



# IDENTITY, RACE, AND ETHNICITY

# How do we define ourselves?

- Marketed through consumer goods
  - Ads convey impression that identity can be purchased
- **Gillian Rose:** identity is “how we make sense of ourselves”
- Experiences, emotions, connections, rejections all help us construct our identity
- Identity is a snapshot of who we are in that moment
  - Place and space are integral
- Identity is fluid

# Defining Others

- One of the most powerful ways to construct identity is by **identifying against others**
  - First define “other”, then define ourselves in opposing terms
- **Edward Said**: Europeans over time constructed an image of regions now commonly called Middle East and Asia
  - The “Orient” – a place with supposedly mystical characteristics that were depicted and repeated in European literature and art
- **James Blaut**: Europeans came to define Africans and Native Americans as “savage” and “mystical”
- Europeans defined themselves as “civilized”

# The State

- National identities are the most powerful foci in the modern world
- People identify themselves first and foremost in terms of nationality
- Coexist with all other identities that divide humanity
  - Some trump national identity depending on context and scales of interaction
- Language and religion also foci of identity
- Race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality - our focus for now

# Race

- **Race:** refers to physical and genetic markers that a particular group share, tied to physical attributes of humans that have developed over time as modern humans spread around the world
  - Genetic difference between two different races is less than 0.1%
- Precolonial African societies had lines of division that sometimes reflected differences in skin tone
- Colonial Africa – all shades of black seen as one by Europeans
- Clumping of various societies/people into a few racial categories still common in modern world



# Origins of this idea?

- Every time we check a box indicating our race, we learn to think of categories of race as fixed, natural, and comprehensive
- Racial categories of race of fluid, overlapping, incomplete, and constructed
- Throughout history societies have drawn distinctions among peoples based on their physical characteristics
- Most modern assumptions grew out of period of European exploration and colonialism

# Origins cont'd

- **Benedict Anderson:** wealthy Europeans defined themselves as superior to those living elsewhere
  - socioeconomic differences can fuel the sense of superiority attached to race - RACISM
- **What changed with colonialism?**
  - Even poorer Europeans came to define themselves as superior to people in the colonies
- **Easiest way to define the “other” was through skin color because it’s visible**



# Ethnicity

- **Ethnicity**: refers to a group of people who share a real or perceived common identity including, but not limited to, religion, language, or history
- Nationality, culture, traditions
- Ethnicity can be learned or adopted
- Geographers focus more on ethnicity than race

# A Brief Case Study

- Because ethnicity is so closely tied to self-identity, there are forms of ethnicity that are entirely artificial, but powerful.
- Example: Hutus and Tutsis of Rwanda
  - [http://www.rwandanstories.org/origins/hutu\\_and\\_tutsi.html](http://www.rwandanstories.org/origins/hutu_and_tutsi.html)

# **Ethnicity In the Cultural Landscape**

- **Ethnic diversity: multiple groups coexist in the same geographic place**
- **American narrative claims to extol tradition of the melting pot**
  - **More like a salad?**
- **U.S. exhibits a level of multiculturalism unfathomable several hundred years ago**

# **Ethnicity... Cultural Landscape con't**

- **Humanity doesn't historically support ethnically diverse communities**
- **Extreme attempts to minimize diversity – ethnic cleansing and genocide**
- **United Nations mandate → acceptable for a country to intervene in another's domestic policies in cases of large-scale persecution**

# Examples

- Holocaust (WWII)
- Armenian Genocide
- Ethnic turmoil in former Yugoslavia
- Genocides in Rwanda and Uganda

# **Examples in the U.S.**

- **Attacks on ethnic diversity don't always lead to violence**
- **Play on people's fears and have destructive consequences**
- **U.S. barred immigration for Chinese, Irish, Italian, and Eastern European immigrants**

# Race and Ethnicity in the U.S.

- **Benjamin Forest:** “In many respects, racial identity is not a self-consciously constructed collection of characteristics, but a condition which is imposed by a set of external social and historical constraints”
- U.S. reinforces racial categories through residential segregation, racialized divisions of labor, and categories of race recorded by U.S. Census Bureau and other govt agencies
- Historically 2 main categories: white and non-white

# **Hispanic: Race or Ethnicity?**

- **Before 2000 U.S. Census classified Hispanic as race**
  - **White person from Venezuela and black person from Brazil and native person from Bolivia all Hispanic**
- **2000 U.S. Census Bureau determined that Hispanic better defined as ethnicity**
- **Racial and ethnic classifications are largely arbitrary in nature**



# **Hispanic: Race or Ethnicity? cont'd**

- **Defined Hispanic as coming from a country where Spanish is the predominant language**
- **Census options: white non-Hispanic, white Hispanic, black non-Hispanic, black Hispanic**
- **2010: Census Bureau realized it was excluding people from Latin America who didn't speak Spanish**
- **Also recognized some prefer the term Latina/Latino**

# **Residential Segregation**

- **Most dramatic geographic impacts of racism found at neighborhood scale**
- **Laws that promoted residential segregation by disallowing the migration of certain racial groups into particular neighborhood**
- **1960s laws passed to outlaw this**
- **Many areas still strongly segregated along racial lines**

