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Ethnicity and ethnic groups in America: the view from Harvard

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1.

The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups published late in 1980 is in part a by-product of the Ethnic Heritage Studies Program which the Federal Government of the United States initiated in 1972 by an amendment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Title IX). As stated in Section 901 of the amendment to that Act, the rationale and purpose of the Ethnic Heritage Studies Program (EHSP) was to ensure that students wishing to 'learn about the nature of their own cultural heritage, and to study the contributions of the cultural heritages of the other ethnic groups of the Nation' (Thernstrom et al. (eds), 1980: 343) would be eligible for assistance from the Federal Government for these endeavours. In 1974--5 the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups was planned with the aid of funds from the EHSP budget for that year (ibid.: 344). The Encyclopedia is thus a legitimate issue of the EHSP, and illustrates its parentage to a surprising degree in many unexpected ways.

The Ethnic Heritage Studies Program is one of several measures initiated by the US Federal Government in the 1970s in response to a variety of pressures and demands by minorities of differing types and sizes within the population for equal or equivalent treatment, recognition, opportunities, access to federal resources and facilities, and so forth. The primary and basic stimulus for these diverse demands came from black (Negro) Americans, particularly in the wake of the US Supreme Court's 1954 decision in Brown v. Board of Education that separate public facilities for blacks and whites denied equality. This was a conclusion that President Truman's Civil Rights Commission had reached seven years earlier (Holt, 1980: 18).

After 1954, the Civil Rights Movement led by the late Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. struggled against formidable odds to secure more parity or equality of status for Negro-Americans in those spheres of social life which were directly or indirectly the subjects of public policy and accordingly subject to public regulation: for example, public transport, schooling and higher education, voter registration and voting rights, justice before the law, etc. Most of
the Movement's successful campaigns took place in Southern communities; but despite the rising expectations and demands the Movement encouraged among youth and Negroes throughout the USA, its achievements, though significant, were limited during the lifetimes of its leader, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the late President John F. Kennedy. Partly for these reasons, and partly in response to the hostile reactions of white civilians and police to the Movement and to black demands, Dr King's non-violent campaigns led to the Civil Disobedience movement of the early 1960s and so to the fiery summers of the mid and late 1960s when Negroes in over '125 cities erupted in violence that required 70,000 troops to quell. These were not places in which King and the movement had been active and successful, but rather Northern communities resentful that the celebrated progress had touched them so lightly' (ibid.: 20).

As Dr King's leadership, methods, and goal of progressive integration of Negroes in American society were effectively challenged in Northern Negro communities by advocates of Black Power such as Stokely Carmichael, Negro-Americans rejected that designation and chose to identify themselves as (American) blacks, seeking on the one hand to segregate themselves rigorously from white domination and influence, while demanding immediate action from the white-dominated Federal Government on the other.

As Washington legislated Equal Opportunity Programs and Affirmative Action, together with other compensatory measures addressed to the demands of American blacks, the latter, sensing success as the fruit of intransigence, further redefined themselves as 'Afro-Americans' rather than American blacks, thereby implicitly claiming a social status as 'ethnics' similar to that of German-Americans, Italian-Americans, Irish-Americans and other white Americans. However understandable this was, in doing so spokesmen for black Americans redefined their constituency in ethnic rather than racial terms. These developments, as van den Berghe (1978: xxix) notes, 'created a racist backlash of significant proportions, as well as the activation of white ethnic movements. Since the best way to get a share of federal funds and to be heard was to activate an ethnic constituency, to claim "minority" status, it paid everyone to try to get into the ethnic act. The ethnic game quickly degenerated into bitter feuds between minority groups over the distribution of pitifully small spoils.'

Between 1972 and 1979 the Ethnic Heritage Studies Program received on average $2 million per annum from the Federal budget as its share of these 'pitifully small spoils'. Before and after the publication of Alex Haley's *Roots*, many white American communities had decided to document and publish their own accounts of their ethnic histories, difficulties and achievements in the USA. Since the EHSP provided support for such activities, social scientists of the New England establishment at Harvard moved to produce an authoritative *Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* with the best intentions and the best available scholarship. This undertaking sought to ensure fair and accurate scholarly accounts of all the various ethnic collectivities which have contributed to American culture and life, while excluding biased treatments and partisan misrepresentations of differing kinds. The result of these efforts is the *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* edited by Stephan Thernstrom, Ann Orlov and Oscar Handlin, a 'landmark publication' and 'something that has never been attempted before', as Senator Daniel Moynihan, formerly of Harvard, proclaims on the dust jacket, perhaps for the very good reasons that previously neither the market nor the popular demand, nor the Federal support, nor even the cultural situation and ideological need for a compendium of this kind, had existed in the USA.

The *Encyclopedia* is of enormous value in several ways. Firstly it compiles systematically and comparably, following a standard check-list of topics (Thernstrom et al. (eds), 1980: viii), a mountain of useful, important and extremely elusive information on a great many American collectivities, often with relevant accounts of their home countries and origins therein. Secondly, it authoritatively represents and illustrates the dominant themes of current social science thought in America on this most interesting and complex aspect of US society. Besides articles of varying length and detail on over 101 collectivities presented as 'ethnic groups', there are 29 thematic essays on such topics as 'concepts of ethnicity', 'assimilation and pluralism', 'integration policies', 'intermarriage', 'family patterns', labour, language, religion, politics and the like, together with two appendices, of which the second summarises US Census data on the changing ethnic composition of the American people from 1820 to 1970 in progressively increasing detail, and supplements this with statistics on immigration and naturalisation to 1975. In short the Encyclopedia amply justifies its name as the most systematic and comprehensive compiliation of objective information on minorities in the USA yet made.

As a record of the origins, experiences and social adaptations of the multitude of ethnic groups currently settled in the USA, even without its invaluable comparative studies of their similarities and differences, or their persistent and changing patterns, there can be no question whatsoever that the Encyclopedia fills a grave scholarly vacuum with magisterial thoroughness. It also strives consciously for objectivity and fairness in its reports. The central question then is whether or not the *Encyclopedia* achieves this, and if not, how, where and why has it failed.

