Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture*

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Identity and culture are two of the basic building blocks of ethnicity. Through the construction of identity and culture, individuals and groups attempt to address the problematics of ethnic boundaries and meaning. Ethnicity is best understood as a dynamic, constantly evolving property of both individual identity and group organization. The construction of ethnic identity and culture is the result of both structure and agency—a dialectic played out by ethnic groups and the larger society. Ethnicity is the product of actions undertaken by ethnic groups as they shape and reshape their self-definition and culture; however, ethnicity is also constructed by external social, economic, and political processes and actors as they shape and reshape ethnic categories and definitions. This paper specifies several ways ethnic identity and culture are created and recreated in modern societies. Particular attention is paid to processes of ethnic identity formation and transformation, and to the purposes served by the production of culture—namely, the creation of collective meaning, the construction of community through mythology and history, and the creation of symbolic bases for ethnic mobilization.

Introduction

Contrary to expectations implicit in the image of the "melting pot" that ethnic distinctions could be eliminated in U.S. society, the resurgence of ethnic nationalism in the United States and around the world has prompted social scientists to rethink models of ethnicity rooted in assumptions about the inevitability of assimilation. Instead, the resiliency of cultural, linguistic, and religious differences among populations has led to a search for a more accurate, less evolutionary means of understanding not only the resurgence of ancient differences among peoples, but also the actual emergence of historically new ethnic groups. The result has been the development of a model of ethnicity that stresses the fluid, situational, volitional, and dynamic character of ethnic identification, organization, and action—a model that emphasizes the socially "constructed" aspects of ethnicity, i.e., the ways in which ethnic boundaries, identities, and cultures, are negotiated, defined, and produced through social interaction inside and outside ethnic communities.

According to this constructionist view, the origin, content, and form of ethnicity reflect the creative choices of individuals and groups as they define themselves and others in ethnic ways. Through the actions and designations of ethnic groups, their antagonists, political authorities, and economic interest groups, ethnic boundaries are erected dividing some populations and unifying others (see Barth 1969; Moerman 1965, 1974). Ethnicity is constructed

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1. The failure of the American melting pot is a qualified one. As Alba and Logan (1991) point out, some groups, particularly whites, have "melted" quite well. Despite the maintenance of a kind of social or symbolic ethnicity among white groups, white ethnicity does not generally involve high levels of ethnic exclusiveness or ethnic group affiliation.
2. An ethnic group can be seen as "new" or "emergent" when ethnic identification, organization, and collective action is constructed around previously nonexistent identities, such as "Latino" or "Asian-American." An ethnic group can be seen as "resurgent" when ethnic identification, organization, or collective action is constructed around formerly quiescent historical identities, such as "Basque" or "Serbian" (see Yancey, Erickson, and Julliani 1976).
3. See Berger and Luckmann (1967) and Spector and Kitsuse (1977) for discussions of the social constructionist model; see Holstein and Miller (1993) for an assessment of the current state of social constructionism.
out of the material of language, religion, culture, appearance, ancestry, or regionality. The location and meaning of particular ethnic boundaries are continuously negotiated, revised, and revitalized, both by ethnic group members themselves as well as by outside observers.

To assert that ethnicity is socially constructed is not to deny the historical basis of ethnic conflict and mobilization. However, a constructionist view of ethnicity poses questions where an historical view begs them. For instance, to argue that the Arab-Israeli conflict is simply historical antagonism, built on centuries of distrust and contention, asserts a certain truth, but it answers no questions about regional or historical variations in the bases or extent of the conflict, or about the processes through which it might be ameliorated. In fact, scholars have asserted that both Israeli and Palestinian ethnic identities are themselves fairly recent constructions, arising out of the geopolitics of World War II and the Cold War, and researchers have documented the various competing meanings of the Arab-Israeli conflict in American political culture.

Similarly, to view black-white antagonism in contemporary American society simply as based in history—albeit a powerful and divisive history—is to overlook the contemporary demographic, political, social, and economic processes that prop up this ethnic boundary, reconstructing it, and producing tension along its borders and within the two bounded ethnic groups. For instance, Lemann's (1991) study of the post-World War II demographic shift of African Americans from rural to urban areas and from the South to the North reveals a reconfiguration of the black-white ethnic boundary in northern and southern cities. This migration magnified urban ethnic segregation, stratified black society, increased interethnic tensions, promoted ethnic movements among both blacks and whites, and produced a black urban underclass. All of these changes reflect the dynamic, constructed character of black ethnicity in U.S. society.

Since ethnicity is not simply an historical legacy of migration or conquest, but is constantly undergoing redefinition and reconstruction, our understanding of such ethnic processes as ethnic conflict, mobilization, resurgence, and change might profit from a reconsideration of some of the core concepts we use to think about ethnicity. This paper examines two of the basic building blocks of ethnicity: identity and culture. Identity and culture are fundamental to the central projects of ethnicity: the construction of boundaries and the production of meaning. In this paper, I attempt to answer several questions about the construction of identity and culture: What are the processes by which ethnic identity is created or destroyed, strengthened or weakened? To what extent is ethnic identity the result of internal processes, and to what extent is ethnicity externally defined and motivated? What are the processes that motivate ethnic boundary construction? What is the relationship between culture and ethnic identity? How is culture formed and transformed? What social purposes are served by the construction of culture? Rather than casting identity and culture as prior, fixed aspects of ethnic organization, here they are analyzed as emergent, problematic features of ethnicity. By specifying several mechanisms by which groups reinvent themselves—who they are and what their ethnicity means—I hope to clarify and organize the growing literature documenting the shifting, volitional, situational nature of ethnicity. Next I examine the construction of ethnic identity, followed by a discussion of the construction of culture.

4. I define ethnic mobilization as the organization of groups along ethnic lines for collective action.
6. The use of the term "ethnic group" rather than "race" or "racial group" to describe African Americans is not intended to discount the unique importance of color or race as a basis for discrimination and disadvantage in U.S. society (and elsewhere). However, the arguments about ethnicity I put forth here are meant to apply to all racial and ethnic groups, whether distinguished by color, language, religion, or national ancestry.
Constructing Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity is most closely associated with the issue of boundaries. Ethnic boundaries determine who is a member and who is not and designate which ethnic categories are available for individual identification at a particular time and place. Debates over the placement of ethnic boundaries and the social worth of ethnic groups are central mechanisms in ethnic construction. Ethnicity is created and recreated as various groups and interests put forth competing visions of the ethnic composition of society and argue over which rewards or sanctions should be attached to which ethnicities.

