

KEY ISSUE 1

Where Are Ethnicities Distributed?

- Ethnicities in the United States
- Distribution of Ethnicities in the United States

Ethnicity is identity with a group of people who share the cultural traditions of a particular homeland or hearth. The word *ethnicity* comes from the Greek word *ethnikos*, which means “national.” Ethnicity is important to geographers because its characteristics derive from the distinctive features of particular places on Earth.

Ethnicity is often confused with **race**, which is identity with a group of people who share a biological ancestor. The word *race* comes from a middle-French word for “generation.” The traits that characterize race are those that can be transmitted genetically from parents to children. For example, lactose intolerance affects 95 percent of Asian Americans, 65 percent of African Americans and Native Americans, and 50 percent of Hispanics, compared to only 15 percent of Americans of European ancestry.

Features of race, such as skin color, hair type and color, blood traits, and shape of body, head, and facial features, were once thought to be scientifically classifiable. Contemporary geographers reject the entire biological basis of classifying humans into a handful of races because these features are not rooted in specific places.

However, one feature of race does matter to geographers: the color of skin. The distribution of persons of color matters to geographers because it is the fundamental basis by which people in many societies sort out where they reside, attend school, spend their leisure time, and perform many other activities of daily life.

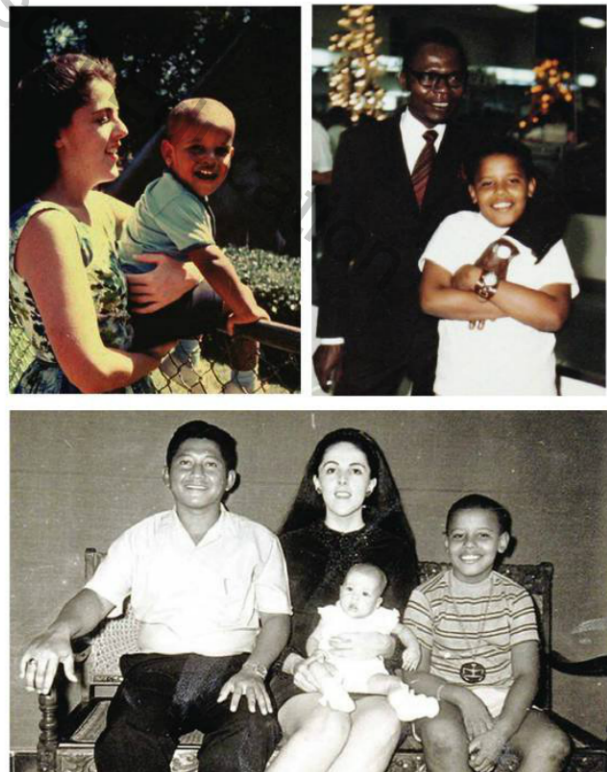
At best, biological features are so highly variable among members of a race that any prejudged classification is meaningless. Perhaps many tens or hundreds of thousands of years ago, early “humans” (however they emerged as a distinct species) lived in such isolation from other early “humans” that they were truly distinct genetically. But the degree of isolation needed to keep biological features distinct genetically vanished when the first human crossed a river or climbed a hill.

At worst, biological classification by race is the basis for **racism**, which is the belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular

race. A **racist** is a person who subscribes to the beliefs of racism.

President Barack Obama illustrates the complexity of designating race and ethnicity in the United States (Figure 7-2):

- President Obama’s father, Barack Obama, Senior, was born in the village of Kanyadhiang, Kenya. He was a member of Kenya’s third-largest ethnic group, known as the Luo.
- President Obama’s mother, Ann Dunham, was born in Kansas. Most of her ancestors migrated to the United States from England in the nineteenth century.
- President Obama’s step-father—his mother’s second husband, Lolo Soetoro—was born in the village of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He was a member of Indonesia’s largest ethnic group, known as the Javanese.
- The son of a white mother and a black father, President Obama chose to identify himself on the census as “Black, African American, or Negro.”