If indeed the *Encyclopedia* displays the objectivity and comprehensiveness its very name connotes, then it should long remain the last word on ethnicity and ethnic groups in the USA; and since the USA is virtually the modern ethnic equivalent of Noah's Ark on the one hand, while its sociology dominates Western social science on the other, any impeccable revelation on ethnicity in America, whether from Harvard or some other oracle, will predictably exercise extraordinary influence on sociological thinking about race and ethnicity elsewhere in Europe, Asia and Africa, and also on numerous governments, political parties, and their policies on these and cognate matters. It is therefore important to scrutinise with care the scientific foundations and conceptual structure of the *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*. 
The editorial introduction recognises that

An Encyclopedia of American ethnic groups requires a definition of an ethnic group, no simple matter because there is as yet no consensus about the precise meaning of ethnicity. A description of this project, written in August 1976 for general circulation, noted that 'the definition of an ethnic group has been necessarily flexible and pragmatic. In some instances it seems obvious; in others there is a question whether or not a group of a certain size perceives itself as different, or is perceived as different by those around it. Regional and small religious groups raise other issues. (Thernstrom et al., eds, 1980: v–vi)

Remarking that 'ethnicity is an immensely complex phenomenon', the editors then announce their decision to treat as 'ethnic groups' any aggregates characterised by some of the following features, although in combinations that vary considerably:

1. Common geographic origins;
2. migratory status;
3. race;
4. language or dialect;
5. religious faith or faiths;
6. ties that transcend kinship, neighbourhood, and community boundaries;
7. shared traditions, values, symbols;
8. literature, folklore and music;
9. food preferences;
10. settlement and employment patterns;
11. special interests in regard to politics in the homeland and in the United States;
12. institutions that specifically serve and maintain the group;
13. an internal sense of distinctiveness;
14. an external perception of distinctiveness. (Ibid.: vi)

Being of a parsimonious disposition, I prefer to this omnibus catalogue the familiar definition of an ethnic group as those 'who conceive themselves as being alike, by virtue of their common ancestry, real or fictitious, and who are so regarded by others' (Shibutani and Kwan, 1965: 47). As those authors point out:

An ethnic group consists of people who conceive of themselves as being of a kind. They are united by emotional bonds and concerned with the preservation of their type. With very few exceptions, they speak the same language, or their speech is at least intelligible to each other, and they share a common cultural heritage. Since those who form such units are usually endogamous, they tend to look alike. (Ibid.: 40)

In short, ethnic units are collectivities that simultaneously believe themselves to share some common ancestry, real or fictitious, and some distinctive cultural practices, and are generally believed by others outside the aggregate to do so. In effect, then, ethnic units necessarily require and display four concurrent features: (1) belief in their unique identity; (2) belief in their shared or common descent; (3) belief in their cultural distinctness; and (4) the fact that outsiders perceive the aggregate and its members in these terms, whether truly or not. Accordingly, unless these four conditions are simultaneously present and valid for members and non-members alike, we cannot correctly designate a collectivity or aggregate as 'ethnic' or apply the concept of 'ethnicity' to it or its members.

Frisians in the USA illustrate this point neatly. Coming from coastal areas in northwest Europe which are scattered across Holland, Germany and Denmark, Frisians, while sharing their own distinctive language, normally use the language of the nation-state from which they or their ancestors came. They have accordingly been classified in America as Germans, Danes or Dutch, and commonly accept this identification. In such a case, clearly, the Frisians fail to qualify as an ethnic group, being without external recognition of the distinctness that this status requires. Nonetheless the Encyclopedia treats them as such (Thernstrom et al. (eds), 1980: 401–3). Similarly, it presents American Tatars as a single ethnic group, while saying that 'There are three groups of Tatars in the United States, the Crimean Tatars, the Kazan or Volga Tatars, and the Polish or Lithuanian Tatars. They share a strong loyalty to Islam, but each group has a distinct historical and cultural background and a different language' (Bennigsen, 1980a: 988).

Whether and how others perceive individuals and aggregates as 'ethnic' or not, and distinguish or identify them with social units of differing kinds, are clearly critical for the notions of ethnicity and ethnic units that prevail within a nation. There must often be divisions of opinion on whether or not certain categories of individuals are 'ethnics'. Yet even if everyone unhesitatingly agreed that 'all Xs are ethnics', there might well be debates about the precise nature and identity of the units to which these Xs belong.

In any large and diverse population, to attribute its prevailing scheme of 'ethnic classification' to the consensus of 'everyone' is clearly to indulge in a fiction. Accordingly, to avoid that fiction, we need to ask, first, who are the classifiers in this ethnic game, as well as the classified? Secondly, we need to ask on what criteria and procedures do their classifications rest; and thirdly, how well are these classifications known in their structure and details, and accepted among the people at large? For clearly, the smaller an ethnic aggregate, the smaller will be the numbers within a nation who are likely to know of its existence in their midst, much less to have first-hand experience of it.

As regards classifications of the American people in ethnic and racial terms, the US Bureau of the Census has long been concerned with these questions and has exercised a profound influence on public opinion in this area. However, the Census Bureau reflects the national and political contexts of which it is a mirror, no less than the Department of Immigration and Naturalization.
Besides the Bureau, then, and Congress and the two major political parties, we should recognise the diffuse influence which the national elite, the social establishment, almost by definition always exercise indirectly on these matters through their representatives in numerous institutions, as well as that which more recently social scientists within the academic establishment have enjoyed.