Recent research has pointed to an interesting ethnic paradox in the United States. Despite many indications of weakening ethnic boundaries in the white American population (due to intermarriage, language loss, religious conversion or declining participation), a number of studies have shown a maintenance or increase in ethnic identification among whites (Alba 1990; Waters 1990; Kivisto 1989; Bakalian 1993; Kelly 1993, 1994). This contradictory dualism is partly due to what Gans terms “symbolic ethnicity,” which is “characterized by a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior” (1979:205). Bakalian (1991) provides the example of Armenian-Americans:

For American-born generations, Armenian identity is a preference and Armenianness is a state of mind. . . . One can say he or she is an Armenian without speaking Armenian, marrying an Armenian, doing business with Armenians, belonging to an Armenian church, joining Armenian voluntary associations, or participating in the events and activities sponsored by such organizations (Bakalian 1991:13).

This simultaneous decrease and increase in ethnicity raises the interesting question: How can people behave in ways which disregard ethnic boundaries while at the same time claim an ethnic identity? The answer is found by examining ethnic construction processes—in particular, the ways in which individuals and groups create and recreate their personal and collective histories, the membership boundaries of their group, and the content and meaning of their ethnicity.

Negotiating Ethnic Boundaries

While ethnicity is commonly viewed as biological in the United States (with its history of an obdurate ethnic boundary based on color), research has shown people’s conception of themselves along ethnic lines, especially their ethnic identity, to be situational and changeable (see especially Waters 1990, Chapter Two). Barth (1969) first convincingly articulated the notion of ethnicity as mutable, arguing that ethnicity is the product of social ascriptions, a kind of labeling process engaged in by oneself and others. According to this perspective, one’s ethnic identity is a composite of the view one has of oneself as well as the views held by others about one’s ethnic identity. As the individual (or group) moves through daily life, ethnicity can change according to variations in the situations and audiences encountered.

Ethnic identity, then, is the result of a dialectical process involving internal and external opinions and processes, as well as the individual’s self-identification and outsiders’ ethnic designations—i.e., what you think your ethnicity is, versus what they think your ethnicity is. Since ethnicity changes situationally, the individual carries a portfolio of ethnic identities that are more or less salient in various situations and vis-a-vis various audiences. As audiences change, the socially-defined array of ethnic choices open to the individual changes. This produces a “layering” (McBeth 1989) of ethnic identities which combines with the ascriptive character of ethnicity to reveal the negotiated, problematic nature of ethnic identity. Ethnic
boundaries, and thus identities, are constructed by both the individual and group as well as by outside agents and organizations.

Examples can be found in patterns of ethnic identification in many U.S. ethnic communities. For instance, Cornell (1988) and McBeth (1989) discuss various levels of identity available to Native Americans: subtribal (clan, lineage, traditional), tribal (ethnographic or linguistic, reservation-based, official), regional (Oklahoma, California, Alaska, Plains), supra-tribal or pan-Indian (Native American, Indian, American Indian). Which of these identities a native individual employs in social interaction depends partly on where and with whom the interaction occurs. Thus, an American Indian might be a "mixed-blood" on the reservation, from "Pine Ridge" when speaking to someone from another reservation, a "Sioux" or "Lakota" when responding to the U.S. census, and "Native American" when interacting with non-Indians.

Pedraza (1992), Padilla (1985, 1986), and Gimenez, Lopez, and Munoz (1992) note a similar layering of Latino or Hispanic ethnic identity, again reflecting both internal and external defining processes. An individual of Cuban ancestry may be a Latino vis-à-vis non-Spanish-speaking ethnic groups, a Cuban-American vis-à-vis other Spanish-speaking groups, a Marielito vis-à-vis other Cubans, and white vis-à-vis African Americans. The chosen ethnic identity is determined by the individual's perception of its meaning to different audiences, its salience in different social contexts, and its utility in different settings. For instance, intra-Cuban distinctions of class and immigration cohort may not be widely understood outside of the Cuban community since a Marielito is a "Cuban" or "Hispanic" to most Anglo-Americans. To a Cuban, however, immigration cohorts represent important political "vintages," distinguishing those whose lives have been shaped by decades of Cuban revolutionary social changes from those whose life experiences have been as exiles in the United States. Others' lack of appreciation for such ethnic differences tends to make certain ethnic identity choices useless and socially meaningless except in very specific situations. It underlines the importance of external validation of individual or group ethnic boundaries.

Espiritu (1992) also observes a layering of Asian-American identity. While the larger "Asian" pan-ethnic identity represents one level of identification, especially vis-à-vis non-Asians, national origin (e.g., Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese) remains an important basis of identification and organization both vis-à-vis other Asians as well as in the larger society. Like Padilla (1985, 1986), Espiritu finds that individuals choose from an array of pan-ethnic and nationality-based identities, depending on the perceived strategic utility and symbolic appropriateness of the identities in different settings and audiences. She notes the larger Asian-American pan-ethnic boundary is often the basis for identification where large group size is perceived as an advantage in acquiring resources or political power. However she also observes that Asian-American pan-ethnicity tends to be transient, often giving way to smaller, culturally distinct nationality-based Asian ethnicities.

Waters (1991) describes similar situational levels of ethnic identification among African Americans. She reports that dark-skinned Caribbean immigrants acknowledge and emphasize color and ancestry similarities with African Americans at some times; at other times Caribbeans culturally distinguish themselves from native-born blacks. Keith and Herring (1991) discuss the skin tone distinctions that exist among African Americans, with the advantages and higher social status that accrue to those who are lighter skinned. This color

8. The examples here are drawn from American groups, but the layering of identity is not unique to the United States. Similar levels of ethnic identification have been observed around the world. See Horowitz (1985), Young (1976), and Enloe (1973) for other examples.

9. The racial self-definition of the Hispanics represents an interesting example of the negotiated and constructed character of ethnicity. In 1980 and 1990, nearly half of respondents who identified themselves as "Hispanic" on an ancestry item, reported their race as "other," i.e., they did not choose any of the more than a dozen "races" offered in the Census or Current Population Survey questionnaires (e.g., black, white, American Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, etc.) The Census Bureau recoded most of them as "white" (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1980, 1990).
consciousness appears to be embraced by blacks as well as whites, and thus demarcates an internal as well as external ethnic boundary.

White Americans also make ethnic distinctions in various settings, vis-à-vis various audiences. They sometimes emphasize one of their several European ancestries (Waters 1990; Alba 1990); they sometimes invoke Native American lineage (Beale 1957; Quinn 1990); they sometimes identify themselves as "white," or simply assert an "American" identity (Lieberson 1985). The calculations involved in white ethnic choices appear different from those of other ethnic groups, since resources targeted for minority populations are generally not available to whites, and may not directly motivate individuals to specify an ethnicity based on European ancestry or "white"ness. In these cases, white ethnicity can take the form of a "reverse discrimination" countermovement or "backlash" against the perceived advantages of nonwhites (Burstein 1991). In other cases, white ethnicity is more symbolic (Gans 1979), representing less a rational choice based on material interests than a personal option exercised for social, emotional, or spiritual reasons (Waters 1990; Fischer 1986).

