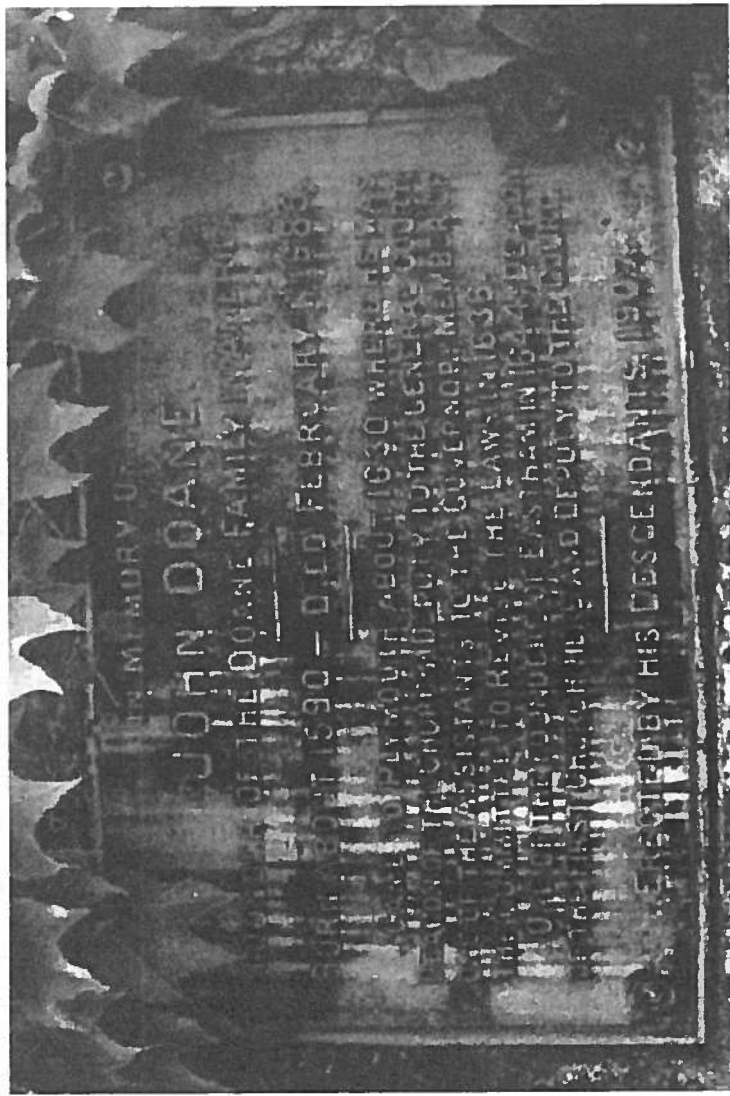


## CHAPTER

# 9

## White-Blindness: The Dominant Group Experience

BY ASHLEY ("WOODY") DOANE



*Commemorative plaque in Eastham, Massachusetts, honoring John Doane, the first member of the Doane family in the United States. The inscription on the plaque is "In memory of John Doane, founder of the Doane family in America. Born about 1590—Died February 1685. Came to Plymouth about 1630 where he was Deacon of the church, Deputy to the General Court, one of the assistants to the Governor, member of the Committee to Revise the Laws in 1636. One of the founders of Eastham in 1644, Deacon of the first church here and Deputy to the Court. Erected by his descendants, 1907."*

In contrast to the other chapters in this volume, I will be examining a different question: What does it mean to be a member of the dominant group? My claimed ancestry is English American or "Yankee" (in the sense of a multigenerational inhabitant of New England). For many in my ethnic group, the strongest identity is simply "American." As Stanley Lieberman (1985) discovered in an analysis of U.S. Census data, white Protestant Americans whose families have lived in the United States for many generations are most likely to self-identify as just "American." Indeed, as I will discuss later, the ability to claim "American" identity is an important marker of dominant group status. More recently, since the 1950s, the label "WASP" (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) has often been applied to my group, reflecting the assimilation of other European ethnic groups into the Anglo-American core and the broadening of group boundaries (Glazer & Moynihan, 1963:15). Whatever the label, the important point is, as John Myers (2003:44) has put it, that "the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant group is the quintessential dominant group in our society."

Like many of the dominant-group students in my race and ethnic relations classes (for whom I assign an "ethnicity as personal experience" or "family background" project), I would have had difficulty writing this essay as a college student. Growing up, I never thought of myself as ethnic. I was "just like everyone else," an "American," as opposed to those who were "different" and could claim a specific ethnic affiliation. Most sociologists would not have seen me as ethnic either. The then-popular term "white ethnic," which was applied to such groups as Irish Americans, Italian Americans, or Jewish Americans, implied that there were white "nonethnics"—people who were just part of the "mainstream" or "larger society." Consequently, very little attention has been paid to the nature of dominant-group identity (Feagin & Feagin, 1996:71–72; Doane, 1997a), as opposed to dominant-group treatment of racial and ethnic minorities. As I have argued elsewhere (Doane, 1997a), this "hidden" nature of dominant-group identity has assisted the dominant-group in maintaining its position of power and influence. For me, developing an understanding of dominant group identity has helped me to understand the history of my family.

## Marking the Center: The Doane Family

On my father's side of the family, which is where I locate my ethnic identity, I am a twelfth-generation English American. Other branches of the family tree contain later immigrants from England and, on my mother's side, nineteenth-century immigrants from Scotland. All evidence, however, suggests that they assimilated rapidly into the Anglo-American group as what Charlotte Erickson (1972) has called "invisible immigrants." In any event, it is through my father's family that I take both my surname and my sense of heritage.

