I. Introduction: Economic Inequality is the Essence

This section explores issues that involve minorities in general. It is not intended to address specific minorities. Any presentation like this one should provide material that applies to all minority/majority relationships. This presentation assumes that all minorities share certain characteristics. It does not matter whether we are talking about the relationship between the Protestants and the Catholics in Northern Ireland or the relationship between the Chinese and the Moslems in Malaysia. Economic inequality is the major common characteristic of all minority groups. Many civil rights leaders have ultimately come to embrace economic injustice as the crucial issue.

Example: Jesse Jackson

Jesse Jackson asked at the Democratic National Convention in August 1988 "What is the fundamental challenge of our day?" He answered his own question by saying "To end economic violence."

Example: Malcolm X

Malcolm X, a spokesman for Afro-American causes during the early 1960s, began his political career with absolute hatred for white people. He had good grounds to do so based on the discrimination he experienced during his early life. Ultimately, however, Malcolm X came to embrace economic issues as more significant than race issues. After a trip to Mecca, where he discovered whites praying to his god, he came back to the United States proclaiming a new philosophy.

Example: Martin Luther King

Many have forgotten the issues important to King's movement after "I Have a Dream." That Speech was given in 1963. King died in 1968 and much occurred between those two dates. General economic inequality of the oppressed was recognized. Focus also shifted to the war in Vietnam.

II. Definitions

A. What is a Race?

Robertson (1989:193) describes a race as a group of people who share similar physical (genetic) characteristics.

1. Racial Categories

Racial categories are human creations. As a biological concept, the term race is almost meaningless. The intense sociological interest in race is due to the fact that people attack meaning and values, either real or imaginary, to physical differences between groups of people.

B. What is an Ethnic Group?
An ethnic group shares similar cultural characteristics and culture is learned. Characteristics that might define an ethnic group would include a common language, religion, national origin, dietary practices, etc. An ethnic group may be distinguished from another group by a high level of social interaction. Ethnic groups perceive themselves as a cultural unit.

C. What is a Minority Group?

A minority is a category of people who lack power, privilege, and prestige in social, political or economic spheres.

- Minorities must always be understood in relation to others in the social structure. A minority group lacks power, prestige, and privilege in relation to others. They are unable to achieve their will. They lack resources to support their own interests effectively.
- Minority groups are people who are singled out for unequal treatment.
- Minorities have a shared sense of identity.
- Minorities may actually be a numerical majority (e.g., women in American society).

D. Racism

Racism refers to attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors that favor one group over another. Racism involves an ideology (a belief structure) that explains racist beliefs. The minority group might be seen as biologically inferior and, therefore, practices involving their domination and exploitation are reasonable. Others may justify racist beliefs by citing scientific evidence. Regardless, a pervasive ideology (belief structure) exists to validate the unequal expectations held by the majority.

III. Origins of Racial and Ethnic Minorities

Typical explanations for the existence of minority groups would be like that presented in Charon (1985:379). They would include the following:

A. Voluntary Migration

Voluntary migration is not really a good explanation by itself. Swedes and Germans do not experience minority status when they migrate to the US.

B. Slave Transfer

Slave transfer can surely account for minority status, but this is merely a specific form of the more general category called colonialism.

C. Colonization

Colonialism (or conquest) is the primary cause of racism (From Huaco's Social Theory notes: Fall, 1987)

1. A conquest occurs when one group conquers another culture.
2. The conquered are immediately placed at the lower end of society.

3. To justify the degraded position of the conquered, the conquerors learn to despise the conquered.

If you want to end racism, you have to decolonize. For example, give minorities a share of the surplus taken from them during slavery. Programs such as busing, having pretty minority girls win beauty contests, etc. will not end racism. Such programs benefit those individuals, but will not address the ultimate problem of racism.

IV. Why do Minorities Continue in Society?

A. Minorities Lack Power Resources.

Resources could take the form of property, money, position, or organization.

B. People in Society Benefit

Members of the elite as well as members of the general population benefit from the existence of minorities. From the stand point of the general public minorities provide scapegoat goats. Deviantizing minorities takes people out of competition for jobs, housing, and education. From the point of view of the elite, minorities represent groups where more profit can be extracted.