**External Forces Shaping Ethnic Boundaries**

The notion that ethnicity is simply a personal choice runs the risk of emphasizing agency at the expense of structure. In fact, ethnic identity is both optional and mandatory, as individual choices are circumscribed by the ethnic categories available at a particular time and place. That is, while an individual can choose from among a set of ethnic identities, that set is generally limited to socially and politically defined ethnic categories with varying degrees of stigma or advantage attached to them. In some cases, the array of available ethnicities can be quite restricted and constraining.

For instance, white Americans have considerable latitude in choosing ethnic identities based on ancestry. Since many whites have mixed ancestries, they have the choice to select from among multiple ancestries, or to ignore ancestry in favor of an "American" or "unhyphenated white" ethnic identity (Lieberson 1985). Americans of African ancestry, on the other hand, are confronted with essentially one ethnic option—black. And while blacks may make intra-racial distinctions based on ancestry or skin tone, the power of race as a socially defining status in U.S. society makes these internal differences rather unimportant in interracial settings in comparison to the fundamental black/white color boundary.10

The differences between the ethnic options available to blacks and whites in the United States reveal the limits of individual choice and underline the importance of external ascriptions in restricting available ethnicities. Thus, the extent to which ethnicity can be freely constructed by individuals or groups is quite narrow when compulsory ethnic categories are imposed by others. Such limits on ethnic identification can be official or unofficial. In either case, externally enforced ethnic boundaries can be powerful determinants of both the content and meaning of particular ethnicities. For instance, Feagin's (1991, 1992) research on the day-to-day racism experienced by middle-class black Americans demonstrates the potency of informal social ascription. Despite the economic success of middle-class African Americans, their reports of hostility, suspicion, and humiliation in public and private interactions with non-blacks illustrate the power of informal meanings and stereotypes to shape interethnic relations (see also Whitaker 1993).

If informal ethnic meanings and transactions can shape the everyday experiences of minority groups, formal ethnic labels and policies are even more powerful sources of identity and social experience. Official ethnic categories and meanings are generally political. As the state has become the dominant institution in society, political policies regulating ethnicity

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10. Despite the practice of "hypodescent" (Harris 1964) or the "one drop rule" in the classification of African Americans as "black," Davis (1991) shows that throughout U.S. history, there has been considerable controversy and reconstruction of the meaning and boundaries associated with blackness.
increasingly shape ethnic boundaries and influence patterns of ethnic identification. There are several ways that ethnicity is "politically constructed," i.e., the ways in which ethnic boundaries, identities, cultures, are negotiated, defined, and produced by political policies and institutions (J. Nagel 1986): by immigration policies, by ethnically-linked resource policies, and by political access that is structured along ethnic lines.

**Immigration and the production of ethnic diversity.** Governments routinely reshape their internal ethnic maps by their immigration policies. Immigration is a major engine of new ethnic group production as today's immigrant groups become tomorrow's ethnic groups (Hein 1994). Around the world, immigrant populations congregate in both urban and rural communities to form ethnic enclaves and neighborhoods, to fill labor market niches, sometimes providing needed labor, sometimes competing with native-born workers, to specialize in particular commodity markets, and as "middlemen." Whether by accident or design, whether motivated by economics, politics, or kinship, immigrant groups are inevitably woven into the fabric of ethnic diversity in most of the world's states.

It is also through immigration that both domestic and foreign policies can reshape ethnic boundaries. The growing ethnic diversity and conflict in France and Britain are direct legacies of both their successes and failures at colonial empire-building. In many other European states, such as Sweden and Germany, economic rather than political policies, in particular the importation of guest workers to fill labor shortages, encouraged immigration. The result has been the creation of permanent ethnic minority populations. In the United States, various Cold War policies and conflicts (e.g., in Southeast Asia and Central America) resulted in immigration flows that make Asians and Latin Americans the two fastest growing minority populations in the United States (U.S. Census 1991). Political policies designed to house, employ, or otherwise regulate or assist immigrant populations can influence the composition, location, and class position of these new ethnic subpopulations. Thus the politics of immigration are an important mechanism in the political construction of ethnicity.

**Resource competition and ethnic group formation.** Immigration is not the only area in which politics and ethnicity are interwoven. Official ethnic categories are routinely used by governments worldwide in census-taking (Horowitz 1985), and acknowledgment of the ethnic composition of populations is a regular feature of national constitutions (Maarseveen and van der Tang 1978; Rhoodie 1983). Such designations can serve to reinforce or reconstruct ethnic boundaries by providing incentives for ethnic group formation and mobilization or by designating particular ethnic subpopulations as targets for special treatment. The political recognition of a particular ethnic group can not only reshape the designated group's self-awareness and organization, but can also increase identification and mobilization among ethnic groups not officially recognized, and thus promote new ethnic group formation. This is especially likely when official designations are thought to advantage or disadvantage a group in some way.

For instance, in India, the provision of constitutionally guaranteed parliamentary representation and civil service posts for members of the "Scheduled Castes" or "Untouchables" contributed to the emergence of collective identity and the political mobilization of Untouchables from different language and regional backgrounds; one result was the formation of an Untouchable political party, the Republican Party (Nayar 1966; Rudolph and Rudolph 1967). This affirmative action program produced a backlash and a Hindu revival movement, mainly among upper caste Indians who judged Untouchables to have unfair political and economic

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advantages (Desai 1992). Such backlashes are common around the world. In Malaysia, constitutional provisions granting political advantages to majority Malays prompted numerous protests from non-Malays—mainly Chinese and Indians (Means 1976). In many of the new republics of the former Soviet Union, nationalist mobilizations are built as much on a backlash against Russia and local Russians (who comprise a significant part of the population in most republics) than on a strong historic pattern of national identity. In the United States, white ethnic self-awareness was heightened as desegregation and affirmative action programs got under way in the 1960s and 1970s. The result was a white anti-busing movement, and a "legal countermobilization" and cultural backlash against affirmative action (Rubin 1972; Burstein 1991; Faludi 1991). American Indians have also been the targets of white backlashes, mainly against treaty-protected hunting and fishing rights in the Pacific Northwest and the northern Great Lakes region (Adams and La Course 1977; Wright 1977; Kuhlmann forthcoming).