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My first-generation ancestor, John Doane, migrated from England to the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts around 1630 (Doane, 1960 [1902]; unless otherwise noted, all historical family information in this section is taken from this work). Interestingly, the family history refers to him as having "settled" in Plymouth, as opposed to more accurate terms such as *colonized* or even *invaded*. I do think that it is important to recognize that my ancestor, along with others of his time, were immigrants, even though their immigrant experience was different from that of other groups. While little is known as to where John Doane came from or why he migrated, I must assume that it was for economic opportunity, religious freedom, or both. Because he almost immediately came to occupy a position of relative prominence in Plymouth Colony (a 1633 document lists him as a member of the Governor's Council, along with Myles Standish and William Bradford), he clearly did not experience life at the bottom of the stratification system (e.g., as a hired laborer or as an indentured servant). As a very early immigrant, he also would not have had the experience of having to adapt to a dominant group within the emerging colonial society.

In 1644 or 1645, dissatisfied with the lack of prosperity and economic opportunity in Plymouth, John Doane and many others relocated to Nauset (later Eastham) on Cape Cod. The land in Nauset is listed as being "purchased" from Native Americans for "moose skins, boats, wampum, and little knives." As we now know, Native American and English notions of land ownership and use were dramatically different. Native Americans viewed land as a resource to be used, while the English treated land as a "commodity" with perpetual ownership rights (Richter, 2001:54). What is clear is that my ancestor (and his descendants) certainly benefited from the transaction. From all accounts, John Doane appeared to have at least a comfortable economic status after the move to Eastham, as his original land purchase was 200 acres. He also had considerable local influence as a deacon, selectman, and deputy to the Colony Court until his death in 1685 at the age of 95.

For the next five generations, my ancestors remained in Eastham, living as relatively prosperous farmers and frequently serving as town officials. Living on Cape Cod, my family was not on the front lines of armed conflict with Native Americans in New England, conflicts such as King Philip's War in 1675 and 1676. While it is difficult to say for certain, I suspect that they would have shared the prevailing attitudes of New Englanders, which was to view Native Americans as inherently heathen, lazy, barbaric, and a threat to civilized Christian society. Historian Ronald Takaki (1993:38) has termed this the "racialization of savagery," the perspective that Native Americans were incapable of civilization. These attitudes justified the conquest and taking of Native American land and enabled Europeans to view the devastating epidemics (probably smallpox) that decimated Native American communities as "God's divine intervention." Even though the "frontier" soon moved far away from my ancestors, the conflicts between English colonists and Native Americans set the stage for two centuries of conflict across the American continent. While my family was increasingly removed from later conflict with and the removal of Native Americans, they were members of a racial-ethnic group that clearly benefited from the territorial expansion of the United States.

Once Native American communities had been eliminated, evidence suggests that my ancestors would have encountered little ethnic or racial diversity during their first

two centuries in the United States. As Vincent Parillo (1994:528) has observed, the initial population of colonial America in 1689 was about 80 percent English. Even though the population of the colonies became more diverse (by the 1790 census English Americans were about 49 percent of the population) with the involuntary immigration of enslaved Africans and the immigration of non-English Europeans (e.g., Germans, Scots-Irish), New England remained the most English area and Massachusetts the most English state (Parillo, 1994). Out on Cape Cod, my ancestors probably would have had little exposure to the increasing diversity of the colonies; there would have been little to dissuade them from the belief that English culture and customs were universal.

What emerged from colonial America was what can be called the Anglo-Protestant "core" of American society (Feagin & Feagin, 1996). As the United States became an independent nation, its culture and institutions had a distinct English influence. More significantly, its ideologies and policies concerning race and ethnic relations have reflected the perspectives and interests of Anglo-Americans (Marger, 2003). Throughout U.S. history, other ethnic and racial groups have been expected to adhere to these practices, a phenomenon Milton Gordon (1964) has referred to as "Anglo-conformity." As "old stock" Americans, my ancestors had the advantage of navigating in familiar social and cultural waters.

In the sixth generation, my ancestor Samuel Dill Doane died and was buried at sea during a voyage to the West Indies in 1809. While I cannot say for certain whether he participated in the slave trade, we do know that the growth of the Atlantic trade and the maritime industry in New England was due in large part to the economic activity generated by the slave trade. Vessels from New England participated in the "Triangle Trade," which involved bringing slaves from Africa to the Americas, raw materials to Europe, and finished goods to the American colonies. Ships from New England carried farm products and manufactured goods (bricks, candles, building materials) to the West Indies and returned with molasses, sugar, spices, and even a few enslaved Africans. This trade stimulated the New England economy and enabled the growth of farming, manufacturing, shipbuilding, and distilling—to the extent that New England in 1770 had perhaps the highest standard of living in the world (Bailyn, cited in Lang, 2002:9). Thus, whether my ancestors participated in the slave trade is immaterial. All of New England (and the United States) profited either directly or indirectly.