C. Culture and Structure are Generally Accepted

Most people accept the structural and cultural patterns in society and see little reason to change them. It takes a long time for social patterns to develop. Those patterns seem functional, especially to those who benefit from their existence. Therefore, those who benefit are more resistant to change.

Remember the idea of "Tyranny of the majority?" Most of the population is willing to let a minority of people suffer high rates of unemployment and poverty.

D. Changing the Status Quo Is Costly

Change means that those with resources will have to pay higher taxes as well as give up existing advantages. In the 1990s Americans are not very interested in paying taxes either.

E. Ideology Perpetuates Minority Position

The dominant group always develops a set of values and beliefs which justify existing inequality. The justification is an attempt to rationalize the inequality. Once established, ideology becomes an integral part of social structure and is, therefore, difficult to change. Racist beliefs are examples of ideology.

V. Patterns of Race and Ethnic Relations

A. Amalgamation
The amalgamation model [melting-pot theory] sees the dominant culture as a conglomeration of all groups in society. Each group actively desires to be a part of the dominant culture and makes an important contribution to the whole. Each group mixes freely with the other groups.

**Example: Mexico**

Blacks, Indians, and those of Spanish dissent mix much more freely than do races in the United States. Benito Juarez became the first Indian president in 1860 while the U.S. only contemplated its first Black President in 1984. In Mexico many people are a mix of Indian and Spanish. In the U.S. we hesitate to even acknowledge the contributions of minority groups.

**B. Assimilation**

Assimilation is the process of being absorbed into the mainstream of the dominate culture. The assimilation model demands that other groups conform to the dominant culture. New comers are to be socialized into the dominant culture that is already present.

**Example: "English Only."**

Example: People who change their name to one that resembles names of members of the dominant culture.

The notion of assimilation, however, is a very complex issue. Usually the dominant culture actively desires a minority who is culturally similar (in language and ideology). There are limits to the "closeness" that the dominant group will accept. It seems as though the dominant culture will accept minorities that assimilate culturally, but there is resistance when minorities want to assimilate structurally and thus achieve full citizenship rights in society.

**C. Pluralism (Salad Bowl Theory)**

In a pluralist society unique groups coexist side by side. The uniqueness of each group is considered a trait worth having in the dominant culture. Note our fascination with unique cultures.

Example: American Indians in Santa Fe selling art work.

The consequence of living in a pluralist society is recognition and tolerance of cultural and ethnic diversity.

**D. Segregation**

Segregation is the spatial and social separation of categories of people by race/ethnicity, class, gender, religion, or other social characteristics (Kendall, 1998:51).

Explanations include economic inequality, prejudice, and personal preference.
Segregation can occur at work, in neighborhoods where people live, or in social activities (Appelbaum and Chambliss, 1997:266)

E. Legal Protection of Minorities

Legal protection of minorities refers to a situation where the majority group will pass laws that protect the status of the minority group.

Example: Canada set the Province of Nunavut for the aboriginal population who live in that area.

F. Population Transfer

Population transfer occurs when one group expels another group from a given territory.

Example: The Trail of Tears of the Cherokee Nation

Example: The Serbian campaign of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo

G. Continued Subjugation

Continued subjugation occurs when the majority group actively engages in the oppression of a minority group.

Example: Saddam Hussein attempted to oppress the Kurds thorough violence and intimidation.

H. Extermination -- Genocide

Genocide is the systematic annihilation of racial, ethnic, or religious groups. It generally requires the cooperation of ordinary citizens. Hitler engaged in genocide against the Jews.

Note that these are not mutually exclusive categories. The United States, for example, have applied all seven categories in the past 220 years.

VI. Prejudice and Discrimination

A. Definitions

1. Prejudice

Prejudice refers to a positive or a negative attitude or belief directed toward certain people based on their membership in a particular group. The root word of prejudice is "pre-judge."

a. The Wallonians

The Wallonians are mythical people used to test prejudice.

b. The Bogardus Scale
The Bogardus Scale is a social distance scale. It does not measure discrimination. Rather, it measures the amount of space that people prefer to keep with other groups.