Official ethnic categories and policies can also strengthen ethnic boundaries by serving as the basis for discrimination and repression, and thus reconstruct the meaning of particular ethnicities. Petonito (1991a, 1991b) outlines the construction of both "loyal American" and "disloyal Japanese" ethnic boundaries during World War II, a process which led to the internment of thousands of Japanese-Americans. Similarly, violence directed toward Iranians and Middle Easterners in the United States increased when American embassy staff were taken hostage during the Iranian revolution in 1980 and attacks against Iraqis and Arab-Americans escalated during the 1991 Gulf War (Applebome 1991). In the former case, official actions of the Carter administration, such as requiring Iranian nationals in the United States to report for photographing and fingerprinting, contributed to an elevation of ethnic awareness and tended to legitimate the harassment of Iranians. In the latter case, official U.S. military hostilities against Iraq "spread" into U.S. domestic politics, prompting attacks on Arab and Iraqi "targets" living in the United States.

Political policies and designations have enormous power to shape patterns of ethnic identification when politically controlled resources are distributed along ethnic lines. Roosens (1989) attempts to trace the rise of ethnicity and ethnic movements in the contemporary United States. He argues that the mobilization of ethnic groups in the United States has paralleled the development of the U.S. welfare state and its racial policies:

There were few advantages in the United States...of the 1930s to define oneself visibly as a member of the Sicilian or Polish immigrant community. When one considers the current North American situation, however, one concludes that ethnic groups emerged so strongly because ethnicity brought people strategic advantages (Roosens 1989:14).

Padilla's (1985, 1986) description of the emergence of a Latino ethnicity among Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago in response to city programs focused on Hispanics, is consistent with Roosens's analysis. Another example is Espiritu's (1992) account of the emergence of Asian-American ethnic identity as a strategy to counter official policies thought to disadvantage smaller Asian nationality groups. Similarly, the white backlashes described above represent one response to exclusion from what are seen as ethnically-designated rights and resources.

The observation that ethnic boundaries shift, shaping and reshaping ethnic groups according to strategic calculations of interest, and that ethnicity and ethnic conflict arise out of resource competition, represent major themes in the study of ethnicity (see Banton 1983). Barth and his associates (1969) link ethnic boundaries to resource niches. Where separate niches are exploited by separate ethnic groups (e.g., herders versus horticulturalists), ethnic

13. This is more the case in the southern republics, such as Tadzhikistan or Uzbekistan, than in formerly independent republics such as in the Baltics—Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania—where national identities are more historically firmly fixed (see Allworth 1989).
tranquility prevails; however, niche competition (e.g., for land or water) results in ethnic boundary instability due to conflict or displacement (see also Despres 1975). Examining labor markets, Bonacich (1972) and Olzak (1989, 1992) have shown how informal job competition among different ethnic groups can heighten ethnic antagonism and conflict, strengthening ethnic boundaries as ethnicity comes to be viewed as crucial to employment and economic success. Hannan argues that the pursuit of economic and political advantage underlies the shift in ethnic boundaries upward from smaller to larger identities in modern states. Thus, in electoral systems, larger ethnic groups mean larger voting blocs; in industrial economies regulated by the political sector, and in welfare states, larger ethnic constituencies translate into greater influence (see also Lauwagie 1979 and B. Nagel 1986).

This research paints a picture of ethnicity as a rational choice (Hechter 1987a). According to this view, the construction of ethnic boundaries (group formation) or the adoption or presentation of a particular ethnic identity (individual ethnic identification), can be seen as part of a strategy to gain personal or collective political or economic advantage. For instance, Katz (1976) reports the creation of racially restrictive craft unions by white settlers in South Africa in order to gain an edge in labor market competition and create class distance from competing black laborers. Such competitive strategies not only provide ethnic advantages, they stimulate ethnic identity and group formation. An example is "whiteness" which Roediger (1991:13-14) argues emerged as an American ethnicity due to the efforts of working class (especially Irish) whites who sought to distance themselves and their labor from blacks and blackness; by distinguishing their "free labor" from "slave labor," they redefined their work from "white slavery" to "free labor."

**Political access and ethnic group formation.** The organization of political access along ethnic lines can also promote ethnic identification and ethnic political mobilization. As Brass notes, "the state...is not simply an arena or an instrument of a particular class or ethnic group...the state is itself the greatest prize and resource, over which groups engage in a continuing struggle" (1985:29). Much ethnic conflict around the world arises out of competition among ethnic contenders to control territories and central governments. The civil war in the former republic of Yugoslavia is a clear example of ethnic political competition (Hodson, Sekulic, and Massey forthcoming). The long-standing grievances of the various warring linguistic and religious groups there did not erupt into combat until the Soviet Union lifted the threat of intervention in the late 1980s and opened the door to the possibility of ethno-political competition. The result was an armed scramble for territory based on a fear of domination or exclusion by larger, more powerful ethnic groups.

In the United States, the construction of ethnic identity in response to ethnic rules for political access can be seen in the national debate over affirmative action, in the composition of judicial (judges, juries) and policy-making bodies (committees, boards), and in the enforcement of laws designed to end discrimination or protect minorities (see Gamson and Modigliani 1987). For example, the redistricting of U.S. congressional districts based on the 1990 census led to ethnic mobilization and litigation as African-American and Latino communities, among others, sought improved representation in the federal government (Feeney

14. Examples are from the town-based Oyo or Ilorin to Yoruba linguistic, regional identity in Nigeria (Laitin 1985); from various regional or linguistic Untouchable groups into an organized national party in India (Nayar 1966); from Chicano or Puerto Rican to Latino or from Cherokee or Apache to Native American in the United States (Padilla 1986; Cornell 1988).

15. See also Hechter (1987b, 1992); Hechter and Friedman (1984); Hechter, Friedman, and Appelbaum (1982); Banton (forthcoming).

16. The distinction between "ethnic" and "national" groups is the subject of much definition and debate in the social sciences. I use the terms synonymously, thus "ethnic" group includes religious, linguistic, cultural, and regional groups with claims to political rights, sovereignty, or autonomy. See Connor (1991), Hobsbawm (1990), Smith (1986), and Gellner (1983, 1987) for discussions of nationalism, ethno-nationalism, and ethnicity.
Similarly, concern based on the importance of ethnic population size for representation and resource allocation led Asian Americans to demand that the Census Bureau designate nine Asian nationality groups as separate “races” in the 1980 and 1990 census (Espiritu 1992; Lee 1993).17

**Ethnic Authenticity and Ethnic Fraud**

Politically-regulated ethnic resource distribution and political access have led to much discussion about just what constitutes legitimate membership in an ethnic group, and about which individuals and groups qualify as disadvantaged minorities. For instance, Hein (1991:1) outlines the debate concerning the extent to which Asian immigrants to the United States should be seen to be ethnic “minorities” with an “historical pattern of discrimination,” and thus eligible for affirmative action remedies. In universities, concerned with admissions practices, financial aid allocation, and non-discriminatory employment and representation, the question of which ethnic groups fulfill affirmative action goals is often answered by committees charged with defining who is and is not an official minority group (see Simmons 1982).