While there is the temptation for white Americans with roots in New England or the North to seek to distance themselves from slavery, the historical reality is more complicated. Slavery did exist in the North; it was legalized in Massachusetts in 1641 (Feagin & Feagin, 1996:239) and persisted in New England until after the Revolutionary War. According to the *Hartford Courant* (2002:19), the first U.S. census in 1790 recorded 3,763 slaves in New England, the majority of whom were in Connecticut. I cannot say definitively whether any of my ancestors owned slaves, although higher status (e.g., a deacon or a more prosperous farmer) increased the likelihood of an individual being a slave owner. A recent listing of Connecticut slave owners in 1790 (*Hartford Courant*, 2002:18) included a Seth Doan (*sic*) of Chatham as owning two slaves; he appears to be a descendant of John Doane and, hence, a relative (another part of my family tree, involving my maternal grandfather, disappears in Texas in the early twentieth century and I have no knowledge of what their involvement with slavery may have

been). Ultimately, whether any of my direct ancestors owned slaves is almost beside the point. They participated in a society that condoned slavery and benefited from the economic contributions of slaves.

After the death of Samuel Dill Doane at sea, his widow remarried and moved to the small town of Dana in central Massachusetts. My great-great-grandfather, Leonard Doane, was a sailor and later a sea captain. Upon leaving the sea, he engaged in an unsuccessful business (with Charles Goodyear and others) to place rubber upon cloth. After losing all of his money in this venture, he returned to Dana and made his living by manufacturing palm leaf hats. According to the family history (Doane, 1960 [1902]:279), Leonard Doane was an abolitionist, opposed to slavery, and an active member (a state representative) of the Free-Soil party, which was against the expansion of slavery into the western territories acquired from Mexico (I think that it is also important to recognize antiracist traditions among white Americans). He was also described as an active supporter, along with his son, my great-great-grandfather George Wood Doane, of the Temperance movement and in favor of prohibition of alcohol. While I do not know what motivated them to support this movement, I do know that there was a historical relationship between Protestantism, antislavery, temperance, and nativism—negative attitudes toward immigrants (Roediger, 1991:152). One of the forces that propelled the Temperance movement was the association (stereotype) in the minds of many Americans between drunkenness and immigrant groups, most notably the Germans and the Irish (Billington, 1963 [1938]:195).

While my great-great-grandfather worked initially as a salesman (for patent medicines), he returned to Dana and made his living first as a manufacturer of palm leaf goods, and then later as a farmer and carpenter. Subsequent generations—my great-grandfather and my grandfather—also lived in Dana and worked as farmers and carpenters. In fact, my father was born while the family was still living in Dana. During this period, from the 1850s through the 1920s, my family members lived in relative isolation in a small, racially and ethnically homogeneous town in rural Massachusetts. It would be easy to describe them as removed from the ethnic and racial issues of this era: emancipation, reconstruction, and the emergence of formal racial segregation; increased European immigration (especially from Southern and Eastern Europe); the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment and the eventual imposition of immigration quotas; the debate over and eventual restriction of immigration from China and Japan; and the final conflicts with Native Americans in the western United States and the creation of the reservation system. At the same time, their lives were shaped by—and they directly or indirectly benefited from—the evolution of American society, including industrialization and economic growth facilitated by immigrant labor and by the exploitation of African American, Mexican American, and Chinese American labor. I do not know what my ancestors' opinions were on these questions; however, I suspect that, like most people, they were products of their times and either supported or did not oppose these developments. In any event, there is no record of strong advocacy on either side of these issues.

What is important to emphasize here is that generations upon generations of dominant-group members—including my family—have benefited from the social and institutional practices of American society. Exclusion, segregation, and the failure to enforce treaties and ensure equal protection under the law certainly reduced competition

and created economic opportunities for dominant-group members. Political and social practices, from voting access to citizenship requirements to educational opportunities, all served to reproduce group power from generation to generation. Government policies, from fugitive slave laws to New Deal legislation to welfare policy to tax policy (e.g., the mortgage interest deduction), have generally given disproportionate benefits to dominant-group members. In contemporary terms, the dominant-group has always enjoyed a home field advantage.

Following the flooding of Dana in the mid-1930s to create the Quabbin Reservoir (the water supply for metropolitan Boston), my grandfather moved his family to the mill town of Springfield, Vermont. There he worked in a variety of industrial positions, eventually rising to some sort of supervisory position in one of the factories. From my father's accounts, and my own research on ethnic relations in northern New England, Springfield would have been a much more ethnically diverse environment than any place in which my family had previously lived. I recall from my father's stories an awareness of the ethnic backgrounds of his high school classmates and some sense of low-level intergroup conflict. These decades (the 1930s and 1940s) would have been the time of the gradual but uneven incorporation and assimilation of European immigrant groups (Irish Americans, French Canadians, German Americans, Polish Americans, and so on) amidst the struggles of the Depression and World War II. I had limited contact with my grandparents' generation; however, I do recall hearing occasional ethnic or racial slurs in adult conversations. As I was to learn later in life, one dilemma for dominant-group members is how to respond when racist statements are made by family members or close friends.

My father left Springfield to attend a seminary in Maine, and then joined the Army near the end of World War II (he served with a medical unit in Alaska). After the war, aided by his veteran's benefits, he attended first the state university and then a theological seminary. I do not recall any specific discussion of the topic, yet I would assume that his environment was both mostly white, yet more diverse than that of previous generations. My mother, whom my father met while in college, had a broader range of intergroup experiences. She spent her early childhood in Texas, then, after her mother married her stepfather, who was a career army officer, moved with her parents through a variety of postings including Panama, a series of bases in the United States, and then high school experiences in postwar Beijing and Japan. Her classmates at the Peking American School came from a variety of nations, including local Chinese students. I would describe both of my parents as broadminded and antiracist, as evident in my father's ministry and my mother's work in community organizations. They certainly encouraged my siblings and me to be inclusive and to see diversity as positive.