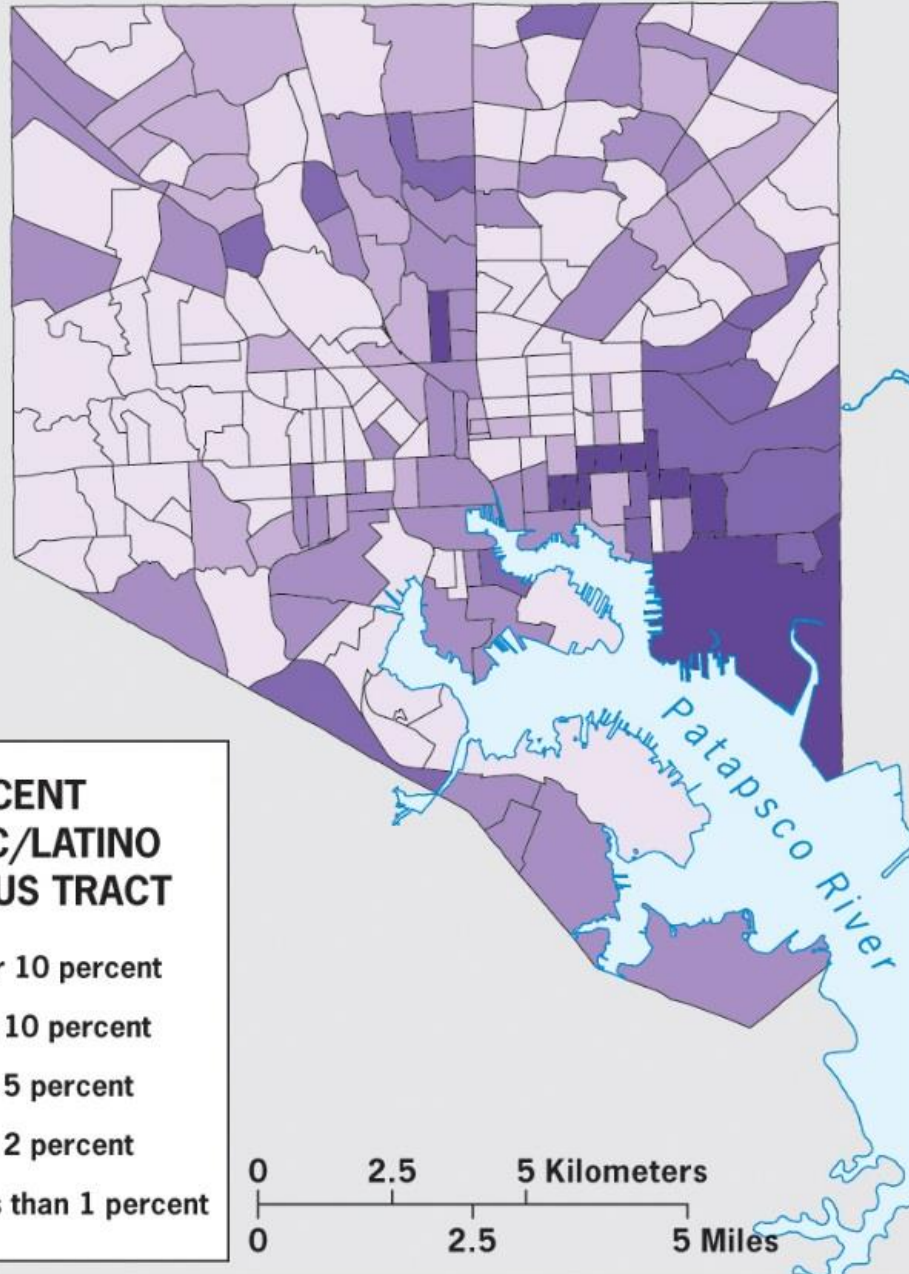
# **Residential Segregation cont'd**

- **Residential segregation**: the degree to which two or more groups live separately from one another, in different parts of the urban environment
- **Census Bureau report → 5 measures of segregation**
  - Evenness, exposure, concentrated, centralized, clustered

# Residential Segregation cont'd

- **Massey and Denton:** “...groups may live apart from one another and be ‘segregated’ in a variety of ways. Minority members may be distributed so that they are overrepresented in some areas and underrepresented in others, varying on the characteristic of **evenness**. They may be distributed so that their **exposure** to majority members is limited by virtue of rarely sharing a neighborhood with them. They may be spatially **concentrated** within a very small area, occupying less physical space than majority members. They may be spatially **centralized**, congregating around the urban core, and occupying a more central location than the majority. Finally, areas of minority settlement may be tightly **clustered** to form one large contiguous enclave, or be scattered widely around the urban area.

