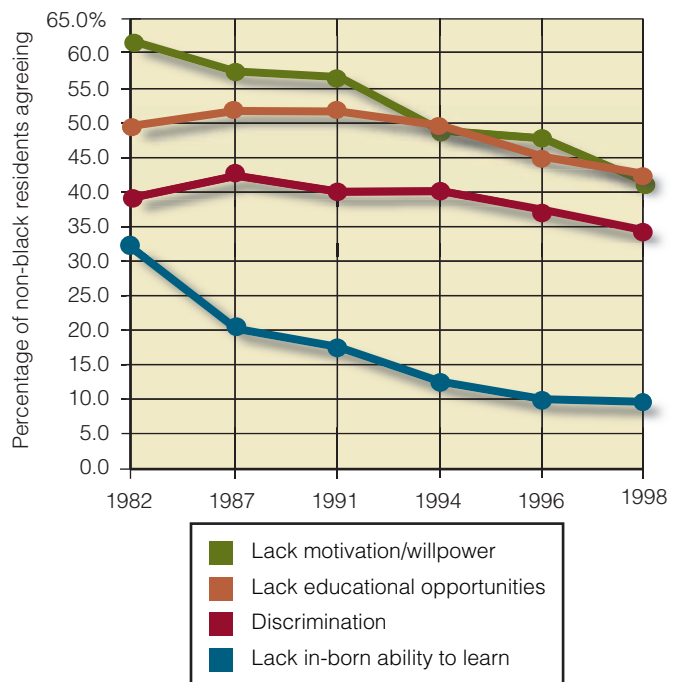

FIGURE 5.1   Changing Explanations for African Americans' Misfortunes
Source: National Opinion Research Center, 1998.

More African American families can be considered middle class than ever before.

came to the Americas free; others came as indentured servants who worked off their indebtedness and went on to lead free lives. Today, African American families come from different classes, different religions, and different geographical areas. Although most have had to deal with some degree of discrimination and oppression, their family structures are quite diverse. The despair of poverty, single parenthood, underemployment and unemployment, and lack of opportunity may be higher among African American families than other groups, but that doesn't mean these problems are uniformly experienced by all blacks.

In short, the image of black families as "pathological" overlooks the families that don't fit this negative stereotype. Consider these facts:

■ One third of African Americans have incomes, educations, and lifestyles that place them in the middle class. Between 1980 and 2004, median household income for blacks increased from $23,372 to $30,134—though, as it has for other ethnoracial groups, income has dropped a bit in the past few years. During those same years, the poverty rate among black families dropped from 29% to 22.1% (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008).

■ It's true that fewer than half of all African American adults are married. But contrary to the contention that all black men are averse to marriage, approximately 90% of those who are college-educated with annual incomes over $25,000 are married and live with their spouse (Holmes, 1996).

■ The birthrate for unmarried black women between the ages of 15 and 44 fell from 90.5 per 1,000 women in 1990 to 67.2 per 1,000 in 2004 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008).

In some ways, African American families might actually be stronger than other families. Family relationships remain a crucial form of emotional and economic support. For instance, one survey of African Americans found that over 90% considered themselves close to their families (Hatchett & Jackson, 1993). Another study found that lower-middle-class blacks are more likely than lower-middle-class whites to claim a long-term goal of providing their children with a strong and loving family (Hill & Sprague, 1999). Blacks tend to have large extended families, often including both blood-related kin and people informally adopted into the family system (McAdoo, 1998). Furthermore, loyalty and responsibility to others in the family are often highly valued.

Asian American Families

When researchers examine the difficulties ethnoracial minority families face in the United States, they often consider Asian American families to be the "exception" because of their well-publicized occupational and economic success—especially among highly educated people of Chinese, Indian, and Japanese descent. Japanese Americans, for instance, are sometimes labeled the "model minority" because they tend to show respect for the cherished U.S. values of hard work, achievement, self-control, dependability, good manners, thrift, and diligence (Kitano, 1976). But like all stereotypes, this one doesn't describe all Asian American families and can mask the disadvantages they do experience.

Immigration and Racism

Like many other ethnoracial groups, Asian Americans have endured a history of prejudice and discrimination that has had a long-lasting impact on the structure of their families. For instance, in the second half of the 19th century, industrialists in the western United States recruited Chinese immigrants to work in the mines and build the transcontinental railroad. But from the outset they were treated with hostility. Widespread fears that hordes of Chinese would take scarce jobs and eventually overrun the white race fostered the image of the "yellow peril."

Initially, working in this country was a means of gaining financial support for the immigrants' families back in China. The goal was to earn enough money to return to China and purchase land there, and most workers assumed they were here temporarily. Indeed, U.S. law in the late 19th and early 20th centuries actually prevented Chinese laborers from becoming naturalized citizens.

In addition, Chinese men who arrived before 1882 were not allowed to bring their wives and were prevented by law from marrying whites (Dill, 1995). Thus, for many years, the predominant family form among the Chinese in the United States was a **split household,** in which financial support was provided by one member (the father) who lived far from the rest of the family. Men were sometimes separated from their families for 20 years or more. Many children grew up never knowing who their fathers were. Wives who remained in China had to raise children and care for in-laws on the meager earnings their husbands in the United States sporadically sent them. These families became interdependent economic units that spanned two continents (Glenn & Yap, 1994).

■ **split household**
A family arrangement common among 19th-century Chinese immigrants in which financial support was provided by one member (the father) who lived far from the rest of the family.