Setting aside such questions for the moment, if we consider only those collectivities that exhibit the four criteria listed above as essential for designation as distinct ethnic units, the question immediately arises whether or not, and if not to what degree and in what contexts, do such units constitute discrete groups. Almost always in the contemporary literature, ethnic units or aggregates are designated as 'ethnic groups' without the least pause or hesitation to consider whether or not they exhibit those qualities and characteristics that are normally associated with the concept of a group in social science. Long ago Shibutani and Kwan recognised that some ethnic units are categories rather than groups (1965: 51), but they argued then that these 'categories are subjective in that they exist only in the minds of men, but they are not subjective in the sense that a person can imagine himself to be whatever he wishes. The categories are objective in that they are well-established beliefs held in common by a great many people, and they are objective in that they exist independently of the desires of any particular individual' (ibid.: 47). While true, these concepts are irrelevant and unhelpful as criteria to distinguish categories and groups. As Joseph Fichter has pointed out, a social category is simply an aggregate differentiated by one or more criteria which lacks the organisation that distinguishes a group. For example, American redheads will remain a category until they create an inclusive or representative association to coordinate and represent their interests. Likewise American Negroes, blacks or Afro-Americans, despite their differing designations, remain a category since they lack the organisation and capacities characteristic of a group, racial or other. Yet, however strenuous their claims, they are neither simply an ethnic group nor an ethnic category.

This brings us closer to the heart of the issue — if indeed this issue has a heart. Following its omnibus designation of ethnic groups in the editorial introduction quoted above, the Encyclopedia devotes several pages to an interesting discussion of 'Concepts of Ethnicity' by William Petersen (1980: 234-42) in which inter alia the differences and relations of race and ethnicity are discussed. Petersen notes that

Many American writers now distinguish 'racial' from 'ethnic' minorities, the former being Negroes, Asians and other 'non-whites', the latter, European nationalities.

The separation of the two terms has been inhibited, however, by the confusion in real life between physiological and cultural criteria. Very often a racial group is cut off from the rest of the population by cultural characteristics as well; conversely, if the endogamy enjoined, or at least encouraged by most religious faiths and other cultural groups continues for enough generations, it is likely to result in a perceptible physical differentiation. (Ibid.: 236)

In effect, like the editors and most other contributors, Petersen prefers to ignore the severe and sometimes crippling differences that distinguish racial from cultural groups, and regards as 'ethnic groups' all culturally defined groupings, religious or other, whether or not they exhibit the characteristics of group organisation and cohesion, and whether or not their distinctive features include racial differentiae. On this basis the door is thrown wide open to assimilate ethnicity and race, as in the editorial definition of ethnicity quoted above. Following a brief discussion that requires less than half a page (Thernstrom et al. (eds), 1980: 869), the concept of race plays little part in the organisation of the Encyclopedia. Instead the volume purports to treat each and every collectivity in the USA that claims common ancestry and custom either as a distinct 'ethnic group' or as part of some larger 'ethnic group', whether or not these aggregates are racially distinct and have or lack group organisation and characteristics.

The consequences of this approach are most illuminating. They are also especially worthy of note since conceptions of race and ethnicity that dominate American social sciences are certain to have profound effects on other streams of Western thought and action in politics and academia alike, more so when the revelation comes from Harvard and in the form of a Harvard Encyclopedia, with all that that implies. It is therefore necessary to treat this comprehensive profession of intent and knowledge by the core of the New England social science Establishment with special care. The book presents as comprehensive, authoritative and up-to-date a statement of their views of the sociology of race and ethnicity in the USA and presumably elsewhere as we could ever hope to have. It also affords profuse and perhaps accidental demonstrations of the implications of these particular viewpoints. It behoves us therefore to examine the volume critically and with care, since any errors that may structure its classification and analysis of ethnicity and 'ethnic groups' can have profound practical effects on human collectivities within and beyond the USA in the near and remoter future.
answer to the question of what are the races of mankind. Beyond the narrow genetic usage, the concept of race has been employed in a variety of ways. The belief that mankind is divided into several biologically distinct races was widely held in the 19th and early 20th centuries, as was the belief that some races are innately superior, some innately inferior. The racist literature of that era contained many ambiguities, distortions and contradictions. In recent decades such theories have been discredited. (Thernstrom et al. (eds), 1980: 869)

Differences of race are thus implicitly rejected by the Encyclopedia on two quite different grounds, namely, that genetic distributions vary so haphazardly for particular traits that genetics can neither identify nor distinguish discrete races; and secondly, that the phenotypical differences with which racial distinctions are associated have been exploited by racists over the past two centuries. Taken together, these arguments suggest that if we deny racial differences we shall escape or exclude racism. Yet the Jewish holocaust in Nazi Germany involved an ethnic group of the same racial stock as their killers, who were motivated by an ideology of racism despite the lack of objective racial differences between their victims and themselves. Accordingly, on these grounds, to eliminate racism we should cease to recognise ethnicity as well as race.

As regards the first argument, namely, that races are illusory since gene frequencies vary widely for differing genetic traits within and between racial stocks, would that the matter were really that simple, and that on such grounds we could thus either ignore and/or eliminate race differences, or equate them with ethnic ones. However, as biologists, most social scientists and various contributors to this encyclopedia recognise, mankind consists of a plurality of mutually interfertile stocks, called varieties or races, which differ visibly and grossly in their characteristic phenotypes,1 and historically in their geographical distributions and mutual isolation. The major human races are identified continentally as European, Asiatic (Mongol and Hindu), Amerindian or New World, African and Australoid. There are, of course, a number of minor races such as Eskimo, Pygmy, Bushman, Melanesian, Polynesian, etc., which are also phenotypically distinct, but which have for various reasons either fallen behind in the reproductive competition over the past hundred millennia, or have emerged as phenotypically distinct stocks rather later than the major races. Normally, when members of two distinct races cross, their offspring differ phenotypically from both parents and their racial stocks. In contrast, when members of the same race cross, their offspring conform to the parental phenotype. Such Mendelian effects illustrate universal norms for the identification of racial differences and hybrid stocks, and direct our attention to the recent emergence of new races through miscegenation, as in Hawaii or South Africa, and also to the fallacy of pure and pristine races on which racist ideologies rest.