▲ **FIGURE 7-2 ETHNIC DIVERSITY: BARACK OBAMA'S FAMILY** (top left) Barack Obama with his mother, (top right) with his father, and (bottom) with his stepfather, mother, and stepsister.

Ethnicities in the United States

Learning Outcome 7.1.1

Identify and describe the major ethnicities in the United States.

The United States has always been defined, in part, by its ethnic diversity. Today, Americans are more diverse than ever before. Every 10 years, the U.S. Bureau of the Census asks people to classify themselves according to the ethnicity with which they most closely identify. Americans are asked to identify themselves by answering two questions:

- Check the box next to one or more of the following fifteen categories:
 - White
 - Black, African American, or Negro
 - American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Asian Indian
 - Chinese
 - Filipino
 - Other Asian
 - Japanese
 - Korean
 - Vietnamese
 - Native Hawaiian
 - Guamanian or Chamorro
 - Samoan
 - Other Pacific Islander
 - Other race
- Respond yes or no to being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. If the response is yes, individuals are asked to pick one of these categories:
 - Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano [the census uses the abbreviation “Am.”]
 - Puerto Rican
 - Cuban
 - Another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin

Respondents who select American Indian, Other Asian, Other Pacific Islander, Other race, or Another Hispanic are asked to write in the specific names on the census form.

Pause and Reflect 7.1.1

How would you answer the census questions about yourself?

Hispanic and *Hispanic American* are terms that the U.S. government chose in 1973 to describe the group because they are inoffensive labels that can be applied to all people from Spanish-speaking countries. Some Americans of Latin American descent have instead adopted the terms *Latino* (males) and *Latina* (females). A 1995 U.S. Census Bureau survey found that 58 percent of Americans of Latin American descent preferred the term *Hispanic* and 12 percent *Latino/Latina*.

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Most Hispanics identify with a more specific ethnic or national origin. Around two-thirds come from Mexico and are sometimes called Chicanos (males) or Chicanas (females). Originally these terms were considered insulting, but in the 1960s Mexican American youths in Los Angeles began to call themselves Chicanos and Chicanas with pride.

In 2010 about 72 percent of Americans said on the census that they were white, 13 percent black or African American, 5 percent one of the seven Asian categories, 1 percent American Indian or Alaska Native, and 6 percent other. The census permits people to check more than one box, and 3 percent did that in 2010. Approximately 16 percent said they were Hispanic, and 84 percent said they were not.

The U.S. census shows the difficulty in distinguishing between ethnicity and race. Most of the census categories relate to ethnicity because they derive from places, such as African American or Asian Indian. However, the census also offers three race-related categories—black, white, and other race. The three most numerous U.S. ethnicities—Asian American, African American, and Hispanic American—further illustrate the difficulty. These three display distinct cultural traditions that originate at particular hearths but are regarded in different ways:

- *Asian American* as an ethnicity and *Asian* a race refer to the same group of people, which encompasses Americans from many countries in Asia (Figure 7-3).
- *African American* as an ethnicity and *black* as a race encompass different groups, although the 2010 census combines the two. Most black Americans are descended from African immigrants and therefore also belong to an African American ethnicity (Figure 7-4). Some American blacks, however, trace their cultural heritage to regions other than Africa, including Latin America, Asia, and Pacific islands. The term *African American* identifies a group with an extensive cultural tradition, whereas the term *black* in principle denotes nothing more than dark skin. Because many Americans make judgments about the values and behavior of others simply by observing

▼ FIGURE 7-3 ASIAN AMERICANS San Francisco's Chinatown.





▲ FIGURE 7-4 AFRICAN AMERICANS New York's Harlem.

skin color, *black* is substituted for *African American* in daily language.

- *Hispanic* is an ethnicity but not a race, so Hispanics can identify with any race they wish. Hispanics have an especially difficult time doing so on the census. In 2010, 53 percent of Hispanics picked white, 37 percent other race, 6 percent more than one box, and 4 percent one of the 13 other categories (Figure 7-5).