Even when Chinese immigrants were able to create and maintain intact families here, prejudice, violence, and discrimination kept them poor and segregated. By necessity, Chinese American communities—which would eventually become the "Chinatowns" we can see in many large cities today—were tightly structured and insulated against the threats from the dominant white society. In these close enclaves people learned to become self-reliant, creating their own businesses and organizing their own social clubs.

The collectivist nature of Chinese culture required the sacrifice of individual needs and desires in favor of the overall welfare of the family unit (Coltrane & Collins, 2001). In traditional Chinese families, children were taught to be loyal and obedient to their parents and to value educational achievement. Although many Chinese wives were more or less equal producers in family businesses, they were expected to assume major responsibility for the household and child care (Wong, 1998). Fathers tended to have final authority and wielded unquestioned power; others—wives and children—were expected to be obedient (Kitano & Daniels, 1988).

Early Japanese immigrants, who arrived around the turn of the century, had similar experiences. In response to prejudice and discrimination, they too created separate, insulated communities where children were taught the Japanese language and culture in schools established by their parents. They learned the importance of hard work, obedience to authority, and self-sacrifice. Tight families and a strong work ethic enabled many Japanese families to pool resources and achieve substantial success. However, this success motivated lawmakers to enact legislation that limited Japanese people's ability to own or lease land. Fearing rapid growth in the Japanese population, Congress enacted the National Origins Act of 1924 barring all further Japanese immigration (Takagi, 1994).

Hostility toward Japanese reached its peak in the early 1940s following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. Vocal special-interest groups, influential members of the government, and the military held the Japanese American community responsible for the surprise attack. The military used suspicion, fear, and racial prejudice to successfully pressure the government to suspend Japanese American citizens' constitutional rights. Eventually President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an executive order authorizing a suspension of Japanese American citizens' constitutional rights and their internment in camps surrounded by barbed wire and watchtowers.

Internment had a devastating impact on Japanese families and the Japanese American community. As part of the registration process, internees were forced to express their loyalty to the United States and renounce their ties to Japan. Many second-generation Japanese (those born here) felt more American than Japanese and thus could express loyalty to the United States more easily than their parents. When they did so, however, Japanese-born parents felt their children were betraying their heritage (Broom & Kitsuse, 1956). In addition, the camps undermined the traditional status and authority of Japanese American parents. Many interred in the camps were farmers. When the war ended, they found that their farms had been taken over during their absence, and they were forced to resettle their families in urban areas. Urban living provided many young Japanese Americans with their first opportunity to work and live independently of their parents, making it especially difficult to retain their traditional way of life (Takagi, 1994).

Both Chinese American and Japanese American family structures have emerged as adaptive strategies for survival in a racially hostile environment. Because people were forced to turn to their relatives for support, families took on an important economic as well as emotional role in their lives. With such a strong familial foundation, it is not sur-

After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, American families of Japanese descent were uprooted and transferred to internment camps, placing overwhelming pressure on family relationships.

prising that many Asian American families have achieved high levels of educational and professional attainment and earnings exceeding those of the rest of the population.

Contemporary Asian American Families

As Asian immigrant families adapt to the dominant culture, they are more likely to adopt behaviors characteristic of other U.S. families. For instance, because Asian Americans tend to come from cultures in which relatively few women work outside the home, the contemporary need for two earners in a household has created conflict between young couples and members of older generations who expect a more traditional family structure.

U.S.-born Asian men and women are significantly more likely than foreign-born Asians to marry outside their ethnic group (Lee & Fernandez, 1998). And fewer than 1 in 5 Asian Americans belong to an all-Asian kin group including aunts, uncles, siblings, spouses, and in-laws (Goldstein, 1999). Such trends make it even more difficult to retain traditional cultural values. Nevertheless, Asian Americans are twice as likely as whites to live in extended families and half as likely to live alone. More workers in a family mean more earnings, which may explain why household income is higher among Asian Americans than any other group (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008).

Yet again we must be aware of the variation *within* the Asian American population. Asian Americans come from some 28 Asian countries or ethnic groups. In fact, people of Asian descent rarely think of themselves as a single racial group (Espiritu, 2004). They have different languages and cultures and different reasons for migrating to the United States. For the most part, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian, and Filipino immigrants came to this country seeking a better life. They have been here the longest,

have a higher proportion of native-born individuals, and are less culturally distinct than those recently arrived from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, who are typically political immigrants or refugees (Parke & Buriel, 2002).

Chinese, Japanese, and Korean families are significantly smaller than Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian families and less tied to the traditions of their countries of origin. The more recent arrivals often try to re-create the family structure of their homeland. Immigrant Vietnamese families, for instance, may incorporate friends and neighbors into their extended kin networks, enabling them to maintain some semblance of their traditional, complex extended families despite the disruption of migration (Kibria, 1994).

Latino/a Families

One of the fastest-growing segments of the U.S. population is Spanish-speaking people who have migrated from Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2006b, 2008), close to 15% of the U.S. population is Latino/a, compared to 12.5% in 2000 and about 9% in 1990. Experts project that by 2050, 1 out of 4 Americans will be Latino/a and by 2100, 1 out of 3 will be Latino/a (Saenz, 2004).

But, as is true of other ethnic groups, there is tremendous cultural and familial diversity among those considered Latino/a. Even race is a source of some debate. We've seen that the Census Bureau characterizes "Hispanic origin" as an ethnicity, not a race. Hence, Latino/as can be of any race. This distinction has not been received well by many Latino/as who consider themselves a separate race. There were so many Latino/a respondents to the 2000 census (about 42%) who refused to identify themselves by any of the racial categories available on the census form that "some other race" became the fastest growing category in the United States (Swarns, 2004).