There are, of course, several important issues of a technical sort connected with the nature and status of the concept of race on which biologists are keenly divided; but to my knowledge these disputes have so far not cogently negated the reality or utility of the concept of race. They tend to centre on the implications of clinal distributions of blood groups and similar factors in Eurasia, Africa and elsewhere for the notion of discrete races. In 1962, generalising from such data, Frank Livingstone asserted that 'There are no races, there are only clines' (1962: 279) acline being simply a gradient or graded sequence of differences within a species. Livingstone's dramatic thesis has been welcomed in various quarters (e.g. Banton and Harwood, 1975: 56–60); and his denial of the scientific basis and validity of racial difference is obviously congruent with the recent efforts of black Americans to deracialise their status and identify themselves as an American ethnic minority.

The problem with Livingstone's thesis is that, while the genetic distributions of blood groups and similar characters on which it is based are invisible to the human eye and are not normally used as racial diacritica by ordinary men, these characters are also all monogenic, that is, they are known to be associated with differences in single discrete genes. In contrast, those characters by which men normally distinguish such racial varieties as the African, Mongol, Caucasoid, Amerindian, etc., are both gross and highly visible and polygenic—that is, they are co-determined by a plurality of genes, most of which, together with their relationships, are very poorly known to this day (Dobzhansky, 1962a: 267). While blood groups and other monogenic traits, with scarcely any exceptions, are not known to differ in their adaptive values, such key racial diacritica as skin colour, stature and distribution of body hair differ in their adaptive values in different regions and climates. Further, while frequency distributions of monogenic characters are labile and change easily as effects of differential reproduction, by inference from the known persistence and uniformity of those clusters of gross phenotypical differentiae that distinguish human races, the polygenic combinations that generate these racial features are both standard and perduring within geographically isolated human races. In short, Livingstone's claim to have disposed of the biological concept of race on the basis of such monogenic characters as blood groups and the sickle-cell trait, which are in any case invisible and irrelevant for racial classifications in human societies, while ignoring the polygenic characters that feature so prominently in the racial identification of individuals and groups across the globe, was rather premature, as Dobzhansky suggested in reply (1962b: 279–80; 1962a: 266–9).

5

For social scientists the principal difficulties with the race concept derive from its dual nature as a 'category of biological classification' (Dobzhansky, 1962b: 280), and as a mode of social classification (van den Berghe, 1978: 9). These two usages, the biological and the social, overlap and differ in their referents. Sociological study of this topic should therefore begin by exploring these overlaps and differences to determine their scope, significance and associated conditions. However, the editors of the Harvard Encyclopedia
apparently preferred to reject both usages on the following grounds:

Most anthropologists today reserve the term 'race' for the three broad, particularly distinctive divisions of mankind: the Caucasoid or Indo-European, the Mongoloid, and the Negroid. These conventional categories, however, do not include all the peoples of the world, and the range of variation within them is enormous. Each contains innumerable ethnic groups arising from the intersecting influence of nationality, religion, tribe, language, and region. In this usage race is a social classification of the most general, physically different categories of humans, regardless of the cultural forms of nation, religion, or language. (Thernstrom et al. (eds), 1980: 869)

Continuing, the editors note that, whereas for many years the US Bureau of the Census regularly recorded information on race, and distinguished Negroes, Amerindians, Orientals and other non-whites, in 1980 the US Census only asked oblique, open-ended questions about ancestry, requesting respondents to identify themselves as either

White, Black or Negro, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, American Indian, Asian, Indian, Hawaiian, Guamanian, Samoan, Eskimo, Aleut or Other. If the answer was American Indian, the name of the tribe was requested; if Other, the respondent was asked to specify. (Ibid.)

With marked coyness, the editors conclude that 'These categories are presumably different from ancestry or descent, but what the U.S. Bureau of the Census means by them, or how they will be analysed, is uncertain' (ibid.).

Thus, despite these indications that the US Census Bureau still regards information on the racial status and composition of the American people as worthy of inquiry and record, the Harvard Encyclopedia clearly prefers to equate race with ethnicity and so to eliminate those fundamental differences within America between its major racial stocks on one hand and the multitudes of ethnic groups on the other which have exercised and continue to exercise such profound influences on the development and structure of the society from its earliest beginnings. As van den Berghe recently observed:

A growing trend in the American literature in recent years has been to treat race as simply a special case of ethnicity. This has paralleled at the political level the attempt by Afro-Americans to redefine their status in ethnic rather than in racial terms, and to develop an elaborate ideology of black culture, black English, and so on. Precisely because a racial, phenotypical definition of group membership is far more stigmatizing than an ethnic definition, and typically gives rise to far more rigid social hierarchies, it is important to keep the analytical distinction clear. . . . To relabel race 'ethnicity' does not make it so. (1978: xv; see also Dobzhansky, 1962a: 269)

However, as indicated above, the Harvard Encyclopedia is not content with this misleading equation, but treats race as one of fourteen criteria of equal relevance for the generation and identification of ethnic groups, without indicating any minimal combination as necessary and sufficient to produce 'ethnicity'. Given this conceptual basis, despite its monumental scope and ambitions, despite the truly enormous wealth of useful and elusive information it assembles, and the impressive quality of the articles and essays that make up the Encyclopedia, its structure glaringly and repeatedly reveals the monumental confusions of thought on which the entire work was based.

The Encyclopedia records information on 101 'ethnic groups', not all of which by any means possess the attributes and organisation that distinguish groups from other kinds of social aggregate. For example,

-'In the 1970s there were 173 American Indian groups, variously called tribes, nations, bands, peoples and ethnic groups. The largest of these - the Navajos of Arizona and New Mexico - numbered more than 160,000, the smallest - such as the Chumash of California and the Modocs of Oklahoma - fewer than 100. (Spicer, 1980: 58)

In the 1970s these 173 Indian communities were scattered on reservations across the length and breadth of the USA, yet despite their distinct ethnic identities and histories, and their lack of any common inclusive or representative organisation, the Encyclopedia would have us treat them all together as a single 'ethnic group', when they are clearly a racial category, not a group.