Nevertheless, the world in which my siblings and I grew up was not a diverse one. The small New Hampshire towns in which we first lived and the Maine coastal town in which I spent summers were extremely homogeneous in terms of race and ethnicity. Even later, when my father's pastoral career led us to three different communities in suburban Boston in the 1960s and early 1970s (late elementary school through high school), race and ethnicity played a very limited role. There was no meaningful residential integration in any of these communities. I do vaguely recall identification and verbal jousting between Irish American and Italian American classmates, and ethnic slurs

directed toward the latter group, but by the late 1960s, ethnic divisions among middle-class white Americans were becoming increasingly symbolic. In terms of my own ethnic identity, I only had a sense of just being present—of being “just like everybody else.” This seemed also to be true for my Protestant European American classmates: They had either assimilated or were members of the dominant group to begin with.

Those intergroup experiences that I did have were somewhat unique in nature and linked to my father's work as a Congregational minister. We had missionaries and divinity students from sub-Saharan Africa and India stay with us at times, which certainly encouraged me to be aware of the diversity of the population of the world. I dimly recall my parents discussing events in the Civil Rights movement (I was only eight at the time of the March on Washington) or guest speakers coming to the church to talk about their role in the Civil Rights movement, but everything seemed very far away. Most of the events of the mid- and late 1960s (e.g., the later events in the Civil Rights movement, the urban rebellions) were merely headlines on the newspapers that I delivered on my afternoon paper route.

By high school, I began to become more aware of the scope of racial injustice in the United States. My parents' conversations began to have more impact. I remember, for example, their disgust upon moving to a new community and learning that some influential members of the church had been involved in discouraging a prominent African American athlete from purchasing a home in their neighborhood. I recall them successfully encouraging the church to provide office space for a former divinity school classmate of my father's who had left the ministry to work as an antiracist activist and consultant. Through the church, and at the encouragement of my mother, I spent a number of Saturdays in high school as a volunteer with a Boston community organization that rehabilitated housing in a low-income, predominantly African American neighborhood. This gave me first-hand exposure to the effects of residential segregation and concentrated poverty: It was clear that the neighborhood was very different from the suburban community in which we lived. I even recall coming home with copies of *Nation of Islam* and *Black Panther Party* newspapers that I picked up on the street. While I was becoming aware of some of the “costs” of being black in American society, I never really thought about the implications of being white.

One particular event does stand out in my memory. While volunteering with the community organization, I occasionally spent the lunch hour eating my bag lunch and answering the telephone while the office staff took a break. One day, a middle-aged African American man came into the office and inquired about employment possibilities. When I informed him that I had no knowledge of any openings and that he should return when the full-time staff members were available, I was shocked by his clear skepticism and repeated questioning of my statement. It was only later in the day that I realized that the communications gap between us was undoubtedly shaped by race. I think that it was the first time that I was ever aware that social interactions were affected by race. As a white American, I had the privilege of living for sixteen years before facing this reality.

After high school, new experiences continued to expand my awareness of ethnic and racial diversity. Before entering college, I spent six months working in one of the last textile mills (historically a significant employer of new immigrants) in Manchester,

New Hampshire. Compared to my previous experiences in school and in my home communities, this was like entering the United Nations. My co-workers included, among others, Mexican Americans, French Canadians, Greek Americans, and Polish Americans. As I encountered linguistic barriers and cultural differences, and observed ethnic rivalry and conflict (verbal jousting), I began to appreciate the impact of group identities on everyday life. My own identity, however, remained unexamined as I focused upon the "differences" of others.

My undergraduate college experience did little to encourage examination of this issue, as the small liberal arts institution that I attended was not diverse. The first time that I ever recall thinking about my own ethnic identity in any concrete manner was near the end of my college career. By this time I had been exposed to "ethnic food," which was always the cuisine of "someone else." One week I happened to glance at the food section of the *Boston Globe* and saw an article on "Yankee food"—New England boiled dinner, codfish cakes, red flannel hash, smoked finnan haddie, "Indian pudding," and the like—dishes that regularly appeared on our family dinner table during my childhood. For the first time, I remember thinking, "I'm ethnic, too." This insight also encouraged me to think about how other aspects of small town New England life, the stuff of Norman Rockwell paintings, were not universal but represented a particular ethnic and cultural heritage. I began to appreciate the ways in which dominant-group experiences were embedded or hidden in what was presented as "American" traditions. We "see" St. Patrick's Day, Columbus Day, Cinco de Mayo, Kwanzaa, and Rosh Hashanah as "ethnic" holidays, but we generally fail to recognize the ethnic origins of Thanksgiving, even though the story and symbols are part of an Anglo-American origin myth (Loewen, 1992, 1995).

My first professional position after college, as a researcher on a one-year study of the occupational and educational status of Franco-Americans in New Hampshire, represented another step in my education. As part of this research, I delved into the literature on assimilation, the experiences of immigrant groups, issues of ethnic stratification, and the history of French Canadians and Franco-Americans (see Doane, 1979, 1983). This enabled me to begin to understand issues of ethnic change and assimilation, as well as the impact of pressures for assimilation, pressures that I realized emanated from my group. Through my interactions with Franco-American scholars and activists, I also came to appreciate the "costs" of assimilation, the struggle to preserve group customs and heritage, and the greater sense of solidarity that goes along with being part of a nondominant ethnic group. In contrast, I began to realize that my dominant-group status did not revolve around these types of experiences, but instead focused on the "differences" of others. To a significant degree, dominant-group identity is grounded in *not* being a member of a minority group.