Early Immigrant Families

The diversity of the Latino/a population in the United States stems from distinctly different immigration histories. For instance, because Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship in 1917, their immigration to the United States has been relatively easy and, at times, actively encouraged by the government (Sanchez-Ayendez, 1998). Most Puerto Ricans live in the large metropolitan areas of the northeast.

When Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba in the late 1950s, Cuban immigrants poured into the United States. Because they were fleeing a Communist political regime that was at odds with U.S. political ideals, their initial entry into this country was met with enthusiasm (Suarez, 1998). Many of the early immigrants were middle-class Cubans who had the means to climb the occupational ladder; a few were wealthy executives and business owners who were able to set up lucrative businesses, particularly in Florida. Today, Cuban American families have the highest median income of any Latino/a group.

The experience of people of Mexican descent in the United States has been quite different. Mexican Americans make up the largest segment of the Latino/a population, and many are not descendants of immigrants at all. In 1848, following war with the United States, Mexico lost more than half its territory, giving up all claims to Texas and ceding much of what is now Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, and California (Dill, 1995). Although Mexicans who had been living on the U.S. side of the new border were supposed to be granted all the rights of U.S. citizens, their property was routinely confiscated, and they lost control of mining, ranching, and farming industries. In the early 20th

century, life continued to be a daily struggle for survival. Since then, many poor immigrants from the interior of Mexico have crossed the border to seek work, some becoming permanent U.S. residents and some returning seasonally to their home villages.

Roles in traditional Mexican families were strongly defined by gender. Women were valued first and foremost for their household skills. In rural areas they might also be responsible for tending gardens and looking after animals. But high rates of widowhood—due to the hazardous nature of the work available to men—and temporary abandonment by men in search of employment created sharp increases in female-headed households from the mid-19th to the early 20th century (Griswold del Castillo, 1979). Women (and children) began joining the labor force primarily as maids, servants, laundresses, garment workers, cooks, and dishwashers.

Eventually entire families participated in the labor market, particularly in seasonal, itinerant farm labor that helped increase earnings and keep the family together. Mexican Americans in extended families fared better economically and experienced less downward mobility than people in smaller, nuclear families (Dill, 1995). Extended families could assist newly immigrating relatives in finding housing and employment and pool their resources to pay for food, housing, transportation, and schooling (Gelles, 1995).

Contemporary Latino/a Families

Because of the influx of immigrants with large families and Catholic proscriptions against birth control, Latino/a families tend to be relatively large. In 2006, for instance, 17% of Latino/a families had three or more children under 18 in the household, compared to 11% for African Americans and 8% for non-Hispanic white families (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008). Not surprisingly, Latino/as are more inclined than either Whites or Blacks to consider having and raising children to be the primary purpose of marriage (Pew Research Center, 2007).

Latino/a families also tend to be more stable than families in other ethnoracial groups. In 2006, for example, 7.9% of the Latino/a population was divorced, compared to 12.1% of Blacks and 10.8% of non-Hispanic Whites (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008). And despite a greater percentage of single-parent families among Latino/as than among Whites, fewer cases are due to the breakup of a marriage.

Compared to African American and white households, a smaller percentage of Latino/a households contain *no* employed adult member (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006). Yet Latino/as tend to be more economically disadvantaged than Whites, with some variation by subgroup. For example, 8.1% of white families live below the poverty line, but 22% of Mexican American families and 23.5% of Puerto Rican families live in poverty. By contrast, only 9.1% of Cuban American families live in poverty (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008).

A sense of familial responsibility and mutual obligation continue to play a prominent role in Latino/a families (American Association of Retired Persons, 2001; Hines, Garcia-Preto, McGoldrick, Almeida, & Weltman, 1997). Their large kinship networks can best be described as **expanded families** (Horowitz, 1997). Even though they don't live in the same household, relatives often live in the same neighborhood and interact on a regular basis. Within expanded families, members are able to exchange important services such as babysitting, meals, personal advice, and emotional support (cited in Becerra, 1992). Rather than being labeled a freeloader, a person who can survive without money for a long time by going from relative to relative is considered to have a strong, cohesive family (Horowitz, 1997). But in recent years, in light of the rapidly growing elderly Latino/a population, fulfilling familial obligations has become more difficult.

▪ **expanded families**
Large kinship networks in Latino/a communities in which even though relatives don't live in the same household, they live in the same neighborhood and interact on a regular basis.

Of all the popular images of Latino/a families, one of the most prevalent is the concept of *machismo*. Machismo is often equated with male dominance, pride in masculinity, honor in being the economic provider, and a sexual double standard. According to this stereotype, the father is considered the head of the household, the major decision maker, and the absolute power holder in the family (Becerra, 1992). Manhood is expressed through independence, strength, control, and domination. By extension, Latina women are considered self-sacrificing and passive caretakers of the entire family.

But the ideals of machismo are frequently contradicted by the economic demands of contemporary life, and most scholars agree that the degree of male dominance associated with machismo has been exaggerated (Taylor & Behnke, 2005). Over time, more and more women have become heads of households and entered the paid labor force. And contemporary Latino men share child care, decision making, and household tasks as much as non-Hispanic white men do (Coltrane, Parke, & Adams, 2004; Hurtado, 1995).

Once again, we see that common stereotypes and generalizations about particular ethnoracial groups fall short in characterizing the family experiences of all or even most members of those groups.

Diversity and Assimilation

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries the **melting pot** was a popular metaphor; it depicted U.S. society as a place where different ethnicities and nationalities would eventually blend together to form a new cultural pattern. Although few people today desire a society where everyone looks or acts the same, the pressure toward **assimilation**—the process by which members of ethnoracial minority groups change their own ways to conform to those of the dominant culture—remains strong. Indeed, many new immigrants believe that if they gradually lose their differences and adopt the lifestyle of the majority, they can get high-paying, stable jobs and become successful members of mainstream society (Waters & Jiménez, 2005).