Discussions about group eligibility are often translated into controversies surrounding individual need, individual ethnicity, and ethnic proof. The multi-ethnic ancestry of many Americans combines with ethnically-designated resources to make choosing an ethnicity sometimes a financial decision. In some instances, individuals respond to shifting ethnic incentive structures (Friedman and McAdam 1987, 1992) by asserting minority status or even changing their ethnicity. Ethnic switching (Barth 1969) to gain advantage can be contentious when resources are limited. In many cases, particularly those involving individuals of mixed ancestry, the designation of a resource-endowed ethnicity for public or official purposes can elicit suspicion and challenge. For instance, Snipp (1993) reports concern among Native American educators about “ethnic fraud” in the allocation of jobs and resources designated for American Indian students; this concern was reflected in the inclusion of ethnic fraud among the topics of discussion at a recent national conference on minority education.18

Indeed, questions of who is Indian or Latino or black19 are often raised and often are difficult to resolve one way or the other. Even when ancestry can be proven, questions can arise about the cultural depth of the individual’s ethnicity (Was he or she raised on a reservation or in the city? Does he or she speak Spanish?), or the individual’s social class (Was he or she raised in the inner city or in the suburbs?). Solutions to questions of authenticity are often controversial and difficult to enforce. For instance, the federal government has attempted to set the standards of ethnic proof in the case of American Indian art. The Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990 requires that in order for artwork to be labeled as “Indian produced,” the producer must be “certified as an Indian artisan by a [federally recognized] Indian tribe” (United States Statutes at Large 1990:4663). By this legal definition, artists of Indian

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17. On the 1990 census form there were actually 10 Asian nationality groups designated as separate races. They were: Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Guamanian, Hawaiian, Japanese, Korean, Samoan, Vietnamese, and Other Asian or Pacific Islander. Asian American groups were concerned that if the term “Asian” were used in the census race item (Item number 4: “What is this person’s race”), that many Asian Americans would not mark the choice, and the result would be an undercount of the Asian-American population (Espiritu 1992).

18. In an October, 1993 conference sponsored by the American Council on Education in Houston (American Council on Education 1993), Jim Larimore (Assistant Dean and Director of the American Indian Program at Stanford University) and Rick Waters (Assistant Director of Admissions at University of Colorado, Boulder) presented a session, “American Indians Speak Out Against Ethnic Fraud in College Admissions.” The session was designed to “identify the problem and its impact on the American Indian community... [and to] discuss effective institutional practices for documenting and monitoring tribal affiliations” (Larimore and Waters 1993).

19. An example is when individuals who are not of African-American ancestry, such as dark-skinned Asians or native-born Africans, are counted as “black” or “minority” for such purposes as demonstrating compliance with affirmative action hiring goals.
ancestry cannot produce Indian art unless they are enrolled in or certified by officially recognized tribes. The act has thus led a number of Indian artists to seek official tribal status (some have refused to do this) and has also served to exclude some recognized American Indian artists from galleries, museums, and exhibits (Jaimes 1992; Kansas City Star 1991).20 Similar local restrictions on who can sell Indian art and where it can be sold have caused bitter divisions among American Indians and other minority communities in the Southwest (Evans-Pritchard 1987).21

In sum, the construction of ethnic boundaries through individual identification, ethnic group formation, informal ascriptions, and official ethnic policies illustrates the ways in which particular ethnic identities are created, emphasized, chosen, or discarded in societies. As the result of processes of negotiation and designation, ethnic boundaries wax and wane. Individual ethnic identification is strongly limited and influenced by external forces that shape the options, feasibility, and attractiveness of various ethnicities.

As we have seen above, research speaks fairly clearly and articulately about how ethnic boundaries are erected and torn down, and the incentives or disincentives for pursuing particular ethnic options. However, the literature is less articulate about the meaning of ethnicity to individuals and groups, about the forces that shape and influence the contents of that ethnicity, and about the purposes ethnic meanings serve. This requires a discussion of the construction of culture.

Culture and history are the substance of ethnicity. They are also the basic materials used to construct ethnic meaning. Culture and history are often intertwined in cultural construction activities. Both are part of the “toolkit”—as Swidler (1986) called it—used to create the meaning and interpretative systems seen to be unique to particular ethnic groups (see Tonkin, McDonald, and Chapman 1989). Culture is most closely associated with the issue of meaning. Culture dictates the appropriate and inappropriate content of a particular ethnicity and designates the language, religion, belief system, art, music, dress, traditions, and lifeways that constitute an authentic ethnicity. While the construction of ethnic boundaries is very much a saga of structure and external forces shaping ethnic options, the construction of culture is more a tale of human agency and internal group processes of cultural preservation, renewal, and innovation. The next section explores the ways in which ethnic communities use culture and history to create common meanings, to build solidarity, and to launch social movements.

**Constructing Culture**

In his now classic treatise on ethnicity, Fredrik Barth (1969) challenged anthropology to move away from its preoccupation with the content of culture, toward a more ecological and structural analysis of ethnicity:

20. The entire Indian art authentication process has been criticized as having as its primary purpose, a way of guaranteeing the value of art for mainly non-Indian art owners and purchasers. My thanks to C. Matthew Snipp for bringing this to my attention.

21. The importance and meaning of official recognition as a basis for individual ethnicity, ethnic group formation, and ethnic mobilization is by no means unique to Native Americans or to the United States. Where a particular ethnicity is especially stigmatizing, ethnic conversions (or "passing") often occur. For example, Schermerhorn (1978) reports a common form of ethnic switching in India—religious conversion, when Hindu Untouchables convert to Islam in order to escape untouchability. Also in India, the British colonial preference for Sikh military recruits, led to many Sikh conversions in order to qualify (Nayar 1966). Lelyveld (1985) discusses the phenomenon of individuals officially changing their race under South African apartheid regulations (see also Adam and Moodley 1993). Official recognition or resources tied to particular ethnic groups can prompt not only individual, but also ethnic group formation and mobilization as well. Burstein (1991) documents a white ethnic legal counter-assault against the perceived ethnic advantages of American minority populations. In Canada, the passage of policies favoring the use of the French language in Quebec during the 1970s and 1980s led to ethnic organizational formation and protests among non-French-speaking Canadian ethnic groups, such as those of Italian and Portuguese descent, who feared disadvantage or exclusion under the new language policies (Murray 1977; Lupul 1983).
...ethnic categories provide an organizational vessel that may be given varying amounts and forms of content in different socio-cultural systems. ...The critical focus of investigation from this point of view becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses (Barth 1969:14-15 [emphasis mine]).