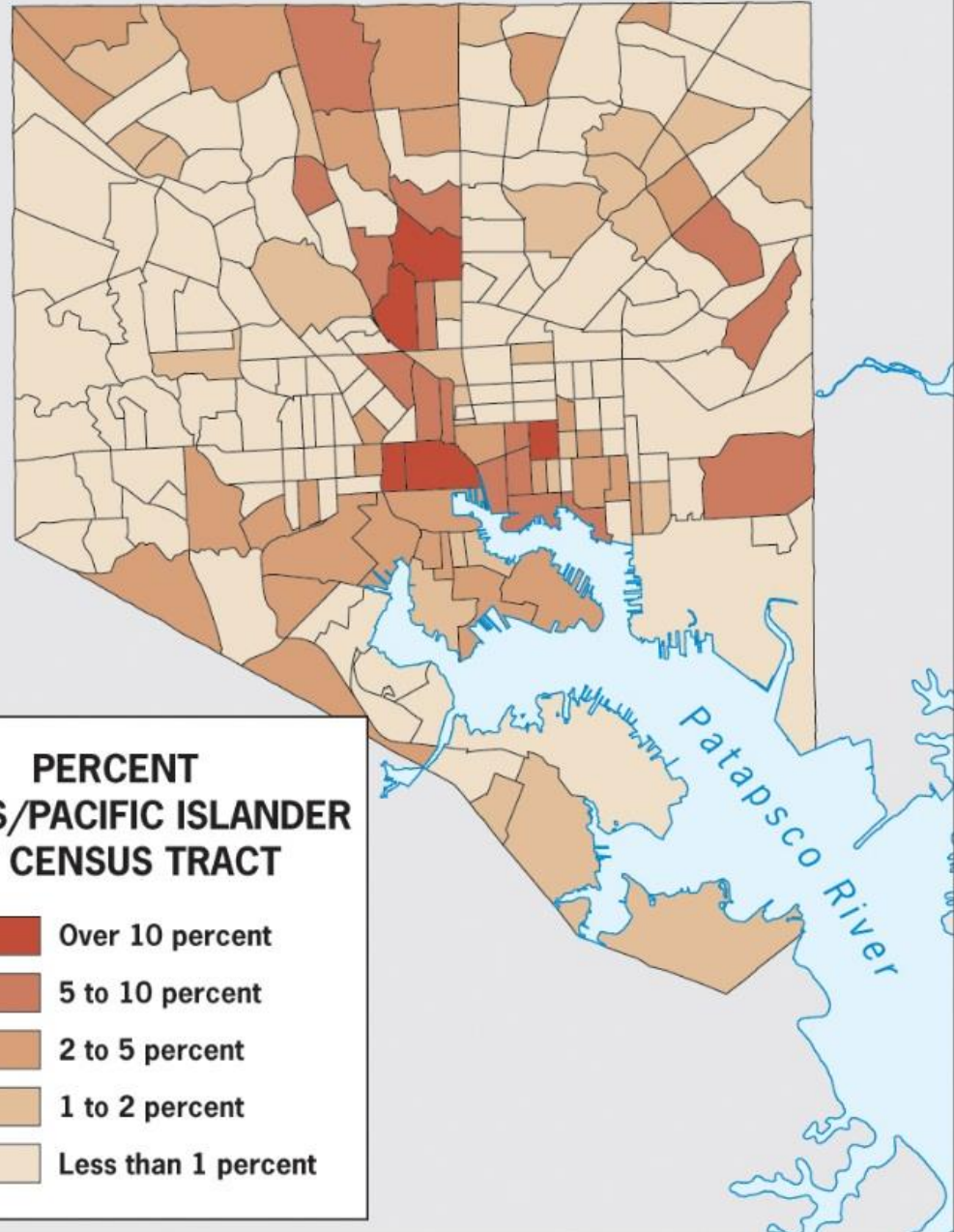
### HISPANIC/LATINO RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION IN BALTIMORE, MARYLAND



**PERCENT  
HISPANIC/LATINO  
BY CENSUS TRACT**

- Over 10 percent
- 5 to 10 percent
- 2 to 5 percent
- 1 to 2 percent
- Less than 1 percent

### ASIANS/PACIFIC ISLANDER RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION IN BALTIMORE, MARYLAND



**PERCENT  
ASIANS/PACIFIC ISLANDER  
BY CENSUS TRACT**

- Over 10 percent
- 5 to 10 percent
- 2 to 5 percent
- 1 to 2 percent
- Less than 1 percent

# **Identities Across Scales**

- **Different identities at different scales**
  - **Individual – daughter, sister, student, soccer player**
  - **Local – member of Palmdale community, resident of specific neighborhood in Palmdale, leader of a KHS organization**
  - **Regional – South Californian, West Coast**
  - **National – American, Democrat/Republican**
  - **Global – Western, free, wealthy**

# Scale of NYC

- NYC has greater number and diversity of immigrant than any other city in the U.S.
- Identities change – Hispanic → Puerto Rican
- **Succession**: new immigrants to a city often move to low-income areas being slowly abandoned by older immigrant groups.
- Many new immigrants focus on the streetscapes, creating businesses to serve their community and reflect their culture.

# HUG It Out



- Think about the last time you were asked to check a box for your race. Does that box factor into how you make sense of yourself individually, locally, regionally, nationally, and globally? What impact might it have on how other people view you? Explain.