But assimilation contains an inherent trap: The only way for a group to conform to the dominant way of life is to abandon many of the traditions, including family traditions, of the culture it left behind. Furthermore, throughout history, assimilation has sometimes been imposed on certain groups. Native Americans were forced to abandon their traditional family lifestyle by Whites; black slaves were forced to take new names and forgo the family and social traditions of their native cultures.

Thus some members of ethnoracial minority groups consider assimilation an undesirable goal. Instead they promote a **multicultural society** in which groups maintain not only their ethnic identities but also their own languages, arts, music, foods, literature, religions, and family forms. They believe that multiculturalism enriches society. With the steady influx of foreign-born, non–English-speaking people into this country, it is difficult if not impossible to think of the United States as one culture and Americans as one people.

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN CONTEMPORARY FAMILY LIFE

In many ways, **religion**—a system of beliefs about the purpose of the universe and the intervention of God (or some other divine force) in human lives—is like race and ethnicity. It is a fundamental component of many people's identities. It is practiced in many forms and adds to the diversity of U.S. society. Throughout our his-

melting pot
A metaphor popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that depicted U.S. society as a place where different ethnicities and nationalities would blend together to form a new cultural pattern.

assimilation
The process by which members of minority groups change their own ways to conform to those of the dominant culture.

multicultural society
A society in which groups maintain not only their ethnic identities but also their own languages, arts, music, foods, literature, religions, and family forms.

religion
A system of beliefs about the purpose of the universe and the intervention of God (or some other divine force) in human lives that serves as a major source of cultural knowledge, plays a key role in the development of people's ideas about right and wrong, and aids in the formation of people's identities.

tory, adherents of certain faith traditions have been dominant, and others have been the targets of various forms of prejudice and discrimination.

But religion also is a social institution that spells out a set of family expectations and obligations. Rules against certain intimate and family activities can be particularly strong in some religious traditions. Religious rites of passage that parallel key aspects of family life—baptisms, bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies, confirmations, and weddings—not only reaffirm an individual's religious identity but impress on her or him the rights and obligations attached to a new status within a particular community (Turner, 1972).

So what role does, and should, religion play in contemporary family life? Do families need religion to function successfully?

Signs of U.S. Religiosity

Structural changes in society have made religious affiliation somewhat unstable in recent years. For one thing, as people move from one location to another, many of the ties that bind them to the same religion—most notably networks of family and friends—are broken. Only about 45% of adults attend religious services regularly (The Barna Group, 2005). Over the past couple of decades, many of the most powerful religious groups have experienced a decline in membership. For instance, between 1990 and 2000, the Lutheran Church suffered a 3.2% drop in membership, the Episcopal Church 5.3%, the United Methodist Church 6.7%, the Presbyterian Church 11.6%, and the United Church of Christ 14.8% (American Religion Data Archive, 2002).

To some people, these figures are a sign that U.S. citizens are turning away from religion. For instance, people are now less likely to marry someone of the same religion than they once were ("Breaking the Rules," 2002). Conservative critics believe that growing secularism, or a decline in the importance of religion in people's family lives, is at the root of many contemporary social problems, such as high rates of divorce, cohabitation, premarital sexuality, AIDS, and violence.

But other signs indicate that religion is not losing its influence in U.S. society. Indeed, at the same time that membership in some religions has shrunk, that of so-called conservative churches (Roman Catholic Church, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Assemblies of God, Christian Churches, and Southern Baptists) has increased (American Religion Data Archive, 2002). And new religions are constantly emerging. Of the 1,600 or so religions and denominations in the United States today, half were founded after 1965.

Furthermore, immigration has helped fuel an increase in non-Christian religions. More than 4 times as many immigrants as native-born Americans report non-Christian religious affiliations (Cadge & Ecklund, 2007). Between 1990 and 2001, membership in a variety of non-Christian religious groups grew significantly, including Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Unitarian/Universalist, Scientologist, Baha'i, Taoist, New Age, Eckankar, Sikh, Wiccan, Druid, and Santerian. During that same period of time, the number of Muslims and Buddhists in the United States more than doubled and the number of Hindus more than tripled (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008).

Religion may not look the same as it did 50 years ago, but it still remains a fundamental part of most people's lives. Indeed, compared to most other Western democracies, such as Canada, Australia, Germany, France, and Great Britain, people in the United States stand out for the depth of their religious beliefs (Zoll, 2005). And consider these facts:

■ Eighty-four percent of U.S. adults say that religion plays a big role in their lives (Zoll, 2005). In contrast, 52% of Norwegians and 55% of Swedes say that God doesn't matter to them at all (cited in Ferguson, 2004).

■ Eighty-three percent of Americans pray in a given week (The Barna Group, 2007), and 31% pray more than once a day (American Religion Data Archive, 2004).

■ U.S. adults are 3 times as likely to say they believe in the virgin birth of Jesus (83%) as in evolution (28%; Kristof, 2003).

■ Forty-five percent of the population believes "It is necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values" (American Religion Data Archive, 2002).

■ Over half of U.S. adults feel the lesson of the September 11, 2001, attacks was that there is too little (not too much) religion in the world. Close to half say they believe that the United States has special protection from God (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2002).

In short, religion remains a significant part of everyday life. We still consider ourselves "one nation under God," and our money still proclaims our trust in God. Athletes publicly thank God for their victories. Sales of Christian books, computer games, videos, and toys go up each year. Enrollment in evangelical colleges has grown steadily over the past decade, as has the number of families choosing to homeschool their children for religious reasons (Talbot, 2000).

