

Race is a social rather than a biological category. Membership is based on appearance and heredity. While there are a number of identified “races,” in the United States, the primary racial divide is Black and White. Racial categories have been bridged for “White” races and may be bridged in the future for “Asian” races, but Black-White status hierarchy and the systemic prejudice have deep roots.

Ethnicity is an American term comparable to nation in Europe and tribe in Africa. Ethnicity tends to be defined by history and culture, but assimilation and intermarriage can de-ethnitize an individual or group. Status hierarchy is more fluid than race and prejudices diminish over time.

Class is fundamentally an economic concept defined by relationship to how economic decisions are made in a society. The big debates are over the significance of class today and the relationship between class and race and ethnicity.