Today, many Americans are of mixed ancestry and may or may not choose to identify with a single race or ethnicity. Other Americans trace their heritage to places in Europe, such as Ireland and Italy, that are not included in the two race and ethnicity census questions.

ETHNIC CLUSTERING: STATE SCALE

The distinctive distribution of African Americans and Hispanics is especially noticeable at the state level. At the state level, African Americans comprise 85 percent of the population in the city of Detroit and only 7 percent in the rest of Michigan. Otherwise stated, Detroit contains less than one-tenth of Michigan's total population but more than one-half of the state's African American population (Figure 7-6). Similarly, Chicago is more than one-third African American, compared to one-twelfth in the rest of Illinois. Chicago has less than one-fourth of Illinois' total population and more than one-half of the state's African Americans.

The distribution of Hispanics is similar to that of African Americans in large northern cities. For example, New York City is more than one-fourth Hispanic, compared to one-sixteenth in the rest of New York State, and New York City contains two-fifths of the state's total population and three-fourths of its Hispanics.

In the states with the largest Hispanic populations—California and Texas—the distribution is mixed. In California, Hispanics comprise nearly half of Los Angeles's population, but the percentage of Hispanics in California's other large cities is less than or about equal to the overall state



▲ FIGURE 7-5 HISPANICS Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood.

average. In Texas, El Paso and San Antonio—the two large cities closest to the Mexican border—are more than one-half Hispanic, but the state's other large cities have percentages below or about equal to the state's average of around one-third.



◀ FIGURE 7-6 DISTRIBUTION OF ETHNICITIES IN MICHIGAN Most of Michigan's African Americans live in Detroit.

Distribution of Ethnicities in the United States

Learning Outcome 7.1.2

Describe the distribution of major U.S. ethnicities among regions and within urban areas.

Within a country, clustering of ethnicities can occur on two scales. Ethnic groups may live in particular regions of the country, and they may live in particular communities within cities and states. Within the United States, ethnicities are clustered at both scales.

ETHNIC CLUSTERING: REGIONAL SCALE

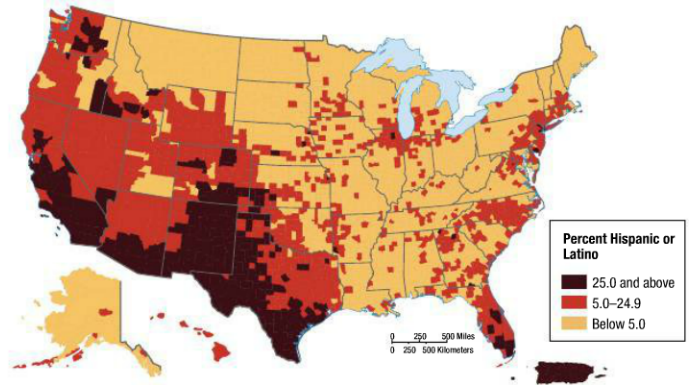
On a regional scale, ethnicities have distinctive distributions within the United States:

- **Hispanics.** Clustered in the Southwest, Hispanics exceed one-third of the population of Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas and one-quarter of California (Figure 7-7). California is home to one-third of all Hispanics, Texas one-fifth, and Florida and New York one-sixth each.
- **African Americans.** Clustered in the Southeast, African Americans comprise at least one-fourth of the population in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, and South Carolina and more than one-third in Mississippi (Figure 7-8). Concentrations are even higher in selected counties. At the other extreme, nine states in upper New England and the West have less than 1 percent African Americans.
- **Asian Americans.** Clustered in the West, Asian Americans comprise more than 40 percent of the population of Hawaii (Figure 7-9). One-half of all Asian Americans live in California, where they comprise 12 percent of the population.