How Religion Strengthens Families

One of the key aspects of religion is that it constrains human behavior, or at the very least it encourages members to act in certain ways. This normative aspect of religion has important consequences for people's family experiences. Religious beliefs can play a role in virtually every stage of family life: dating, marriage, sexuality, childbearing decisions, parenting techniques, responses to illness and death, household division of labor, divorce, and so on. For instance, in recent years, more and more churches have begun requiring engaged couples to participate in premarital counseling and religious education programs before the wedding. In highly religious families, the Bible or the Koran or the Talmud may serve not only as a source of faith and inspiration but as a literal guidebook for every aspect of family life.

One more formal mechanism through which religion can strengthen family bonds is participation in regular religious services. Clergy often preach the importance of positive relationships among family members, thereby validating people's commitments to their spouses and their children (Pearce & Axinn, 1998; Sherkat & Ellison, 1999). Even couples who have not participated much in religious activities before having children decide to start attending services once their children reach a certain age. There is indeed some evidence that the presence of children increases church membership and attendance among young families (Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy, & Waite, 1995).

In most religions, people are reminded regularly of the value of marriage and family (Wilson & Musick, 1996). Some church-based educational programs teach communication skills to engaged or recently married couples so they will be better equipped to handle problems and disagreements when they arise. Others provide specific child-rearing instruction; for instance, conservative Protestant denominations emphasize children's strict obedience to their parents and the use of corporal punishment when they don't obey.

Religious organizations and families are often strongly interdependent (Call & Heaton, 1997) and mutually reinforcing (Roof, 1999). In some cases, they both draw upon the same emotional bonds and symbols. So intertwined are some families with their religious communities that they view their place of worship as a second home and the members of the congregation as a second family (Wuthnow, 1998). For others, church and family are virtually indistinguishable. The common use of terms like "father," "mother," "brother," and "sister" in churches of various sorts reinforces the connection between religious organizations and family.

Religious organizations can create strong social ties by linking friends and family members in the same social group. From time to time they also offer more formal support for families (Pearce & Axinn 1998). For example, many African American churches have long-standing traditions of providing financial assistance to needy families. These churches can draw on their preexisting organizational skills and spiritual traditions to mobilize their better-off members in the service of those in the community who lack the resources to help themselves (Chatters, Taylor, & Jayakody, 1994).

Religion also provides families with a shared system of spiritual beliefs that reinforces bonds and supports members through difficult times. Belief systems are important because they shape our convictions, attitudes, biases, values, and assumptions. They trigger emotional responses, guide our actions, and inform our decisions (Walsh, 1998). For example, virtually every religion—from Christianity to Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Islam to Taoism—promotes some version of "the golden rule" ("to love others as ourselves") and encourages its members to subordinate their selfish, personal desires to the interests of their family (Vela, 1996). Such principles can inspire commitment, tolerance, and unconditional love.

It's not difficult to imagine such rules fostering positive interactions. One study found that parents with conservative religious ideologies are more likely to praise and hug their children and are less likely to yell at them than are parents with less conservative beliefs (Wilcox, 1998, 2000). Consider how this 8-year-old girl, raised in a strict Catholic family, describes what such rules mean to her and her family:

> One way religion is used in our family is that Jesus told us to worship Him and serve Him. We also read our Bible in school, church, and home. Mother reads it to us at night or sometimes in the afternoon. We go to church and communion every Sunday. We also serve Jesus by the way we treat each other at home. We treat each other nicely. If someone falls down, we help them up. When my little baby sister cries, I give her the pacifier." (quoted in Vela, 1996, p. 166)

Active commitment to religious or spiritual belief systems—often through participation in religious rituals—can elicit loyalty and provide family members with a sense of purpose (Durkheim, 1965). In some religions, informal religious rituals also promote family togetherness, as this Seventh Day Adventist explains:

> Ritual gives you a sense that all is well. . . . That is the wholesome service of family ritual. One ritual that I have found to be valuable is the candle light supper on Friday evening to welcome the Sabbath. . . . Hopefully the house is clean and the chaos is over. Many times on Friday evening I will sit on the sofa and read. Often my two oldest daughters will snuggle up beside me and talk. We can talk about anything they want to talk about. . . . Another is I kneel by the children's beds, put my arms around them, and pray with them. I will thank Jesus for the incredible, awesome child. (quoted in Vela, 1996, pp. 154–155)

Specific religious beliefs can also help families weather adversity. In times of stress, which can be disruptive to families, a dominant religious or sacred belief system often provides "answers" to difficult questions and serves as a guide for behavior. Through such beliefs, family members can begin to understand painful, uncertain, and frightening events, making them less vulnerable to hopelessness and despair (Walsh, 1998).

Given the influential role religion can play in everyday life, it's not surprising that higher levels of religiosity and specific religious traditions tend to be associated with aspects of family life that many people would consider "positive" (Wilcox, Chaves, & Franz, 2004). For instance, religiosity has been linked to higher levels of marital commitment and stability (Call & Heaton, 1997; Larson & Goltz, 1989), more positive parent–child relationships (Pearce & Axinn, 1998), lower rates of cohabitation (Thornton, Axinn, & Hill, 1992), lower rates of adolescent antisocial behavior (Simons, Simons, & Conger, 2004), and lower rates of voluntary childlessness (Heaton, Jacobson, & Fu, 1992).