American Indians are only one of several non-white racial stocks to receive this kind of treatment in the Encyclopedia. Others include Africans; Afro-Americans; East Indians; Indochinese; Pacific Islanders; West Indians (excluding Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans and Haitians); the single category of 'Central and South Americans' (excluding Mexicans); and, perhaps most intriguing of all, some 200 small isolated groups of mixed white, black and red (Amerindian) ancestry with no known common history or organisation, who are scattered throughout the eastern States in inaccessible regions. As we shall see, despite its general rejection of race as a critical factor, the Encyclopedia devotes significantly different attention and space to 'American ethnic groups' of white and non-white racial stocks.

As regards these tri-racial isolates which the Encyclopedia classifies together as a single 'ethnic group', we are told that

'It is difficult to claim that the majority, if any, of the tri-racial isolates are ethnic groups, although they perceive themselves, and are perceived by those around them, as different. They maintain a cohesive identity over several generations, but they retain very little European, Indian, or African language or culture (Thernstrom et al. (eds), 1980: 991)

-a remark which leaves us wondering what, if any, kind of language or culture these most mysterious Americans possess. Evidently, whatever its nature, it is clearly sufficient, despite the obscurity, to constitute them all as a single
'ethnic group', labelled by scholars and henceforward to be known as 'Tri-racial Isolates', despite the general insistence on their differences indicated by such colourful names as the Jackson Whites, Brass Ankles, Red Bones, the Melungeons, the Turks or Moors, Coe Ridge Group, Bushwhackers, Black Dutch, the Ramapo Mountain People, etc. (ibid.).

As this brief mention of some of the 'ethnic groups' discussed in the Encyclopedia might suggest, given their decision to treat race as merely one of fourteen possible bases for ethnicity, and their loose designation of the elements which in unspecified combinations and intensities might constitute ethnic 'groups' and generate ethnicity, we should not expect the editors to work within the ordinary professional limits of consistency and coherence. For example, while these 200 small 'tri-racial isolates' are denied individual recognition as ethnic groups, though 'each group is separate and distinct' (ibid.), they are treated all together as one 'ethnic group', though it is freely admitted that these separate communities have maintained their distinct identities, cultures and patterns of social organisation over several generations.

However, despite this denial of ethnicity and ethnic status to the various tri-racial isolates, we learn in the essay on inter-ethnic marriage that...

Elements that define ethnic groups usually include a common heredity, a common language, a common set of surnames, a common religion, a common geographic locale, and common behavioral norms. . . Groups that want to preserve their distinctiveness actively discourage marriage to outsiders. (Heer, 1980: 513)

If so, then precisely why, given their recorded distinctiveness of race, history, language, values, traditions, food preferences, settlement and occupation patterns, endogamy, distinctive surnames and their internal insistence on difference as well as external perception to that effect, these several isolated tri-racial communities are denied distinct ethnic status by the Encyclopedia remains as mysterious as their origin, survival and other attributes (Thernstrom et al. eds, 1980: 991).

7

Numerous populations treated as 'ethnic groups' in the Encyclopedia scarcely conform either to the generally accepted notion summarised by Shibutani and Kwan above, or to the introductory editorial discussion and catalogue of attributes which in variable and unspecified combinations are regarded as necessary or sufficient to distinguish groups of this kind. For example, the Appalachians, Yankees and Southerners present three regional populations with somewhat distinct histories and varieties of Anglo-American culture; but the Yankees and Appalachians have never been organised as groups, nor do the articles on them in the Encyclopedia indicate how either they or the 'Southerners' fulfil its criteria of ethnicity and so merit designation as 'ethnic groups'. To illustrate:

Appalachians lack the characteristics of distinctive race, nationality or religion that typically set apart ethnic groups in urban environments. Most are Anglo-Americans. . . . For the majority of the region's people, Appalachian has never been as important a symbol of identity as family, community, county, or even state and nation. (Billing and Walls, 1980: 127-8)

As regards Yankees,

Whatever the origins of the word, the group to which it claims specifically to apply had antecedents in the Puritan settlement of New England. . . .

Almost from the start, therefore, the consciousness of group identity held the region's people together.

However, besides receiving immigrants of diverse kinds,

the New England colonies early showed a tendency to spread out by migration. . . . Generation after generation repeated the experience of desertion. . . . Because censuses record nativity rather than ethnicity, there is no way of estimating the number of Yankees remaining after many had left ancestral New England. . . .

By the 1950s, in most parts of the country, under the impact of the Civil Rights movements, the group had blended into the general image of the WASP. (Handlin, 1980: 1028-30)

Southerners illustrate comparable difficulties and problems of ethnic classification:

However the region is defined, it is clear that the term 'Southerners' does not mean simply residents of the South, but refers rather to people who identify themselves with the region, whether they live there or not. . . .

Even today, identification with the South appears to have something to do with ancestral, if not one's personal, sympathy with the Confederate cause. . . . Nevertheless, the majority of Southern Blacks, Appalachian Whites, and a substantial minority of migrants to the South, claim to be Southerners. Whether — or, rather, when and by whom — this claim is accepted as valid is another question. But it is clear that there is more to the matter of Southern identification than having fought the Yankees and lost, several times. . . .

Whatever its basis, the level of identification among Southerners is surprisingly high. (Reed, 1980: 944)

Perhaps the author is satisfied with this account of the Southerners; but precisely who those people are, or how objectively and consistently one may identify them, and whether or not in fact they do constitute a distinct 'ethnic group', remain for this reader more perplexing and obscure than ever.