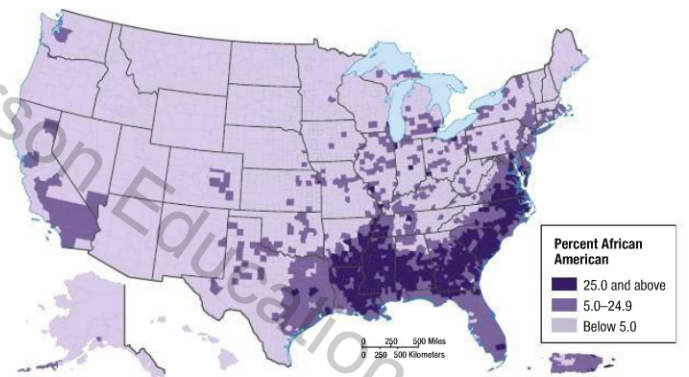
ETHNIC CLUSTERING: URBAN SCALE

African Americans and Hispanics are highly clustered in urban areas. Around 90 percent of these ethnicities live in metropolitan areas, compared to around 75 percent for all Americans. The clustering of ethnicities is especially pronounced on the scale of neighborhoods within cities. In the early twentieth century, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and other Midwest cities attracted ethnic groups primarily from Southern and Eastern Europe to work in the rapidly growing steel, automotive, and related industries. For example, in 1910, when Detroit's auto production was expanding, three-fourths of the city's residents were immigrants and children of immigrants. Southern and Eastern European ethnic groups clustered in newly constructed neighborhoods that were often named for their predominant ethnicities, such as Detroit's Greektown and Poletown.

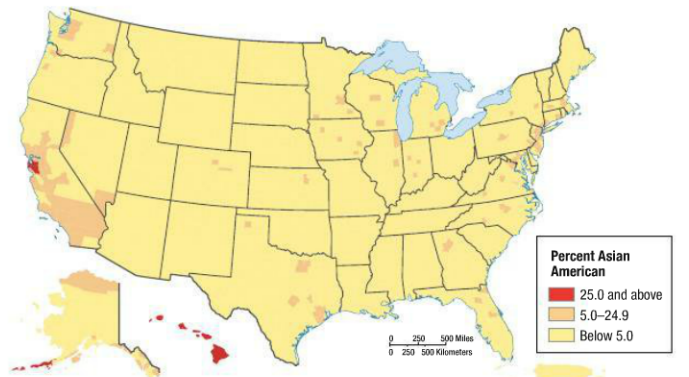
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▲ **FIGURE 7-7 DISTRIBUTION OF HISPANICS IN THE UNITED STATES** The counties with the highest percentages in 2010 are in the Southwest, near the Mexican border, and in northern cities.



▲ **FIGURE 7-8 DISTRIBUTION OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE UNITED STATES** The counties with the highest percentages of African Americans are in the rural South and in northern cities.



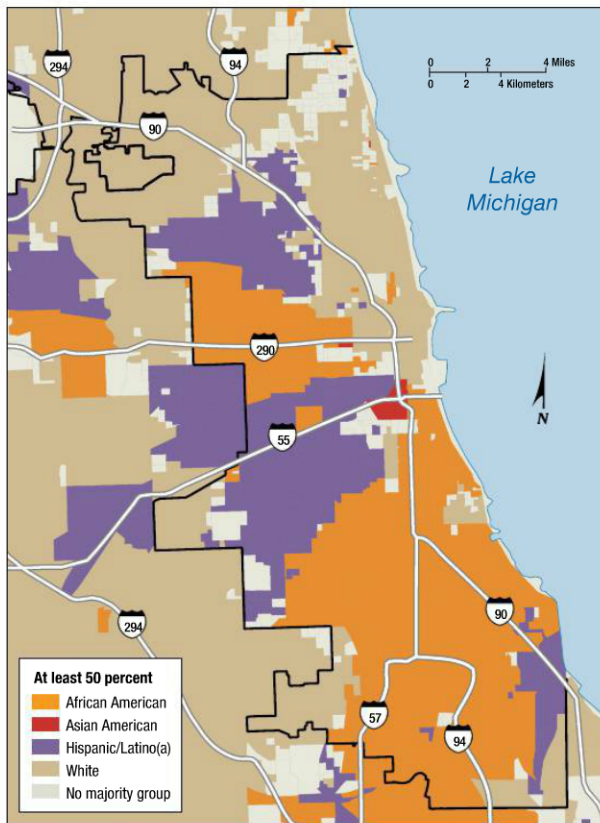
▲ **FIGURE 7-9 DISTRIBUTION OF ASIAN AMERICANS IN THE UNITED STATES** The counties with the highest percentages of Asian Americans are in Hawaii and California.