One area of family life that has received quite a bit of scholarly attention is the intersection of religiosity and divorce. Prohibitions against divorce still exist among some U.S. religious groups. Catholics, Jews, and fundamentalist Christians have historically been stricter about marital dissolution than mainstream Protestants. In fact, the divorce rate tends to be highest among couples who are unaffiliated with any religion, perhaps because they are less bound by social conventions and face fewer sanctions than those actively involved with their faith (Call & Heaton, 1997). In addition, interfaith marriages tend to be less stable than marriages between people of the same religion.

Ending a marriage is much more difficult within a religious community, not only because of obvious constraints against divorce but also because such communities offer so much support for staying together (Larson & Goltz, 1989). One study found that among Catholics and Protestants, the likelihood of divorce goes down as church attendance goes up (Figure 5.2). In another study of people in long-term marriages (40 years, on average) most respondents said that religious faith was one of the most important factors enhancing their marriage (Robinson, 1994).

But no religious group, not even one that explicitly forbids divorce, is completely immune to members wanting to end their marriages. Despite the Catholic Church's clear and strong opposition to divorce, 1 in 4 Catholics who have ever been married has divorced (Pew Research Center, 2007).

Furthermore, means other than divorce exist to accommodate people who are unhappy in their marriages but whose religious beliefs are strong enough to prevent them from divorcing. Every year in the United States, more than 50,000 Catholic marriages are annulled (Woodward, Quade, & Kantrowitz, 1995). An annulment is a church declaration that a marriage was invalid from the beginning and therefore never existed in the eyes of God or the church.
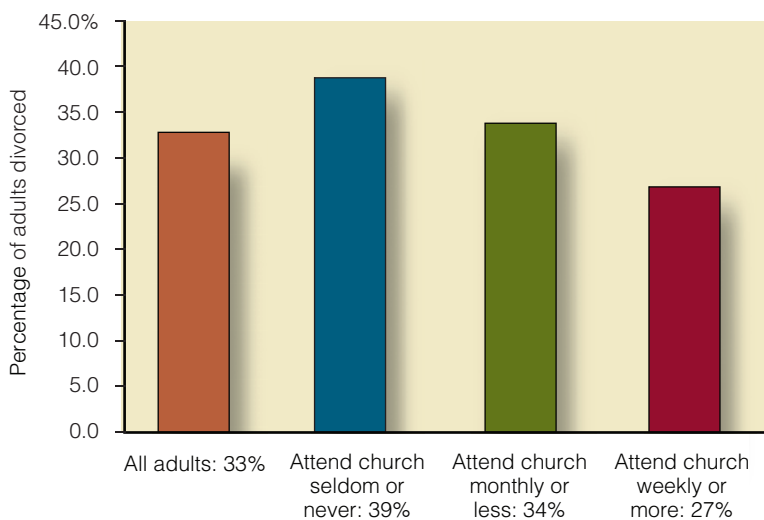

FIGURE 5.2   **Church Attendance and Divorce**
Source: Pew Research Center, 2007, p. 44.

How Religion Stresses Families

For families with a fairly traditional structure (married, with children, and heterosexual), religion typically has a positive, reinforcing effect. For families that don't fit this mold, however, religion may create considerable stress. Problems can arise when the structure or practices of a family don't coincide with religious doctrines—as is often true of unmarried cohabiting heterosexual couples, homosexual couples, families with homosexual members, single-parent families, divorced couples, childless couples, and any other families that do not fit the traditional model. When religious organizations take unambiguous, categorical stands on issues such as sexual behavior, divorce, and gender roles, families with different values or ways of doing things will receive little comfort. Research indicates that children in religious families whose parents divorce are more likely than children from "intact" families to either renounce religion entirely or switch to a different religion in an effort to seek a more supportive environment (Lawton & Bures, 2001). Among fundamentalist Christians, divorced individuals sometimes feel compelled to change churches to avoid facing old friends (Ammerman, 1987).

The tendency for people to turn away from their houses of worship when they violate religious doctrine shows us that the relationship between religion and family ties is a complicated one. As mentioned earlier, most people assume that low levels of religiosity cause a variety of family-related problems. However, it may be that the relationship works in the opposite direction as well: that people who engage in what their religion defines as problematic or perhaps sinful behavior withdraw from the congregation and become less religious as a result of the way others treat them. In fact, some evidence suggests that divorced or separated individuals stop attending services because they feel rejected, or were rejected, by clergy or fellow members (Glenn & Supancic, 1984).

Similarly, in those religious groups that are most opposed to sex outside marriage, the decision to cohabit or engage in premarital sex leads young people to reduce their religious participation. Such withdrawal is especially likely among those who were originally the most religious (Thornton et al., 1992; Thornton & Camburn, 1989). It is very difficult to commit yourself to a group that believes your actions have reserved you an eternal spot in the fiery pits of hell. Ironically, religion may have little to offer those who are arguably most in need of the social support a religious community can provide—divorcing couples, single-parent families, rebellious teenagers, and conflicted homosexuals.

Interfaith Marriage

It can be very stressful for families to be devoutly religious in a society they perceive to be at odds with a godly lifestyle. In predominantly religious societies, because almost everyone is a devout member of the same religion, parents don't have to worry about their children acquiring "undesirable" beliefs from friends, teachers, colleagues, or spouses. The problem only exists in culturally and religiously diverse societies in which children are likely to be exposed to friends, teachers, and later on coworkers and potential marriage partners who are significantly less religious than they are, or who have very different religious beliefs.