Taken together, these 'ethnic groups' — Appalachians, Yankees and Southerners — include the overwhelming majority of Anglo-Americans, from whom other American collectivities have hitherto been distinguished in racial and/or ethnic terms. Accordingly, if all WASPs now belong to one or other of these three regional 'ethnic groups', and if race is treated as merely one of several possible conditions of ethnicity, then not only are racial differences of
lesser significance than ethnic differences in the USA, but at last, after some centuries, American scholars led by the WASP-dominated social science establishment at Harvard are able to assure Americans that they are all equally ethno- nics of one sort or another with the final transformation of the Anglo-Saxons or Anglo-Americans, first into WASPs, and now into these three regional 'ethnic groups', a set of changes which ostensibly puts them on the same footing as other US collectivities of any race. Surely these recent transformations in the academic classification of Anglo-Americans — which curiously parallel and accompany the simultaneous conversions of Negro-Americans into American blacks and finally Afro-Americans — reflect important, and perhaps irreversible, developments of American thought about the American people and society. When blacks shed their deeply disprivileged racial status and become Afro-Americans, to balance this, WASPs also should lose their privileged non-ethnic identity and reappear as a plurality of 'ethnic groups'. However, the questions remain, whether or how far the objective situations of these and other recently reclassified 'groups' have changed to match these new labels, and what future patterns the present trends imply.

It is interesting nonetheless to contrast the Encyclopedia's attempt to discriminate between Yankees, Appalachians and Southerners on the one hand, and its rather indiscriminate treatment of ethnic distinctions among Africans, 'Central and South Americans', Pacific Islanders, East Indians, IndoChinese and West Indians on the other. Even when we allow for the vast demographic difference and vastly different roles of Anglo-Saxons and other Europeans in the development of the USA, it is clear that the Encyclopedia devotes disproportionate attention and space to collective differences among white Americans — some of which are quite clearly ethnic, while others are hardly so — than it does to parallel differences among peoples of differing racial stocks.

Predictably, the exception to this principle nicely illustrates it. The Encyclopedia's note on 'Oriental' reads as follows:

The Orient includes both the Near East and the Far East, and Oriental is used to refer to people, objects and institutions from Turkey to Taiwan. In the United States the term Oriental most often means a person of Chinese, Korean, Filipino or Japanese ancestry. It is used as a synonym for Asian, but many Asian Americans consider it an outdated colonialist term and prefer to be called Asian. (Thernstrom et al. (eds), 1980: 762)


Among Americans of broadly Russian provenience the Encyclopedia treats as distinct 'ethnic groups' the Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Belorussians, Cossacks, Estonians, Georgians, 'Germans from Russia', Kalmyks, Latvians, Lithuanians, North Caucasians, Tatars, Turkestans, Ukrainians and, of course, those of Russian descent. Some of these labels denote polyethnic regional populations of miniscule size. For example, Turkestans number 150 families; Georgians are estimated at 1,200 people, Kalmyks at 300 families or 900 people, Azerbaijanis at 200 families; and North Caucasians, while only 500 families strong,

comprise three different linguistic groups. The most numerous are the Ibero-Caucasians, the Abkhazians, Adyghe, Cherkes, Kabardians, Chechen, Ingush, and the Dagestanis. Next in size is the Turkic group: the Karachais, Balkars and Kumyks. The Iranian-speaking group is the smallest, represented only by Ossietians. With the exception of some Eastern Orthodox Ossietians and Abkhazians, all North Caucasians are Sunni Muslims.

Likewise the 200 families of Azerbaijanis who recently settled in the USA derive from Northwestern Iran and the Georgian isthmus of the USSR, speak a Turkic language and are Muslims, but 80 per cent of them are Shiites, the remainder being Sunnis. The Azerbaijanis and North Caucasians thus divide into two exclusive religious communities whose differences in these respects are surely no less significant than those which the Encyclopedia elsewhere seems to treat as the basis for distinguishing ethnic groups.

Of the minute American Turkestani population we are told that

More than 100 families are Uzbeks, 20 are Kazakhs, 10 are Tadzhiks, 6 Uigur and 2 each Kirghiz, Turkomans, and Karakalpak. The community is united by their common regional origin, their Muslim faith, and their languages. Except for the Tadzhiks, whose language is within the Iranian group, the Turkestans belong to the same Turkic linguistic group.

(Bennigsen, 1980c: 991)

It seems most unlikely that these tiny, heterogeneous regional groupings of refugees are sufficiently homogeneous to justify classification as 'ethnic groups'.

However, besides this tendency to treat immigrants from a given region as a single ethnic group despite their differing ethnic identities, languages and faiths, the Encyclopedia also presents some religious congregations as if they were ethnic groups. On these grounds it distinguishes the following aggregates, several of which display a marked ethnic heterogeneity: Bosnian Muslims, Copts, Eastern Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Muslims and Zoroastrians. Together with common regional origins, common faith is frequently treated by the Encyclopedia as a prime basis for asserting ethnic identity, as, for example, among North Caucasians, Georgians, Azerbaijanis, Tatars and Turkestans (with the various inconsistencies noted above). However, such congregations as the Eastern Catholic and Eastern Orthodox include pluralities of ethnic groups such as Albanians, Bulgarians, Belorussians, Carpatho-Rusyns, Greeks, Macedonians, Rumanians, Russians, Serbians, Syrians,
By this point the main kinds of inconsistency and inequality in the *Encyclopedia's* coverage of American 'ethnic groups' should be clear, together with some of the reasons therefor. For example, the 'Central and South Americans' in the USA 'present a variety of national and ethnic groups and now number more than 800,000 people from 18 different countries. Some speak languages other than Spanish' (Orlov and Ueda, 1980: 210). However, the *Encyclopedia* groups them all together as a single 'ethnic group' and devotes of them in eight pages, approximately the same space as it devotes to American Finns, who were estimated in 1970 at less than 250,000 and all hailed from one country (Hoglund, 1980: 362–70), and the 320,000 Portuguese (Rogers, 1980: 813–20). The American Welsh, who numbered 17,000 in 1970, receive as much space as 'West Indians', who numbered more than 315,000 in 1972 and came from more than a dozen countries. The 20,000 Thais receive two paragraphs of fifteen lines, one-fifth the space allocated to the Turkestani community of 150 families. The 200 small communities of tri-racial isolates receive approximately one-quarter the space devoted to the American Tatar groups which total approximately 1,200 families.