2. Discrimination

Discrimination is a behavior (an action), particularly with reference to unequal treatment of people because they are of a particular group whether it be racial, ethnic, religious, or gender.

3. The Relationship between Prejudice and Discrimination

Prejudice (an attitude) and discrimination (a behavior) are related concepts but one does not automatically mean that the other is present. Some argue that prejudice occurs as a justification for discrimination. They argue, citing the slave trade, that people cannot brutalize their peers. On the other hand, masters had to brutalize their slaves. In order to rationalize inhuman behavior toward humans, the master would believe an ideology which suggested that the slave was inferior and, therefore, domination was justified. Robert Merton developed a typology which compared prejudice to discrimination. He suggested that there were four possible combinations.

a. The Prejudiced Discriminator

This group would include the KKK who is both prejudiced and who discriminates.

b. The Unprejudiced Nondiscriminator

This person accepts ethnic and racial groups as equals in theory and practice.

c. The Unprejudiced Discriminator

This person believes there is really no difference between races and ethnic groups, but still discriminates as a matter of convenience.

d. The Prejudiced Nondiscriminator

Merton describes this person as a closet bigot. They are prejudiced, but they do not openly discriminate.

B. Sources of Prejudice

The main drift of this section is the search for personality characteristics (a personality profile if you will) that would be predisposed toward prejudiced thought.

1. Stereotypes

A stereotype is a mental image which assumes that whatever is believed about a group is typical for the entire group. Stereotypical thinking is unavoidable in social life and it is not automatically bad. "The essence of prejudicial thinking, however, is that the stereotype is not checked against reality. It is not modified by experiences that counter the rigid image (Robertson, 1989:202).

2. Authoritarian Personalities
Theodor Adorno contends that many prejudiced people have a distinct set of personality traits centered on conformity, intolerance, and insecurity. The authoritarian personality is submissive to authority. They tend to be anti-intellectual and anti-scientific. They are disturbed by ambiguities in sexual or religious matters. They see the world in very rigid and stereotypical terms.

The authoritarian personality develops within the family environment. Parents are themselves "cold, aloof, strict disciplinarians, and are themselves bigots" (see Farley, 1995).

3. Scapegoating

Scapegoating occurs when one blames one's troubles on someone else who is relatively powerless. This may occur when one group feels threatened, but are themselves powerless to act against the actual source of the threat.

4. Social Environment

All of the above are rather psychological. There is also the social context. Our attitudes and behaviors are learned within a social context.

C. Forms of Discrimination

"Discrimination occurs when the dominant group regards itself as entitled to social advantages and uses its power to secure them at the expense of minority groups" (Robertson, 1989:204). There are two forms of discrimination.

1. Personal

Personal discrimination occurs when one member in society treats another group in society differently based on some criteria based on race or ethnicity.

2. Legal

Robertson (1989:204) provides a formal definition of legal discrimination. He contends that legal discrimination is "unequal treatment, on the grounds of group membership, that is upheld by law."

3. Institutional

Although legal discrimination in the U.S. has ended (in terms of racial and ethnic categories of people), institutional discrimination remains a major barrier to social equality. Institutional discrimination refers to unequal treatment that is entrenched in social institutions. One example would be segregated housing. Another idea here would be the concept of blocked opportunities.

VII. Women as Minorities

A. Women are like other minorities in that...

1. Women lack power relative to men. They do not hold high position and have fewer resources.
2. Women lack privilege relative to men
3. Women lack prestige
4. Women are also developing a consciousness of themselves as a separate category of people with common interests. They are beginning to work together to achieve common goals.

B. Women are different from other minorities in that ...

1. Women generally have better education than other minorities, yet in what they are able to achieve with that education, they are similar to other minorities. In fact, when education is held equal, women suffer more than racial and ethnic minorities.

2. Women are actually a numerical majority (in the U.S.) which gives them resources that other minorities do not have. Women can vote collectively. Yet, women face the same problems of organization and unity that other minorities face.

3. Women are physically integrated into society.

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