Throughout my graduate studies in sociology and the early years of my teaching career, I continued to study issues of race and ethnicity. My doctoral dissertation (Doane, 1989) was an in-depth study of the historical evolution of ethnic and racial identities and inequality in the United States and South Africa. This work left me convinced that power and economic competition are at the core of race and ethnic relations and intergroup conflict, and that dominant groups use society's institutions in order to reinforce and maintain their advantages. On a personal level, I came to a fuller

understanding of how the history of my group was inextricably connected to relations of domination and subordination—that much of our "success" had come at the expense of other groups. Since then, I have reexamined many of the cultural and historical images that I grew up with, from the "settling" of New England and the American West, to the realities of life in small-town or suburban middle-class white communities, to the redefinition of what it means to be an "American." This process has not always been easy, since being a member of a dominant group in many ways limits our ability to see the nuances of race and ethnic relations. It is much easier to see social and institutional practices as "normal" instead of examining them for ways in which they reflect and reinforce the position of the dominant group.

During the past decade, one major focus for my research and writing has been to analyze the social role of dominant-group ethnic and racial identities. I began with a paper titled "The Myth of WASP Non-Ethnicity" (Doane, 1992), in which I explored the ways dominant-group identities were different from nondominant identities and how these differences affected race and ethnic relations. Since then, I have written a number of pieces analyzing dominant-group ethnicity and "whiteness" (Doane, 1997a, 1997b, 2003). I have also incorporated these issues into my teaching, and over the years I have encouraged students to confront the nature of whiteness. Despite all of this work, however, I find that it still takes me additional effort to "see" racial issues and the role of whiteness. Being a member of the dominant group makes it that much more difficult to see race relations clearly. White-blindness continues to affect intergroup relations.

Over the past few decades, many things have changed. Part of my family has moved geographically from our northern New England base. We have married and adopted across ethnic and racial lines that would have been impermeable a couple of generations ago. The old ethnic divisions among European Americans appear to be largely irrelevant. Our workplaces are in some cases considerably more diverse than those of our ancestors. We have friendships or relationships with neighbors and co-workers that are more diverse than ever before. At the same time, we all live in predominantly white neighborhoods, work in predominantly white workplaces, and move in a largely white social environment. Our intergroup interactions are largely on "home fields," and we generally have the option of becoming involved or not in the racial issues of our community and our society. In a lot of ways, many things have not changed.

## Dominant-Group Identity and the Twenty-First Century

So what does it mean to be a member of the dominant group in the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century? In general, there is still a lower level of self-awareness when it comes to race and ethnicity. White Americans tend not to think about being white because they do not have to; Anglo-Americans still have a tendency to think of themselves as "American" when they consider issues of ethnicity. At the same time, I believe that there is an increasing debate about what it means to be an "American." Past assumptions that "American" is equivalent to white or Anglo-American are still prevalent, but they are being challenged by ideas such as multiculturalism, a

rethinking of history, and a reevaluation of what constitutes “American” literature, art, or music. Perhaps this debate is particularly evident in the university environment where I work, but it is also making its way into the larger society.

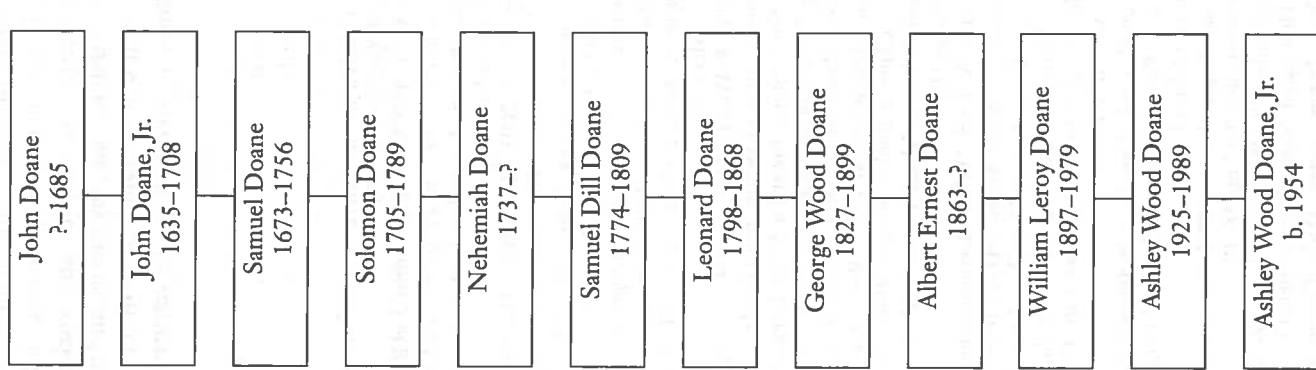
The dominant group itself has undergone change. Over the centuries, the boundaries of the dominant group have expanded to include British Americans (Scots, Scots-Irish, Welsh), then Protestant European groups, and now to where it has become a generalized “white European American” identity. This has involved not only the assimilation of non-English groups, but also the evolution of the “Anglo core culture” into a more generalized European American culture. As I have argued elsewhere, this has been to the advantage of the dominant group, for by absorbing other European groups, it has been able to maintain its social, political, and economic advantages in the face of substantial immigration (Doane, 1997a:388).