This situation poses a serious problem for highly religious parents and their churches. At young ages, devout parents may control their children's social environment and restrict their friendship choices to those with compatible religious beliefs to ensure that their children acquire and retain orthodox religious beliefs (Kelley & DeGraaf, 1997). When children get older, these parents often worry about their marital choices. In a society such as our own—where individuals have considerable choice over mates,

are likely to interact with many persons of different religions, and feel less pressure to switch faiths upon marriage—interfaith marriages have become more common (Roof, 1999). These parents are likely to worry that their grandchildren will be raised in a different religious tradition or without any religion at all.

On a more general level, religious leaders are often concerned that interfaith marriage will result in more secular values throughout society. In 2004, the Vatican issued an official church document discouraging marriage between Catholics and all non-Christians, especially Muslims (Feuer, 2004). The Pope's concern was that such marriages would further weaken people's religious beliefs and values, lead to the raising of children in a different faith, or encourage family members to abandon religion entirely.

Marriage between people of different faiths is especially troublesome in those religions whose numbers are already small. The situation facing U.S. Jews provides a good example. The percentage of Jews in the U.S. adult population has declined from 4% to about 1.4% in the past 50 years (Safire, 1995; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008). Although only 1 Jew in 10 married a non-Jew in 1945, close to 1 in 2 does so today. A lower birthrate among Jews compared to other groups, coupled with the likelihood that interfaith couples will not raise children as Jews, explains, in part, why the Jewish population has been dropping steadily (Goodstein, 2003).

Some Jewish leaders fear that the outcome of the trend toward greater interfaith marriage will be not only the shrinking of the Jewish population but also the erosion and perhaps extinction of an entire way of life. They believe that the survival of U.S. Judaism depends on maintaining the integrity of traditional Jewish values and institutions. Young people who decide to marry outside the faith "are threatening to transform Judaism into a religion of half-remembered rituals, forgotten ancestors and buried beliefs" (Rosen, 1997, p. 7).

Promoting "Oppression"

Problems also can arise for individuals when families are too successful in meeting their religion's expectations. In some situations, living up to religious teachings can come at the expense of an individual's own happiness or well-being. For example, according to the Koran,

> Men are the protectors and maintainers of women. . . . Therefore righteous women are devoutly obedient. . . . As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them, refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly). (translated by Yusufali, 2001, p. 1)

■ GOING GLOBAL

The Taliban

When we think of religious ideologies as being "oppressive," we typically think of radical regimes in other countries that use religious texts to reinforce conformity and justify their persecution of dissenters. For example, in 1996 the Taliban, a radical fundamentalist Islamic movement, took control of Afghanistan. Before the takeover, women accounted for 70% of Afghanistan's teachers, 50% of its civil servants, and 40% of its physicians. The Taliban immediately issued religious edicts forbidding women to work outside the home, attend school, or leave their homes unless accompanied by a husband, father, brother, or son. They were not permitted to wear white socks—because white is the color of the Taliban flag—or to wear shoes that make noise as they walk.

These restrictions had a profound effect on women's physical and mental health. About 62% of Afghani women experienced a decline in access to health care shortly after the takeover. Most were so frightened of being flogged or beaten in the streets that they were often reluctant to seek what little help was available to them. One study found that 86% of Afghan women showed signs of anxiety, and 97% demonstrated evidence of major depression (Rasekh, Bauer, Manos, & Iacopino, 1998). It's worth noting that in recent years, since the overthrow of the Taliban, the everyday lives of Afghan women have improved somewhat (U.S. Department of State, 2003). However, the Taliban have not given up. According to the Afghan Minister of Education, there are about 1,350 girls' schools in the country. But over a span of 6 months during 2006, Taliban attacks disrupted or shut down more than 300 of them. Even today, 79% of Afghan women have not learned to read or write (Moreau & Yousafzai, 2006).

The Taliban are an extreme case, but the potentially harmful consequences of families adhering to strict religious belief systems can be found in more democratic societies and within other religions as well. For instance, although there's no evidence that violence against women is more frequent in highly religious Judeo-Christian families, abused women who are religious may be more vulnerable in the aftermath of the abuse. They're unlikely to leave (because of the promise before God to stay until "death do us part") and commonly express feelings of guilt because they feel they've failed God in not being able to make the relationship work. Such feelings are reinforced by a religious ideology that typically depicts women's roles as wife and mother as essential to their self-worth and that condemns divorces (Nason-Clark, 2004).

Some religions hold that children enter the world with a wayward will and that it is up to the parents to break that will so the child can better respond to parental guidance and submit to the will of God (Greven, 1991). But many parents have taken this directive to "break the child's will" as a mandate that allows them to inflict severe physical punishment, pain, and sometimes injury for the child's own good and not out of their own anger or vindictiveness (Capps, 1992). In 1984, 90 state troopers and 50 social workers raided the compound of the Northeast Kingdom Community Church in Island Pond, Vermont. They rounded up 112 children—ranging in age from 9 days to 17 years—and took them to a courthouse in nearby Newport where they could be examined for evidence of mistreatment. The children were eventually released to the custody of their parents. Church members didn't dispute that they used corporal punishment, usually with thin rods, to discipline the children. But they claimed they did so in accordance with their God-given right to discipline and in a spirit of love:

> Discipline comes from love. Without discipline, children will not have any respect for God or for authority. They have no sense that there are consequences for disobedience. Discipline is not a joyful experience, it hurts, but [children never feel] unwanted or unloved. (quoted in "Trip Home to Stand," 2000, p. A16)

In 2000 a conservative religious leader in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, showed a group of parents how to inflict corporal punishment. Demonstrating on a teen-age boy, he stated "You spank them right here on the gluteus maximus, which God made for that purpose" (quoted in "Conservative Leader Urges Parents," 2000). The minister urged parents to start spanking children around age 2, claiming that it builds self-esteem because it lets children know that they are loved. However, research on corporal punishment has found that such disciplinary tactics are likely to result in overly aggressive and easily frustrated children (Crary, 2000).