There is neither room nor need to multiply further illustrations of the disproportionate allocations of space and emphasis on ethnic units of differing racial stock within the *Harvard Encyclopedia*. Of the 101 American ethnic groups it reports upon, at most thirty-two include all who are not recognisably white or of Caucasian race. Some of these thirty-two entries treat as one populations of differing ethnic stock, such as the Africans, American Indians, Central and South Americans, East Indians, Filipinos, Indochinese, Pacific Islanders, tri-racial isolates and West Indians. By contrast the *Encyclopedia* distinguishes three ethnic groups of German-Americans besides the Amish and Hutterites, and likewise distinguishes between Hispanics, the Spanish (of the Southwest) and Spaniards, whose immigration ceased between 1924 and 1965.

10

Two or three minor entries obliquely indicate the peculiar orientations and concepts that structure the *Encyclopedia*. Thus of foreign stock we are told:

The term Foreign Stock was adopted by the US Bureau of the Census in 1870 to refer to first- and second-generation Americans. Since then the Census has counted as Foreign Stock all people living in the United States who were born abroad, and all those whose parents (one or both) were foreign-born. Third-, fourth-, and fifth-generation Americans have been considered old stock unless they are Afro-Americans, Asians, Hispanics, or American Indians. (Thernstrom et al. (eds), 1980: 379)

In brief, American Negroses, American Indians, and those of Asiatic or Mongol descent, like Hispanics resident in the Southwestern territories that were seized by the expanding USA from Mexico during the last century, are neither foreign stock, old stock, nor 'joint stock'—which they often are—but rather simply 'out-of-stock'. The political nature and racial framework of these US Census classifications are perfectly clear, as also the recent national discriminations between Asians as Koreans, Burmese, Bangladeshis, Chinese, Japanese, etc., all of which clearly reflect reorientations linked with America's new political roles in Asia and in the world at large.

Some intriguing if rather archaic terms such as Aryan, Nordic and Teutonic are included in the *Encyclopedia's* list of entries and briefly defined. Of these, the note on Nordic is most illuminating:

Now used to designate natives of northern Europe, the term Nordic was a key concept in the racist anthropology of the early 20th century. Americans of European origin were thought to belong to one of three entirely distinct physical types, Nordic (which included Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic, or Aryan), Alpine or Mediterranean. Nordics were viewed as superior, but their dominance was believed threatened by the mass immigration of 'inferior' types from eastern and southern Europe. This theory, later entirely discredited, was the basis of the discriminatory immigration quotas enacted in the 1920s and not repealed until 1965.

(Therstrom et al. (eds), 1980: 749)

Along with articles on immigration policy (Bernard, 1980), assimilation and pluralism (Abramson, 1980), American identity and Americanization
(Gleason, 1980), and two essays on the history of and policies against prejudice and discrimination (Frederickson and Knobel, 1980 and Glazer and Ueda, 1980), these brief notes on Nordics and foreign stock indicate the inherently political basis and function of American classifications of American people in terms of race and ethnicity. Moreover, as the note on Nordics indicates, at certain periods racist theories effectively influenced the US Government to exclude European immigrants of 'Alpine' and 'Mediterranean' racial stocks. Prior to that, for over fifty years during the period of heavy immigration, the US Census Bureau had distinguished Anglo-Americans and others of 'old stock' from European immigrants and other foreign stock including all whose parents (one or both) were foreign-born (Thernstrom et al. (eds): 379). As whites, all these collectivities were 'stock', whether foreign or 'old'; but non-whites, Hispanics and those Spanish of the Southwest who were incorporated by its expansion in the USA were clearly not at all 'stock', whether new or old, and were therefore out-of-stock. In this classification, Spaniards who immigrated between 1870 and 1924 were distinguished in successive censuses from Hispanics and Spanish, while Negroes, Amerindians, Asiatics, Mongols, Chicanos, Mestizos and the like were classified together on essentially racial grounds, irrespective of their differing ethnic backgrounds and identities. Thus, if in 1980 the US Bureau of Census decided to ask indirect questions on the racial state of the population, this was probably in response to currents of public opinion, and primarily to pressures from American blacks for reclassification as an ethnic rather than a racial 'group'. In short, now as then the racial and/or ethnic classification of the American people has been generated and governed by political conditions and considerations, and devised for political ends. Under such circumstances it would be silly to expect an impartial, objective or scientifically defensible basis for the identification and grouping together of American collectivities on racial or ethnic lines, now as then. As always, the measure of its social validity indicated the political utility of US ethnic or racial classifications at any point in time.

So it was in 1980; except that then, while the US Census Bureau asked indirect open-ended questions about the ancestry, origin, descent and racial identity of respondents, the Harvard encyclopedists affected to understand neither the meaning and purpose of these questions nor their analytic implications (ibid.: 869), even though differences between West Indian blacks, mulattoes and other racial categories figure prominently in their discussion of that group of immigrants (Ueda, 1980: 1020–7).

In 1870 when the US Census Bureau first used the terms 'old stock' and 'foreign stock' to distinguish incoming European immigrants and their offspring from the old Anglo-American population, their ex-slaves, Amerindians, Orientals, and other non-white or 'out-of-stocks', sociology and its cognate disciplines had not yet appeared on the American academic scene. The Bureau of the Census, therefore, then had a virtually unchallenged freedom to devise racial and/or ethnic categories for its periodic population censuses, subject only to pressures and protests expressed through Congressional or Presidential channels.