Dominant group status has served to benefit its members over the years in a variety of ways. While some whites and English Americans have benefited more than others (social class *does* make a difference), as a group we have enjoyed easier access to social resources and less competition from groups who have been excluded from full participation. For example, my siblings and I have all attained middle- to upper-middle-class positions in society. On one hand, it would be easy to attribute our relative success to individual effort—our education was through our own efforts and we have all worked hard in our chosen fields. On the other hand, we have been beneficiaries of a system that for members of our group was more likely to reward effort. We were able to attend better than average schools; we had easier access to college, housing, and mortgage loans; and we benefited from assumptions of individuality and trustworthiness. While life has had its struggles, we never had to confront the kinds of obstacles faced by peoples of color in the United States. As Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro have noted in their book *Black Wealth, White Wealth* (1995), this has translated into higher levels of wealth for white Americans, even when compared with African Americans of the same income level. Higher levels of wealth in turn create more opportunities for the future—and for future generations.

What can we say about the present state of the dominant side of dominant-minority relations? In some, but not all, cases, there appears to be a greater sense of inclusiveness. According to survey researchers, attitudes of white Americans toward peoples of color have become more egalitarian and inclusive (e.g., Schuman et al., 1997). I see this when I look at my family—my parents’ generation and my own generation. Yet we also know that behavior (and in-depth ideologies, as opposed to attitudes) are more problematic. For example, research shows that whites will still move out of neighborhoods once the percentage of black residents reaches a certain tipping point (Farley & Frey, 1994). Follow-up interviews with white survey respondents find that initial inclusive attitudes (e.g., acceptance of interracial marriage) are qualified or contradicted when explored in depth (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Racial stereotypes have evolved, often including more complex combinations of race and class. We are also becoming more aware that even unconscious attitudes may have an impact; for example, the response to “black-sounding” names on a resume (Associated Press, 2003).

Seemingly changing attitudes may be problematic in another sense. Dominant group members may “talk the talk” of equality by supporting equal opportunity in the

FIGURE 9.1 Twelve Generations of the Doane Family



abstract, but fail to “walk the walk” by supporting specific measures to attain racial equality. It is hard to change a system from which one is the beneficiary. Recently, we have seen the emergence of a new dominant-group racial ideology, “colorblind racism” (Bonilla-Silva, 2001), one that claims that race no longer “matters” and that racism no longer exists save in individual acts of discrimination. It is too easy for whites as a group to claim that slavery was 140 years ago and that “the past is the past” (Bonilla-Silva, 2001:158). When we say “not today” or “it wasn’t me” (Myers, 2003:538), we ignore the persistent racial inequality built into American institutions—what Joe Feagin (2000:6) has termed “systemic racism.” I do not say this as an exercise in white-bashing, but instead to assert that a realistic accounting of the past and examination of the present leads to the inescapable conclusion that dominant-group members (white European Americans) *continue* to benefit from existing social arrangements.

Unfortunately, the “colorblind” worldview makes change more difficult. If dominant group members are relatively unaware of their group advantages, then it is even more difficult to see systemic racism and the obstacles facing peoples of color. This then makes it easier to say that racial inequality is the result of circumstance, or the lack of effort or ability on the part of subordinate groups. It even becomes possible to make the claim, as increasing numbers of dominant-group members are doing, that racism *against* whites (e.g., “reverse discrimination”) is an emerging social problem and that dominant group members are increasingly becoming the “victims” in race relations in the United States (Gallagher, 1995; Doane, 1996). To the extent that colorblind racism becomes a dominant racial ideology, I believe that it will become a significant obstacle to addressing racial inequality and pursuing racial justice.

What will be the nature of the dominant group in the future? We know that the United States is becoming more diverse. New immigration from Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe is creating an even more complex ethnic and racial mosaic. U.S. Census Bureau projections suggest that white European Americans will be a bare majority of the population by 2050. How will the dominant group respond to these changes? Will we see increased white assertion and defensiveness, as has happened in the past when the dominant

group has felt itself to be threatened? Will we see, as some have predicted, a new expansion of the boundaries of the dominant group to include selected Latinos, Asian Americans, and multiracial persons, thereby once again increasing dominant-group numbers and power (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Yancey, 2003)? Or will circumstances lead whites to become more willing to address systemic racism, share power, and work to make the American dream truly open to all? I do know that my son, my nieces, and my nephews will grow up and live their lives in a world that will be significantly different from the one that I experienced. What I do not know is what will be the nature of dominant-minority relations in this society.

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## PART FOUR

# Second-Stream Groups

## Italian Americans, Greek Americans, and Jewish Americans

In this section we study white groups who are descended from more recent European immigrants than the Irish and German Americans. This greater recency will be a tremendous advantage. The authors will know the immigrants, the people who had the initial contact with the dominant group. We will be privy to more intimate and colorful details of the process. Much more will be presented to us on a first-hand basis.

There are three ethnic groups in this section: Italian, Greek, and Jewish Americans. In general, all three groups illustrate very well the theory presented in this book, but each article reveals a somewhat of different viewpoint. Serravallo takes us to a New York State Italian American industrial town. Much of the writing on Italian Americans focuses on the urban experience, like Gans's classic work. Here we see a village, but it is not an urban ghetto.