In other situations, the harm caused by religious beliefs is less direct. Consider, for example, parents who refuse to seek medical treatment for their sick children because of their religious beliefs. Most states allow parents to refuse certain medical procedures for their children on religious grounds, such as immunizations, eye drops for newborns, screenings for lead poisoning, and physical examinations (CHILD, Inc., 2006). But it is unclear what ought to be done when parents' religiously inspired actions result in the injury or death of a child. Thirty-nine states allow religion as a defense in cases of child abuse or neglect. Nineteen states have religious defenses to felony crimes against children. Delaware, West Virginia, and Arkansas allow religious defenses in cases of murder.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

As you've seen in this chapter, race, ethnicity, and religion can play powerful roles in people's family experiences. Families from all ethnoracial groups—even those that are the most destitute—demonstrate incredible resilience, surviving difficult and sometimes debilitating social circumstances. These families—particularly African American, Asian American, and Latino/a families—are more often than not a source of strength for their members, providing crucial support and nurturing. Families can play a significant part in helping individual members of racial and ethnic minorities overcome the disadvantages they face in mainstream society.

As U.S. society becomes increasingly multiracial, we will be forced to deal with a number of critical issues. Can a society that has been strongly committed to assimilation truly appreciate racial, ethnic, and religious diversity? What would such appreciation look like? Is it possible to address and reduce large-scale economic and educational inequalities without threatening the cultural uniqueness expressed by different groups?

In the past, religious and family institutions had a mutually supportive relationship. Religion served to legitimate marriage and child rearing and to support and guide family life. In exchange, families were an extension of the religious community, inculcating religious values, beliefs, and practices. Although society has not become completely secular, as some have feared, this close relationship between family and religion has weakened due to a wide variety of challenges facing contemporary families. The benefits to be gained from the close tie between family and religion are therefore not experienced by as many in the United States as in the past.

As you think about the material in this chapter, consider these questions:

1. Popular conceptions of *the* family in U.S. society are typically based on a narrow, white, middle-class image. Consequently, family types that do not conform to this image have often been perceived as deficient, abnormal, or even dangerous. How do the structures of minority families represent historical adaptations to broader social and economic conditions? Is it useful to focus on race and ethnicity as the defining features of minority families?

2. When it comes to understanding families, should we emphasize the similarities that exist across ethnoracial and religious groups, or should we emphasize the differences that give these groups their unique culture and identity? Do you think we as a society should aspire to assimilation or multiculturalism? And do you think we will ever reach a point when racial and ethnic categories are irrelevant in people's lives?

3. Have you or someone you are close to grown up in an interfaith or interracial family? What do you see as the disadvantages? Is children's racial and religious identity necessarily weakened in such families? What are the advantages?

4. Should religious organizations compromise their position on various issues (such as premarital sex, divorce, or homosexuality) if their message makes some groups or individuals feel unwelcome? How could such compromises benefit families, religious organizations, and society in general? At what costs?

5. Should parents have complete freedom to homeschool their children if they believe public (and even parochial) schools cannot instill proper religious values? What role should the government play in ensuring that these children receive adequate educational experiences? Should religious organizations help subsidize these children's education?

SUMMARY

- The characteristics that distinguish one racial group from another have less to do with biological differences than with what a society defines as socially significant.

- The dramatic growth in the number of multiracial children is challenging traditional conceptions of race.

- The family forms that characterize particular racial or ethnic groups reflect the historical and economic conditions under which that group entered the United States. Minority families must adapt to differing degrees of social exclusion.

- Focusing on the unique family characteristics of certain racial or ethnic groups sometimes obscures the diversity that exists *within* those groups.

- When evaluating the role of religion in family life, it's important to consider how religion can create stress in families along with how it can help them.

Go to the Online Learning Center at **www.mhhe.com/newman1** to test your knowledge of the chapter concepts and key terms.

KEY TERMS

assimilation 122	hypodescent rule 110	race 109
ethnicity 109	melting pot 122	religion 122
expanded families 121	multicultural society 122	split household 117

SEE FOR YOURSELF

U.S. society—especially the economic opportunities it provides and the obstacles it sets in place—can look quite different to people from different racial and ethnic groups. To gain a better understanding of how race and ethnicity influence people's family experiences, interview a few adults from each of the following groups:

- White, European
- Non-white, Latino/a
- Asian American
- African American
- A multiracial couple or family

If possible, interview both husbands and wives, and also try to maximize diversity within each group. For example, for Latino/a adults, try to locate someone of Mexican descent and someone of Cuban descent. For Asian Americans, see if you can interview people of different nationalities.

When you interview your respondents, first ask them to discuss their cultural heritage(s). When did their families come to the United States? What were the circumstances? Do they have any knowledge of relatives living in the countries of origin? Consider how the circumstances and historical context of their arrival here affected contact with and knowledge of distant relatives who live in other parts of the world.

Ask them about family traditions, such as weekly or daily rituals and holiday celebrations. Are some of these traditions linked to their racial or ethnic backgrounds? In what ways? What are the most powerful and important cultural traditions? You might want to ask if it's difficult to maintain these traditions. Do their family traditions include members of their extended families? In general, what role do these other relatives play in their lives?

Finally, ask about experiences with racial or ethnic discrimination. What have these experiences taught them about living and surviving in the United States? About the importance of family?

Use your findings to consider whether, when it comes to family, people should emphasize the similarities that exist across racial and ethnic groups or the differences.