

## UNIT 2

# Echoes from the Past and Pieces of Our Ambiguous Legacies

### Unit Selections

10. **The Slave History You Don't Know**, Scott McLemee
11. **Paying for Jefferson's Sins**, Algis Valiunas
12. **How the GOP Conquered the South**, Michael Nelson

### Key Points to Consider

- In your opinion, are the issues related to slavery and the history of the South—particularly the impact of large-scale plantation slavery—ongoing influences and thus relevant to contemporary public issues?
- Does the grouping of people into categories and divisions such as black or white have the same meaning in all regions of this country? Are such categories relevant for self-identification? For government policy? For the law? For understanding pluralism in America?
- What stereotypes of American regions have you encountered? Explain and discuss the question of regional and universal values.
- Does the historical archaeology of your personal identity shape your view of race and ethnicity? In what respect does the past have current personal and social significance?
- Should the U.S. Census Bureau collect religious data?

### Student Web Site

[www.mhcls.com/online](http://www.mhcls.com/online)

### Internet References

Further information regarding these Web sites may be found in this book's preface or online.

#### U.S. Census Bureau

<http://www.census.gov>



**R**ace and ethnic relations, discrimination, and population diversity are essential dimensions of American history. Certain aspects of American history are broached in these articles: the legacy of slavery, segregation, and racist conquest and immigration, as well as Anglo-American colonial developments. These features of social history call attention to the original context of the American experiment in the formation of a large republic. A complete social history would include:

- the variety and specificity of indigenous, migrant, and imported populations.
- the particular scale and regional uniqueness of demographic configurations and patterns of settlement.
- the historically embedded characteristics of dominant cultures.

The history of interaction with minority groups and recent patterns related to immigration—especially the diffusion of settlements and the formation of new enclaves—are rooted in the exclusionary practices of the past. The material in this unit establishes the base for the ongoing process of peopling

America, and the experiences of new immigrants. These articles illustrate the accessibility and attractiveness of the legacy of slavery, conquest, urbanization, group mobility, and the racial and ethnic succession of enclave neighborhoods. The specific dynamics of group isolation and integration point to the complexity generated by public policy—most importantly, the designations available for legal remedies for racial and ethnic isolation and exclusion. Race and ethnic relations was marked by various actions of the U.S. Supreme Court, most recently in decisions regarding affirmative action: *Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Gratz v. Bollinger*. But this movement in public policy does not stand alone and should be read within the larger framework established by the original U.S. Constitution. The American record illustrates the way that the American founders handled ethnic pluralism. In most respects, they ignored the cultural and linguistic variety within; and between the 13 original states, instead adopted a legal system that guaranteed religious exercise free from government interference, due process of law, and freedom of speech and the press. The founders, however, conspicuously compromised their claims of unalienable rights and democratic republicanism with regard to the constitutional status of Africans in bondage and indigenous Native Americans. Even after the

Civil War and the inclusion of constitutional amendments that ended slavery exclusionary, practices continued. Decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court helped to establish a legal system in which inequality and ethnic discrimination—both political and private—were legally permissible.

The articles in this unit focus on and the larger scale of human affairs, especially regional forces that shaped cultural patterns. The South, unlike New England and much of the northern industrial states, has deeper ambiguities about the uprooting force of bourgeois and market-driven universalism. Until recently, when immigration patterns occurred, the absence of large-scale immigration and urbanization limited its historical experience with diversity and pluralism. Southern regional culture is not homogeneous but does have embedded in it a particularity that is well worth exploring in more detail for its impact on ethnic and racial group formation. Interaction, in the context of the southern experience and the process of separation and integration, is unique and yet formative to a good deal of our national discourse on race relations. The contextual character of group relations is well established in the social sciences as a powerful explanatory

variable. In fact, ethnicity as a local identity may be utterly and entirely contextual.

The presence of a politically relevant past and the invocation of religious warrants for group conflict have indicated the need for new approaches to peacekeeping and educational strategies for meeting and transcending group differences. Ethnic relations have erupted into warfare in Africa, where conflicts have shattered emerging states and thus challenged the hopeful myth of postcolonial renewal as well as the racial/ethnic myth of black solidarity. But Africa's emerging countries are not alone. The Middle East, central Europe, India and China, Canada, Northern Ireland, and the Balkans are additional venues of destructive conflict. Each of these simmering cauldrons—not melting pots—illustrates the stakes and consequences of unresolved conflict and distrust concerning land, religion, culture, leadership, and economic production and distribution. Each also shows the rewards and recognitions that fuel human passions, ambitions, and the will to dominate and to govern the affairs and destinies of various peoples that cohabit contiguous regions.