Hutter, like the other two, centers his chapter on a geographic place called Bensonhurst. Unlike Serravallo's, Hutter's is a more traditional urban experience. Bensonhurst has many of the characteristics of "Bricktown." Hutter, like many of our authors, draws attention to the focus of his study—Jewish Americans—but in the process he must also acknowledge the Italian Americans. He shows us that Jewish Americans were geographically close to though socially separate from the dominant group, and also very near to Italian Americans spatially "but with parallel institutions that they did not share with one another."

Karpathakis is the first author to take us back to the country of origin, Greece, and gives us a flavor of what life was like there. She also shows us how difficult it was to leave her country of birth. Emigration for her family was initiated in 1910 but involved much back-and-forth movement between America and Greece and entailed great sacrifice, even loss of life. In fact, Karpathakis herself actually emigrated from Greece during the period of the third-stream immigration, but most Greek Americans came during the second stream. Her article is a good segue into the third-stream groups.

Her description of the dreadful economic and political conditions in Greece points to the circumstances that pressured her family members to emigrate. However, Greece was still home, and the family was leaving behind siblings, grandparents, friends, and so much more. Karpathakis is able to show us the anguish associated with emigration. For example, she was never to see her grandmother again after she emigrated.

Just before the completion of this reader, Karpathakis felt compelled to add an epilogue to her chapter. The additional material, "Greek American: An Epilogue—It's My Child This Time," gives us visceral details of a mother's anguish caused by ethnocentrism directed at her child. The epilogue is most moving.

In terms of initial contact, Serravallo also shows how difficult it was for many immigrants to leave their home country. His grandfather returned to Italy seven times in the first few years he was in America. His bride-to-be refused to leave Italy. Eventually she did, but we can imagine how hard it was for them. The actual trips were "horrible." They were "treated like the animals on the boat." And when they finally settled into their new country and began work in the New York State brickyard, they were "treated as non-human commodities." Reading about the continual danger of working in the pre-OSHA brickyard clearly shows that the Italian American workers in Serravallo's family were seen as expendable and exploitable. They were specifically barred from municipal buildings.

Hutter shares few instances of "in your face" discrimination like Karpathakis does. But the separate ethnic community both belies and protects from such hostilities, making them almost invisible to some, as Cunnigen hypothesizes. Hutter does, however, describe the hardships endured by the immigrant members of his family. Living conditions were harsh. Family members were separated from one another for many years. Like many newcomers, young people had to drop out of school and work to help support the family.

Karpathakis's description of her first day at school as a newly arrived immigrant symbolizes so much of the dominant group sentiment toward minority groups: "My First day at school, Harold, a boy in my class ran up to me, took a whack across my face yelling something incomprehensible." Most immigrants similarly get hurt in many ways.

Not all of the hostility came from the dominant groups. Like Hutter, Karpathakis describes some of the interethnic relations, noting:

The "whiter" working class ethnics did not want us there because we represented for them an essentially lesser group living alongside them. . . . The minorities did not want us because we represented for them another group that would later become part of the oppressors.

Some of the violence associated with the initial hostility on the part of the dominant group is indirect. For example, the European settlers brought diseases that killed many Native Americans. Karpathakis shows us that isolation and poverty led to the death of her great uncle.

Ironically, some of the hostility experienced by our author came from her own ethnic group and not members of the dominant or other groups. "The 'Greek Americans' [who had arrived earlier] teased and ridiculed the 'green horns,' those 'fresh off the boat,' for reasons that were not always clear to those being teased." This can be seen in many other groups as well.

Interestingly, many newcomers continue to deny or "forget" about such initial hostile treatment from other groups. Karpathakis gives a great example of this "forgetting" process when she discusses a reaction by a fellow Greek American to her writings about discrimination. It takes us back again to Cunnigen's cocoon and Grunpenhoff's urban village. The fellow Greek American said, "Nobody bothered 'us' as long as we 'stuck with us' and didn't interfere in 'their' business." Karpathakis retorts, "'us' and 'them,' the words so well summarizing the ways in which so many groups have negotiated their relations by not breaking out of these group boundaries." Obviously, if you do not venture out of your isolated and separate social structure, if you never see members of the dominant group, you will never encounter personal prejudice and discrimination and may in fact labor under the assumption that the members of the dominant group really are not that bad.

In describing minority group reaction, Serravallo writes about the separate Italian American community of which his family were members. "My father said he was never welcome in [dominant group] houses even when he played with their kids, and Uncle Frankie said he frequently got into fist fights with the top-of-the-hill kids because they would refer to him as being a no-good bum from down the hill." They could not get loans to improve their situation.

It is amazing how similar Hutter's description of a different ethnic group in a different geographical area is in so many ways similar to Serravallo's. The Jewish American group reacted to dominant group anti-Semitism by building its own community, as aptly described by Hutter.

Karpathakis talks about the "safety net" the school children who were Greek Americans formed in order to protect themselves. This is a reflection of the larger ethnic-based community but it performed many of the same functions. The Greek immigrants "created vast and complex support networks through which important job information and other resources flowed." Karpathakis quotes a fellow Greek American: "We had to help one another because no one was going to help us. We stuck together, were patriots (compatriots), we had to help one another."

Just as Doane wrote about the benefits of exploitation of Native and African Americans from the dominant point of view, Serravallo describes how members of his family were paid less because they were Italian Americans in the process on ongoing discrimination. He concludes, "Ethnicity and social class intersected to keep the recent immigrant groups at the bottom of the social structure." And, as is so often the case when the immigrants were asked if they faced any discrimination, members of Serravallo's family refused to say that they were discriminated against. However, descriptions of his grandparents' and parents' occupation careers indicate otherwise. But, just as Cunnigen's racially sealed cocoon in the deep South shielded him from daily racial harassment, the closed ethnic community Serravallo describes also safeguarded them from the rampant anti-Italian prejudices of the first half of the twentieth century: "They knew from their general experience of the Italians in America that prejudice and discrimination were common, but their manifest and direct forms were infrequent in Brickitalia and in their new residences."