Barth's quarrel was not with the analysis of culture, per se, but with its primacy in anthropological thinking. In fact, by modernizing Barth's "vessel" imagery, we have a useful device for examining the construction of ethnic culture: the shopping cart. We can think of ethnic boundary construction as determining the shape of the shopping cart (size, number of wheels, composition, etc.); ethnic culture, then, is composed of the things we put into the cart—art, music, dress, religion, norms, beliefs, symbols, myths, customs. It is important that we discard the notion that culture is simply an historical legacy; culture is not a shopping cart that comes to us already loaded with a set of historical cultural goods. Rather we construct culture by picking and choosing items from the shelves of the past and the present. As Barth reminds us:

...when one traces the history of an ethnic group through time, one is not simultaneously...tracing the history of "a culture": the elements of the present culture of that group have not sprung from the particular set that constituted the group's culture at a previous time" (Barth 1969:38).

In other words, cultures change; they are borrowed, blended, rediscovered, and reinterpreted. My use of the shopping cart metaphor extends Swidler's (1986) cultural toolkit imagery. Swidler argues that we use the cultural tools in the toolkit in our everyday social labors; I argue that we not only use the tools in the toolkit, but that we also determine its contents—keeping some tools already in the kit, discarding others, adding new ones. However, if culture is best understood as more than mere remnants of the past, then how did it get to its present state—how did the cart get filled, and why? What does culture do?

Culture is constructed in much the same way as ethnic boundaries are built, by the actions of individuals and groups and their interactions with the larger society. Ethnic boundaries function to determine identity options, membership composition and size, and form of ethnic organization. Boundaries answer the question: Who are we? Culture provides the content and meaning of ethnicity; it animates and authenticates ethnic boundaries by providing a history, ideology, symbolic universe, and system of meaning. Culture answers the question: What are we? It is through the construction of culture that ethnic groups fill Barth's vessel—by reinventing the past and inventing the present.

Cultural Construction Techniques

Groups construct their cultures in many ways which involve mainly the reconstruction of historical culture, and the construction of new culture. Cultural reconstruction techniques include revivals and restorations of historical cultural practices and institutions; new cultural constructions include revisions of current culture and innovations—the creation of new cultural forms. Cultural construction and reconstruction are ongoing group tasks in which new and renovated cultural symbols, activities, and materials are continually being added to and removed from existing cultural repertoires.22

Cultural revivals and restorations occur when lost or forgotten cultural forms or practices are excavated and reintroduced, or when lapsed or occasional cultural forms or practices are refurbished and reintegrated into contemporary culture. For example, for many, immigrant and indigenous ethnic groups' native languages have fallen into disuse. Efforts to revitalize language and increase usage are often major cultural reconstruction projects. In Spain, both

22. For a detailed discussion of cultural construction, see Nagel (1994).
in Catalonia and the Basque region, declining use of the native tongues (Catalan and Euskera, respectively) due to immigration and/or Castilian Spanish domination, has spurred language education programs and linguistic renewal projects (Johnston 1991; Sullivan 1988). In the United States, the threatened loss of many Native American languages has produced similar language documentation and education programs, as well as the creation of cultural centers, tribal museums, and educational programs to preserve and revive tribal cultural traditions. Study and instruction in cultural history is often a central part of cultural reconstruction.

Cultural revisions and innovations occur when current cultural elements are changed or when new cultural forms or practices are created. As part of U.S. authorities' various historical efforts to destroy Native American cultures by annihilation or assimilation, many Indian communities and groups used cultural revision and innovation to insulate cultural practices when they were outlawed by authorities. Champagne (1989, 1990) reports that the Alaska Tlingits revised traditional potlatch practices, incorporating them into Russian Orthodox or Protestant ceremonies to conceal the forbidden exchanges. Prucha (1984) reports a form of cultural innovation to protect the use of peyote in American Indian religious rites. The creation of the Native American Church imbedded peyote use in a syncretic, new Indian-Christian religious institution, thus protecting practitioners under the First Amendment of the U.S. constitution. Such cultural camouflage in the form of religious syncretism is reported in many societies, particularly those penetrated by missionaries operating under governmental auspices.23

These various cultural construction techniques, and others that will be described below, serve two important collective ends which will be the focus of the remainder of this paper. They aid in the construction of community and they serve as mechanisms of collective mobilization. Cultural constructions assist in the construction of community when they act to define the boundaries of collective identity, establish membership criteria, generate a shared symbolic vocabulary, and define a common purpose. Cultural constructions promote collective mobilization when they serve as a basis for group solidarity, combine into symbolic systems for defining grievances and setting agendas for collective action, and provide a blueprint or repertoire of tactics.

The Cultural Construction of Community

In Imagined Communities, Benedict Anderson argues that there is no more evocative a symbol of modern nationalism than the tomb of the unknown soldier. The illustrative power of this icon lies in the fact that such tombs "are either deliberately empty or no one knows who lies inside them" (Anderson 1991:9)—thus, they are open to interpretation and waiting to be filled. The construction of culture supplies the contents for ethnic and national symbolic repositories. Hobsbawm (1983) refers to this symbolic work as "the invention of tradition"—i.e., the construction or reconstruction of rituals, practices, beliefs, customs, and other cultural apparatus. According to Hobsbawm, invented traditions serve three related purposes: a) to establish or symbolize social cohesion or group membership, b) to establish or legitimize institutions, status, and authority relations, or c) to socialize or inculcate beliefs, values, or behaviors (1983:9). By this analysis the invention of tradition is very much akin to what Cohen (1985) calls "the symbolic construction of community."

The construction of history and culture is a major task facing all ethnic groups, particularly those that are newly forming or resurgent. In constructing culture, the past is a resource used by groups in the collective quest for meaning and community (Cohen 1985:99). Trevor-Roper provides an example of the construction of a national culture:

23. For example, see Whiteman (1985); Salamone (1985); Sanneh (1989); and Taber (1991).
Today, whenever Scotchmen gather to celebrate their national identity, they assert it openly by certain distinctive national apparatus. They wear the kilt, woven in a tartan whose colour and pattern indicates their 'clan'; and if they indulge in music, their instrument is the bagpipe. This apparatus, to which they ascribe great antiquity, is in fact largely modern. Indeed the whole concept of a distinct Highland culture and tradition is a retrospective invention. Before the later years of the seventeenth century, the Highlanders of Scotland did not form a distinct people. They were simply the overflow of Ireland (Trevor-Roper 1983:15).

Other scholars concur with Trevor-Roper’s assertions about the constructed character of Scottish identity and culture (Chapman 1979; Prebble 1963). However, the fictive aspects of Scottish ethnicity in no way lessen the reality of Scottish nationalism in Great Britain, particularly during its heyday during the 1970s and early 1980s. During that time, Scottish and Welsh nationalism combined with the escalating violence in Northern Ireland to represent a major political and economic threat to the integrity of the United Kingdom. Indeed, despite its invented origins, Scottish nationalism contributed to a major devolution of political authority to the British Celtic states (Mercer 1978; Davies 1989; Harvie 1977).