The children and grandchildren of European immigrants moved out of most of the original inner-city neighborhoods during the twentieth century. For descendants

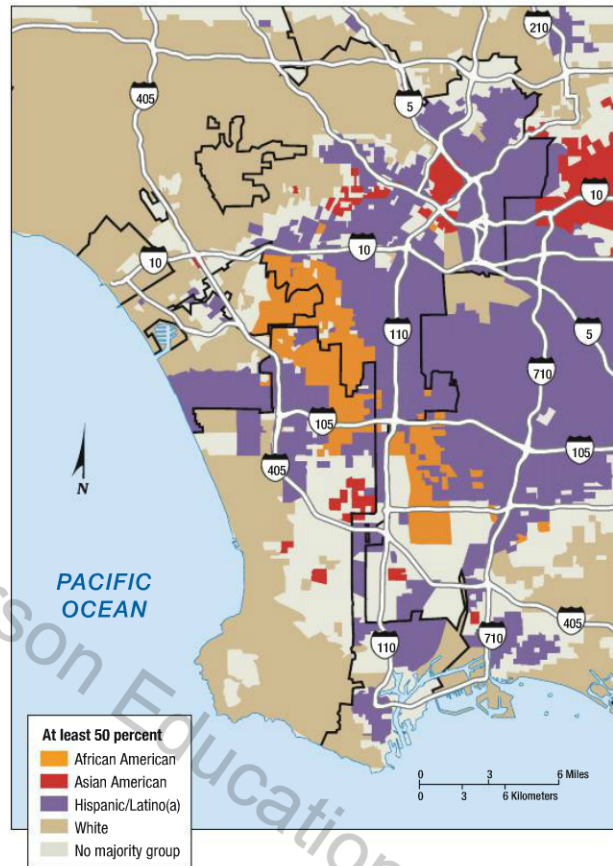
of European immigrants, ethnic identity is more likely to be retained through religion, food, and other cultural traditions than through location of residence. A visible remnant of early twentieth-century European ethnic neighborhoods is the clustering of restaurants in such areas as Little Italy and Greektown.

Ethnic concentrations in U.S. cities increasingly consist of African Americans who migrate from the South or immigrants from Latin America and Asia. In cities such as Detroit, African Americans now comprise the majority and live in neighborhoods originally inhabited by European ethnic groups. Chicago has extensive African American neighborhoods on the south and west sides of the city, but the city also contains a mix of neighborhoods inhabited by European, Latin American, and Asian ethnicities (Figure 7-10).

In Los Angeles, which contains large percentages of African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans, the major ethnic groups are clustered in different areas (Figure 7-11). African Americans are located in south-central Los Angeles and Hispanics in the east. Asian Americans are located to the south and west, contiguous to the African American and Hispanic areas.



▲ FIGURE 7-10 DISTRIBUTION OF ETHNICITIES IN CHICAGO According to the 2010 Census, African Americans were clustered on the south and west sides, Hispanics on the northwest and southwest side, and whites on the north side.



▲ FIGURE 7-11 DISTRIBUTION OF ETHNICITIES IN LOS ANGELES According to the 2010 Census, African Americans were clustered to the south of downtown Los Angeles and Hispanics to the east. Asian American neighborhoods were contiguous to the African American and Hispanic areas.

CHECK-IN: KEY ISSUE 1

Where Are Ethnicities Distributed?

- ✓ The most numerous ethnicities in the United States are Hispanic, African American, and Asian American.
- ✓ The three most numerous U.S. ethnicities have distinctive distributions at regional, state, and urban scales.

Pause and Reflect 7.1.2

Where are the principal clusters of ethnic minorities found in your community?