By 1980 things had changed. Not only had sociology and other social sciences long since achieved maturity and public recognition in the USA, but the unchallenged WASP hegemony of 1870 was almost over. In any case, following the new immigration restrictions of 1924, by 1980 most Americans descended from 'Alpine' and 'Mediterranean' immigrants of the earlier phase could claim to be old stock on the Bureau's definition. Those who could never do so consisted overwhelmingly of non-whites of such differing races as the Negroes, Amerindians, Asiatics, Mongols, Polynesians, etc., and their hybrids. When American blacks insisted on their reclassification as Afro-Americans, implicitly demanding the same status as Irish-Americans, German-Americans, Swedish-Americans, etc., the Federal Government was obliged either to accept or reject this demand, and to signify its response through the 1980 Census. It did so in the way reported above. However, by then many major American universities had long since set up departments or programs of Black Studies to promote and accommodate increasing enrollments of students from the black population. By 1980 most of these operations had been re-christened as Departments or Programs of Afro-American Studies.

The editors of and contributors to the Harvard Encyclopedia were neither unaware of these developments nor immune to them. With few exceptions, the contributors are members of prominent American universities and colleges, exposed to the intramural political pressures and turmoil that have characterised these areas of campus life over the past decade and will continue to do so for the present one. Perhaps for these reasons among others, the editors of this volume, in consultation with their expert advisers, consultants, associates, university colleagues and perhaps even with their publishers, apparently decided to set aside the US Census Bureau's hesitant but continuing insistence on the relevance of racial differences in the classification of America's population, and to treat race as merely one of some fourteen possible bases or conditions of ethnicity. Clearly their intention was to accord equal attention to differences of either sort, racial or ethnic, and thus to give equivalent status to all bona fide American ethnic groups. It is equally clear that the Encyclopedia consciously offers an alternative classification of the American people to that which the US Census Bureau has hitherto given and which it may still deliver in reporting the 1980 census. Part of the academic establishment is thus here challenging the bureaucratic one, with the intentions and results noted above.

We set out to determine whether or not the Encyclopedia had achieved its implicit aims of objectivity and impartiality in its comprehensive review of American ethnic groups; and if not, to see where and how it had fallen short.
of these ideals, and if possible why. Various answers to these questions have been given above. However, to understand fully the aims, achievements and failures of this great if rather misguided effort, we need to situate it in the context in which it was conceived.

As we have seen, the conception and initial planning of this *Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* presupposed the EHSP budget, and the nationwide processes of racial protests, adjusive political responses and multi-ethnic reactions through which certain aspects of these levels of American social structure underwent successive modifications over the preceding quarter-century. The decision to produce the *Encyclopedia*, along with other decisions then taken about its structure, scope and objectives, all reflect the social and political context of which its very conception and gestation were an almost predictable part. In conception and preparation, the *Encyclopedia* was designed to put the best available social science scholarship at the service of those trends and processes by which Americans of all kinds were simultaneously struggling to understand and restructure their society, by liberalising its hitherto exclusive racial and ethnic classifications.

To this end, it probably seemed that only two innovations were required. First, race differences which had hitherto provided the primary and most inclusive basis for the social classification on which the *de facto* American political structure rested should be denied validity and significance, and be replaced by some apparently value-neutral and even more uniform and comprehensive principle of classification such as ethnicity, under which, as we have seen, race is subsumed by the editors, despite their denial of its objective validity. Secondly, it was essential to reclassify the dominant Anglo-American section, recently relabelled WASPs, who had never before figured as an American ethnic minority, being instead the core of that population of old Americans which, controlling the state, the Bureau of the Census, and other agencies of social classification, had distinguished the rest of the population from themselves on racial, national, or ethnic and religious grounds, and in those terms.

To achieve uniformity and comprehensiveness, the *Encyclopedia*’s new classification of the American people had to include these Anglo-Americans on the same footing as German-, Greek-, Afro-Americans or Amerindians and other identifiable ‘ethnic groups’. To this end it was merely necessary to divide the Anglo-Americans into three regional groupings and to present these as distinct ‘ethnic groups’ of essentially the same kind as the Cubans, Puerto Ricans and Haitians, Croats and Serbs, Pacific Islanders and so forth.

However, as van den Berghe observed, ‘To label race “ethnicity” does not make it so’ (1978: xv). Nor can the *Encyclopedia*’s re-classification of Anglo-Americans as three ‘ethnic groups’ automatically change the nature, boundaries and status of this segment of US society. Yet without such developments, whatever their new labels, Amerindians, Afro-Americans, Chicano and other racial categories, on the one hand, like Anglo-Americans on the other, will continue to occupy much the same positions as before, on much the same grounds, and for the same basic reason that, despite certain Federal initiatives and improvements, not enough has changed in their objective situations and relations with one another. If so, then this intentionally uniform and comprehensive classification of all Americans and foreign residents as ‘ethnic groups’ will remain an example of academic futility and illusion so long as the age-old inequalities and disjunctions persist among racially distinct sectors of the US population.

‘A rose by any other name would smell as sweet’, wrote Shakespeare. Had the social scientists and other scholars who designed and laboured so diligently on this encyclopedia considered the implications of that line, they might have decided to present as objective, comprehensive and value-free a documentation and analysis of these aspects of the national situation as possible. However, to do so, they would first need to set aside their liberal sentiments, their sense of national interests and involvements, racial and ethnic identities, religious affiliations and class position. In that case they might have avoided presenting this uniform and comprehensive scheme of ethnic classification as a substitute for the enduring American split-level system which puts old and foreign stock on different levels from one another and from ‘out-of-stock’ races. The evidence on American society available within the *Encyclopedia* itself contrasts the objective reality of this split-level system with the idealistic unreality of the *Encyclopedia*’s attempt to assert a uniform classification.

For all the nobility of its conception, design and execution, this *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* shows once more how social studies designed and oriented as contributions to contexts and issues of social policy may so lose objectivity under the influence of laudable moral values that they defeat their purposes.

**Note**


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