For newly forming ethnic and national groups, the construction of community solidarity and shared meanings out of real or putative common history and ancestry involves both cultural constructions and reconstructions. Smith refers to ethnic and national groups’ “deep nostalgia for the past” that results in efforts to uncover or, if necessary, invent an earlier, ethnic “golden age” (1986:174). For instance, Karner (1991) describes the reconstruction of Finnish cultural history (folklore, music, songs) by Swedish-speaking Finnish intellectuals during the mobilization for Finnish independence. Similarly, Kelly (1993) discusses the efforts of Lithuanian-Americans to learn the Lithuanian language and to reproduce Lithuanian foods, songs, dances, and customs illustrating the process whereby people transform a common ancestry (whether by birth or by marriage) into a common ethnicity. And in their homeland, Lithuanians themselves are embarked on a journey of national reconstruction, as decades of Russian influence are swept away in an effort to uncover real and historical Lithuanianness.

The importance of cultural construction for purposes of community building is not limited to the creation of national unity. Cultural construction is especially important to pan-ethnic groups, as they are often composed of subgroups with histories of conflict and animosity. For instance, Padilla (1985) discusses the challenges facing Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago as they attempt to construct both Latino organizations and an identity underpinned by the assertion of common interests and shared culture—a commonality that is sometimes problematic. Espiritu (1992) also documents the tensions surrounding nationality and cultural differences in the evolution of an Asian-American pan-ethnicity.

One strategy used by polyethnic groups to overcome such differences and build a more unified pan-ethnic community is to blend together cultural material from many component group traditions. About half of the American Indian population lives in urban areas (U.S. Census Bureau 1989). Urban Indians have borrowed from various tribal cultures as well as from non-Indian urban culture to construct supratribal or “Indian” cultural forms such as the powwow, the Indian Center, Indian Christian churches, Indian bowling leagues and softball teams, and Indian popular music groups. In the urban setting, tribal differences and tensions can be submerged in these pan-Indian organizations and activities.

Building a cultural basis for new ethnic and national communities is not the only goal prompting cultural reconstruction. Cultural construction is also a method for revitalizing

24. Given the location of Britain’s North Sea oil holdings off Scotland’s coast.
25. An interesting aspect of Lithuanian-American ethnic renewal is what Kelly calls the “ethnic pilgrimage,” where Lithuanian-Americans visit Lithuania to learn firsthand about their ethnic roots and to participate in building the new independent state and nation (Kelly 1994).
26. See Hertzberg (1971); Weibel-Orlando (1991); Steele (1975); Whitehorse (1988); Clark (1988).
Constructing Ethnicity

The reconstruction and study of cultural history is also a crucial part of the community construction process and again shows the importance of academic actors and institutions in cultural renewal. Examples can be found in the recent emergence of various ethnic studies programs (e.g., Latino, American Indian, African-American, Asian Studies) established in colleges and universities around the United States during the past three decades (Deloria 1986). Such programs are reflective of a renewed and legitimated interest in ethnicity and cultural diversity. These programs, as well as classes in oral history and ethnic culture, serve as important resources in cultural revivals and restorations.

Cultural Construction and Ethnic Mobilization

Cultural construction can also be placed in the service of ethnic mobilization. Cultural renewal and transformation are important aspects of ethnic movements. Cultural claims, icons, and imagery are used by activists in the mobilization process; cultural symbols and meanings are also produced and transformed as ethnic movements emerge and grow. While there is a large literature on the structural determinants of ethnic mobilization, recent social movement research reflects increased interest in the nature of social movement culture and the interplay between culture and mobilization (see Morris and Mueller 1992). An examination of this literature offers insight into the relationship between culture and ethnic mobilization.

For instance, Snow and his associates argue that social movement organizers and activists use existing culture (rhetorical devices and various techniques of "frame alignment") to make movement goals and tactics seem reasonable, just, and feasible to participants, constituencies, and political officials (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988, 1992). For example, nuclear disarmament movement leaders responded to questions about the hopelessness of opposing a military-industrial complex bent on the production of nuclear weapons by drawing a parallel between the elimination of nuclear weapons and the abolition of slavery—namely, the success of abolitionism was achieved despite an equally daunting opposition (Snow et al. 1986). Thus, by drawing on available cultural themes, the discourse surrounding movement objectives and activism is more likely to recruit members, gain political currency, and achieve movement goals.

Gamson and his associates document the ideational shifts and strategies used by movements, policymakers, and opposition groups to shape debates, define issues, and to paint the most compelling portrait of each side's claims and objectives (Gamson 1988, 1992; Gamson and Modigliani 1987; Gamson and Lasch 1983). For instance, Gamson and Modigliani (1987) argue that the changing culture of affirmative action results from a struggle over the definition of equality, justice, and fairness, as various political actors frame the issues in competing ways, e.g., affirmative action as "remedial action" versus "reverse discrimination."

27. Tanzanian-born Maulana Karenga is professor and chair of Black Studies at the University of California at Long Beach.

28. The use of historical or anthropological research by ethnic groups engaged in reconstruction projects has its pitfalls. These center on the accuracy and objectivity of such academic work. Recent research "deconstructing" historical and contemporary ethnographies (Wagner 1975; Clifford 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Geertz 1988) has been aimed at revealing the voices and viewpoints of researchers imbedded in "objective" reports of their subjects' social and cultural organization.

29. See Enloe (1973); Hechter (1975); Young (1976); Nagel and Olzak (1982); Brass (1985); Horowitz (1985); Olzak (1992); A. Smith (1992).
rhetorics, counter-rhetorics, and rhetorical shifts characterized in this research are common
to all social movements, including ethnic movements. They reflect the use of cultural mate-
rial and representations in a symbolic struggle over rights, resources, and the hearts and
minds of constituents, neutral observers, and opponents alike.

The work of Snow and Gamson illustrates the use of existing culture by movement or-
ganizers and activists, and shows several forms of cultural reconstruction, where cultural
symbols and themes are borrowed and sometimes repackaged to serve movement ends.
There is another way in which cultural construction occurs in movements—where protest is
a crucible of culture. For instance, Fantasia (1988) describes a “culture of solidarity” that
arises out of activism. Cultures of solidarity refer to the emergence of a collective conscious-
ness and shared meanings that result from engaging in collective action. Ethnic movements
often challenge negative hegemonic ethnic images and institutions by redefining the mean-
ing of ethnicity in appealing ways or by using cultural symbols to effectively dramatize griev-
ances and demands.

