

Philosophy 232: Race, Ethnicity, Panethnicity

Race: A group defined by various aspects of its members' "phenotype" (visible physical characteristics), where those characteristics are assumed to indicate the presence of certain distinctive psychological or behavioral characteristics, generally indicative of inherent inferiority or superiority, especially in comparison to other races.

The consensus of 20th century science is that there are no races in this sense. The basic reason for this is that people with the same phenotypic characteristics are not genetically similar in any other significant ways, and do not have common genetically-based psychological characteristics. There are no psychologically or behaviorally significant genetic differences between "whites," "blacks," "Asians," "Native Americans," etc., as groups.

So, currently, the word "race" is generally used to refer to groups that, historically, were *thought* to be races, and were generally *treated* in their particular societies as if they were races. I use the word "racialized group" to refer to these groups, in my book, "I'm Not a Racist, But...". So racialized groups may have certain common histories or social experiences because of how they were treated because they were wrongly thought to be a race; but they are not similar in any genetically-based ways other than phenotype.

Race categories on the U.S. Census: One way about thinking about the use of racial categories on the U.S. Census is that for about the first 140 years (until c. 1930), the Census thought it was counting actual races. In contrast, for the past 4 censuses (1970-2000), what has been counted is membership in racialized groups, for it is as members of racialized groups that one suffers discrimination and historical disadvantage, and the tracking of this history and current discrimination is the reason why the Census now gathers "racial" information.

Ethnic group: A group having common ancestry and (or once having had) a distinctive culture connected to that ancestry. Ethnic groups are generally smaller than nations, and do not generally have political structures the way nations do. However, some ethnic groups span different nations (e.g. Kurds in Iraq and Turkey).

In the United States, ethnic groups are generally thought of as originating in immigrant groups that bring a distinctive culture with them from another country. However, African Americans are an ethnic group but not an immigrant group; their culture arises from their distinctive experiences inside America, and only minimally from Africa. In many nations other than the U.S., ethnic groups have originated where they are currently located, not somewhere else. So "ethnic" is not the same as "of foreign origin," even if that is the general understanding in the U.S. As Mary Waters points out ("The Costs of a Costless Community") not all ethnic groups *actually* have distinctive cultures, even if they once did, but people often think that they do.

In the early part of the 20th century, white ethnic groups were thought of in somewhat of a race-like manner—something in between races and ethnic groups, as Guglielmo discusses.

Races and racialized groups are generally much larger than ethnic groups, and contain many distinctive ethnic groups within them. So (sticking to the U.S. case) "whites" include the ethnic groups "Polish-Americans," "Irish Americans," "Italian Americans," etc.; "Asians" [understood as a racial rather than a geographical group] include "Vietnamese Americans," "Chinese Americans," "Korean Americans"; "blacks" include "African Americans," "Haitian Americans," "Jamaican Americans"; and so on.

Panethnic group: Espiritu's definition ("Ethnicity and Panethnicity"): a "politico-cultural collectivity consisting of distinct ethnic groups that experience themselves as having something in common." Examples are "Asian Americans," "Latino/Hispanics," "Native Americans." Thus panethnic groups do not have a single culture, the way ethnic groups do. There may be great cultural diversity within a given panethnic group. Dominicans and Peruvians (in the US) are culturally quite different, but are both "Hispanic" (or "Latino").

(However, the ethnic groups forming a panethnic group may have more in common culturally than they do with ethnic groups in *other* panethnic groups.)

One of the things that members of a panethnic group may have in common is the experience of being a target of racism by persons who do not distinguish the different ethnic groups composing the panethnic group. Because of this connection, it is easy to confuse race with panethnicity, and often the boundaries of a panethnic group are almost identical with those of races. But they are not the same.