Hutter does not detail any ongoing hostility by the members of the dominant group. He does, however, describe the tensions that existed between the two rival ethnic groups—the Jewish and the Italian Americans.

Karpathakis talks about the fact that the Greek Americans were treated like a minority for several decades. However, it is difficult for her to see this ongoing discrimination first-hand because, by the time she arrived in the 1970s, earlier generations of Greek immigrants had already established more than a beachhead. The Greek American community was flourishing.

Serravallo describes a very clear and separate "Brickitalia" whose ethnic-based solidarity enabled the Italian Americans to survive and included a great dose of fun. It is a good example of the power-building separate ethnic community. He colorfully describes the subculture and its norms, values, and practices that centered on communal living. As with other groups previously described, the church was a major institution in Brickitalia and provided benevolent societies, dances, men's clubs, college scholarships, financial assistance, and more.

Hutter gives example after example of the separate Jewish community. He notes, "Even in the same high school, the two ethnic groups were segregated." Inter-marriage is a meaningful sign of assimilation. In Bensonhurst, "Dating was restricted within the ethnic group and it was rare that strong dating and courtship patterns and eventual marriage occurred among members of the two groups." This ethnic separation did indeed lead to power: "Persons rely upon ethnic and residential unities in the neighborhood."

Karpathakis' description of the separate Greek American community is similarly classic:

The streets were lined with Greek-owned shops opened by members of earlier immigrant cohorts. The language most frequently heard in public spaces was Greek, followed by English. English predominated in the schools and on the television set—only during the hours when Greek programs were not aired....

The Greek immigrant community is comprised of a plurality of religious and secular institutions. These were created to serve the following functions: help immigrants enter American institutions, pass on the Greek culture and religion to the American-born cohorts, and help public and other charitable projects back home.

Clearly the Greek American community is one that has gained much power from ethnic unity. "During the most recent city and state elections, the Greeks of Astoria elected a Greek American to replace the retiring Democratic council member in our district." There were many Greek American political groups, organizations, stores, social groups, and occupational and educational networks as well as groups that coalesced around the issues of Greek national sovereignty that bespeak Greek American power. But, like other authors, Karpathakis notes that the church has played a significant role in the process of gaining power, despite conflicts within the church having to do with the assimilation process.

In terms of assimilation, we can feel the pressure to take on the dominant culture that Serravallo experienced. His parents did not stress the Italian culture in the home very much at all: no Italian literature, music, movies, or trips. In fact, it is somewhat ironic and comical that the necessity to assimilate was so strong that when Serravallo wanted to mentally refer to Italian Americans he had to fall back on media-created stereotypes:

I felt [the Italian culture] was something to suppress when in the presence of members of the dominant culture, like teachers or higher-status schoolmates.... I could not

speak the language. I did not know how to play the drinking games. I only saw one or two games of bocce. I only saw one or two games of *morra*, the finger numbers game. So I had to rely on the stereotypical images and mannerisms I saw in movie and television roles, like Rocky Balboa, Vinny Boperino, and Sonny Carleone.

Serravallo makes the point that his generation, the third, has been assimilated to a large degree. He is a college professor and his sister is a teacher's aide. However, just as you might suspect, the assimilation from both the dominant and the minority point of view is incomplete:

I remain convinced that I'm seen as an Italian professor. Without exception, Italian colleagues in the several colleges I attended and at which I worked introduced me to other Italian professors and often spoke Italian expressions, even though I never sought this out or gave any indication that I was interested in it.... Students who were searching for courses and saw my name asked [me] if I could speak English. Some faculty colleagues immediately call me Vincenzo.... and one Italian professor in graduate school gave me the nickname Vito.... These small events work to remind me that my ethnicity does matter.

Hutter describes a great deal of cultural and structural pluralism. However, the assimilation process began very soon after arrival. "My father, coming here at the age of 10, became assimilated very quickly. Peers and the school system emphasized the Americanization process." He notes that the Italian and Jewish Americans "had their own parochial educational institutions [but] the majority of their children and adolescents did attend public schools." Traditionally, public schools have been an important conveyor belt in the assimilation process. As other writers in this reader have noted, the assimilation was at a cost. As the younger family members adopted the new ways, they often clashed with the old ways and elders in the family.

Karpathakis made an interesting observation while she was at the beautician's: "A sea of blonde women talking loudly in Greek" symbolizes much about Greek American assimilation. The comment on Karpathakis's first report card in America denotes the early years of her assimilation situation well: "Anna is a bright child, and with proper nurturing will be successful." Karpathakis describes a group that is well on its way to assimilation. However, there are still some areas of pluralism. She notes that she will enroll her son in the Greek language afternoon classes in a nearby church, and he will as a requirement for this course attend Sunday Catechism.

Karpathakis concludes that Greek Americans "have become one of America's recent success stories.... We now can afford to buy homes in relatively safe (i.e. 'white') neighborhoods.... [We] can now afford to send [our] children to church-run schools and then to college." But she cautions that there are still many poor Greek Americans. And we see in the epilogue that the church-run schools are not free of ethnocentrism.

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