Examples of the construction and reconstruction of history and culture in order to rede-
fine the meaning of ethnicity can be found in the activities of many of the ethnic groups that
mobilized during the civil rights era of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. During
these years, a renewed interest in African culture and history and the development of a cul-
ture of black pride—“Black is Beautiful”—accompanied African-American protest actions
during the civil rights movement. The creation of new symbolic forms and the abandonment
of old, discredited symbols and rhetoric reflected the efforts of African Americans to create
internal solidarity and to challenge the prevailing negative definitions of black American
ethnicity. For instance, the evolution of racial nomenclature for African Americans can be
excavated by a retrospective examination of the names of organizations associated with or
representing the interests of black Americans: the National Association for the Advancement
of Colored People, the United Negro College Fund, the Black Panther Party, and the National
Council of African-American Men, Inc. The fluidity of names for other American ethnic
groups reflects similar shifts in constructed ethnic definitions and revised meanings associated
with evolving collective identities: from Indians to American Indians to Native Americans;
from Spanish-Surnamed to Hispanics to Latinos. Such changes in ethnic nomenclature
were an important part of the discourse of civil rights protest, as were changes in dress, new
symbolic themes in art, literature, and music, and counterhegemonic challenges to prevailing
standards of ethnic demeanor and interracial relations.

The expropriation and subversion of negative hegemonic ethnic definitions and institu-
tions is an important way that culture is used in ethnic mobilization around the world. Brit-
ish conceptions of “tribe” and “tribal” shaped many of their colonial policies, such as
geographic administrative boundaries, education policies, and hiring practices. These tribal
constructions were reshaped by Africans into the anti-colonial ethnic politics of a number of
African states (Melson and Wolpe 1971; Young 1976). For instance, Wallerstein (1960) and
Iliffe (1979) document the mobilization of various “tribal” unions and associations into na-
tionalist movements for independence in many African countries. In India, similar subver-
sion of colonial cultural constructions designed to facilitate British domination occurred.
Cohn (1983) argues that the pomp and ceremony of the British Imperial Assemblage and the
Imperial Durbars in nineteenth century India were expropriated by Indian elites, who

Americans. My thanks to Norm Yetman for raising the issue of evolving nomenclature.
31. See Cleaver (1968); Carmichael and Hamilton (1967); Willhelm (1970); Lister (1968).
This "turning on its head" of cultural symbols and institutions can be seen in the ways ethnic activists use culture in their protest strategies. The tactics used in ethnic movements rely on the presentation, and sometimes the reconstruction, of cultural symbols to demonstrate ethnic unity, to dramatize injustice, or to animate grievances or movement objectives. For instance, Zulaika (1988), Sullivan (1988), and Clark (1984) report the use of various cultural symbols and conventions by Basque nationalist groups, noting, for instance, the central symbolic importance of demands for Basque language rights, although fewer than half of the Basque population speaks the Basque language. The Red Power movement for American Indian rights during the 1960s and 1970s drew its membership from mainly urban Indians from a variety of tribal backgrounds. The movement created a unified pan-Indian cultural front by borrowing cultural forms from many native communities (e.g., the teepee, eagle feathers, the war dance, the drum). Red Power repertoires of contention—as Tilly (1986) called them—also employed a rhetorical and dramaturgical cultural style that reflected movement leaders' sensitivity to the place of the American Indian in American popular culture and history. The American Indian Movement (AIM) was especially skilled in the use of such symbolic dramaturgy, as illustrated in the following description of an AIM-sponsored counter-ceremony in 1976:

*Custer Battlefield, Mont.* Today, on the wind-buffeted hill...where George Armstrong Custer made his last stand, about 150 Indians from various tribes danced joyously around the monument to the Seventh Cavalry dead. Meanwhile, at the official National Parks Service ceremony about 100 yards away, an Army band played...Just as the ceremony got underway, a caravan of Sioux, Cheyenne, and other Indians led by Russell Means, the American Indian Movement leader, strode to the speakers' platform to the pounding of a drum. Oscar Bear Runner, like Mr. Means, a veteran of the 1973 takeover of Wounded Knee, carried a sacred peace pipe (Lichtenstein 1976:11).

The above example shows the interplay between pre-existing cultural forms and the new uses to which they are put in ethnic movements. What we see is the National Parks Service's efforts to commemorate the "official story" (Scott 1990), and the American Indian Movement's challenge to this hegemonic interpretation of history. Both groups employed the symbolic paraphernalia available to them, drawn from similar strands of American history and culture, but used in opposing ways. By recasting the material of the past in innovative ways, in the service of new political agendas, ethnic movements reforge their own culture and history and reinvent themselves.

**Conclusion**

At the beginning of this paper I posed a number of questions about ethnic boundaries and meaning, inquiring into the forces shaping ethnic identity and ethnic group formation, and the uses of history and culture by ethnic groups and movements. My answers have emphasized the interplay between ethnic group actions and the larger social structures with which they interact. Just as ethnic identity results both from the choices of individuals and from the ascriptions of others, ethnic boundaries and meaning are also constructed from within and from without, propped up by internal and external pressures. For ethnic groups, questions of history, membership, and culture are the problematics solved by the construction process. Whether ethnic divisions are built upon visible biological differences among

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32. A less liberating but common cultural construction technique used in ethnic mobilization is the demonization or vilification of opposition ethnic groups in civil wars, pogroms, and genocides (e.g., against Armenians in World War I Turkey, against Jews in World War II Germany, against Muslims in post-Soviet Yugoslavia).
populations or rest upon invisible cultural and ideational distinctions, the boundaries around
and the meanings attached to ethnic groups reflect pure social constructions.

Yet questions remain. What is driving groups to construct and reconstruct ethnic iden-
tity and culture? What is it about ethnicity that seems to appeal to individuals on so funda-
mental a level? From what social and psychological domains does the impulse toward ethnic
identification originate? Why is ethnicity such a durable basis for group organization around
the world? If ethnicity is in part a political construction, why do the goals of some ethnic
activists favor equal rights, while others demand autonomy or independence? Other ques-
tions remain about the social meaning of ethnicity. How are particular meanings (values,
sterotypes, beliefs) attached to different ethnic groups, and by whom? What are the impli-
cations of these different meanings for conceptions of social justice, intergroup relations,
political policy? Concomitantly, how does ethnic stratification (material and ideational)
arise? Can constructionist explanations of ethnicity account for persistent prejudice and dis-
crimination, particularly where race or color are involved? To the extent that the construc-
tionist model emphasizes change, how should we understand intractable racial and ethnic
antagonism and stratification?

These questions comprise not only an agenda for future research, they are also warnings.
While ethnic boundaries and the meanings attributed to them can be shown to be socially
constructed, they must not, therefore, be underestimated as social forces. In fact, the con-
structionist model constitutes an argument for the durability, indeed the inevitability, of
ethnicity in modern societies. As such, it represents a challenge to simple historical, biologi-
cal, or cultural determinist models of human diversity.

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