

Main Idea: The overall idea that Yancey is trying to demonstrate is that there are two types of groups consisting of the majority group and the minority group. Yancey explains that being “white” is a concept that is dynamic and evolving. He states that because of this nature and by looking at the past we can see that individuals of the past who were once considered “white” no longer are considered to be non-white in contemporary society. Because of the dynamic and changing nature it is reasonable to assume that minority groups that are considered non-white today will one day in the future be considered white.

Concepts:

Yancey states that when two groups experience relative equality the groups will either merge or remain culturally distinct. These two conceptualizations of race are called pluralism, when a culture preserves its own ethnicities, and assimilation, when the minority culture takes on the culture and beliefs of the dominant culture.

Yancey argues that these two minority groups are not always given the option of assimilation because of resistance from the majority group for various reasons. Today most European Americans see themselves as existing within the dominant group with few differences within their racial identity. Even though most European Americans come from very different ethnicities, this illustrates that ethnicity holds very little saliency towards a person creating their racial identity in contemporary America. Because Southern and Eastern Europeans enjoy majority status today, it is easy to ignore that they were once greatly discriminated against. Southern and Eastern Europeans were considered to be inferior to their Northern counterparts. Yancey further explains that through “Americanization” the Southern and Eastern Europeans were able to assimilate into the dominant group. This advantaged both the dominant group of that period and the minority Europeans because it reduced the number of the minority Europeans and reduced their threat by sheer numbers and bolstered the numbers of the dominant class without presenting any threats to the ideologies and culture of the dominant class. The assimilation of minority Europeans eventually served as a philosophy that defended their new majority status by stating that since they were able to overcome racial discrimination that other racial minorities should be able to do the same. The voluntary nature of their ethnicity makes it difficult for whites to perceive that race is not voluntary. In order for the European minorities to be fully accepted into the dominant culture they had to accept the ideologies that were valued by the white dominant culture of that period. One of which was the belief in the inferiority of African Americans. The European Americans could use the former minority status to condemn African Americans who could not rise out of their minority status. Yancey proves this by explaining how Irish Americans were part of the labor movement which was more progressive in ideology than the dominant class Europeans. The minority Europeans had to let go of their progressive ideas of equality and adopt more racist views in order to preserve their own acceptance into the dominant class.

The similar phenotypes of the Europeans undoubtedly made it easier for them to be accepted and assimilate into the dominant culture. It cannot be assumed, though, that other groups such as

Latinos cannot be assimilated because of even greater phenotype differences. Latinos racial makeup consists of Native American and white Spanish ancestry and their phenotypes display themselves on a continuum ranging from appearing white to appearing very ethnically Latino. There are considerable amounts of evidence to suggest that Latinos are currently experiencing a similar process of assimilation such as the minority Europeans of the 1900's. Latino's on average out marry into other race at higher percentages. The longer an individual is away from their original ethnic community the more likely they are to out marry. Asian Americans are similar to minority whites as well because of their increased acceptance and assimilation into the dominant contemporary group.

The history of alienation of African Americans helps us to understand how assimilation works and how some groups are denied full assimilation and are forced to pursue pluralism. During slavery in order to establish a difference in class and to establish who is a slave rules were made that made anyone who had even one drop to be labeled as black and thus, a slave. African Americans attempted to assimilate into the dominant culture by taking on the language and adopting Christianity, but had to be denied in order to protect the dominant culture under the special circumstances of slavery.

Quotes

“African Americans are the group most likely to recognize that groups discrimination can affect a single group more than other groups, followed by Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans.”

“The differences in percentages between the two non-black minority racial groups and African Americans is about the same as the two racial groups and European Americans.”

Questions

Does the economic prosperity of Asian Americans allow them to become assimilated into the dominant culture more easily than Hispanic Americans?

Is Yancey's assertion that Blacks cannot fully assimilate into the dominant culture because of their skin color valid in terms of the future.