

# Lecture 8

## Circumstantialism

# Circumstantialism

- Primordialists responded to the failure of assimilation theory with the idea that ethnicity is deeply rooted and enduring.
- The other group of theorists called circumstantialists, or instrumentalists, believed that **practical purposes** accounted for the persistence of ethnicity

# Circumstantialism

- Ethnic identities are *not* more fundamental or powerful than other types of identity.
- Ethnicity is fluid. Individuals have multiple identities, these identities shift according to context.

# Circumstantialism

- Mobilization is about *getting something*. People join ethnic movements when there is a pay-off to doing so. Furthermore, when it is useful to them, they may even invent new identities.
- Ethnicity leads to conflict when someone has something to gain from going to war.

# Circumstantialism

- Persistence? As long as ethnicity is a useful way of organizing people, it will persist.

# The Utilitarian Logic of Ethnicity and Race

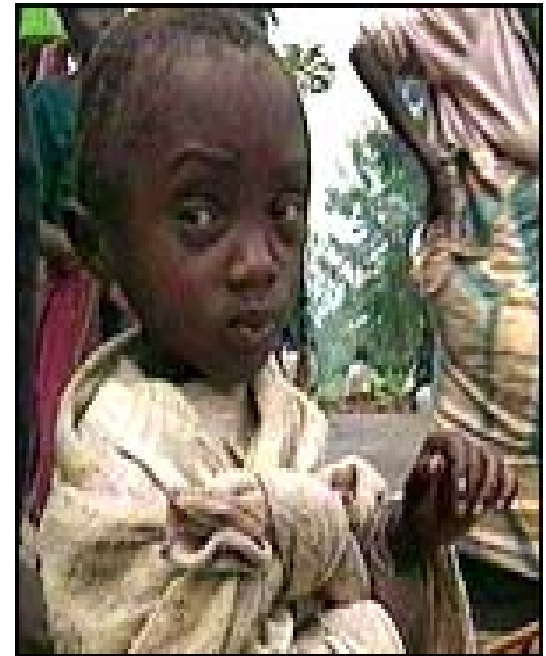
- *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963) Glazer and Moynihan challenge the notion that ethnic groups are primary cultural groups held together by shared cultural practices.
- Argued that ethnic groups are **interest groups**
- “Ethnic groups are continually created in America”
- Ethnic groups are organized for collective action

# The Utilitarian Logic of Ethnicity and Race (Abner Cohen)

- "some interest groups exploit parts of their traditional culture in order to articulate informal organizational functions that are used in the struggle of these groups for power"
- ethnicity "involves a dynamic rearrangement of relations and of customs and is not the result of cultural conservatism or continuity"
- Ethnic groups emerged so strongly because ethnicity brought people **strategic advantages**.

# Example: Ethnic Groups as Interest Groups

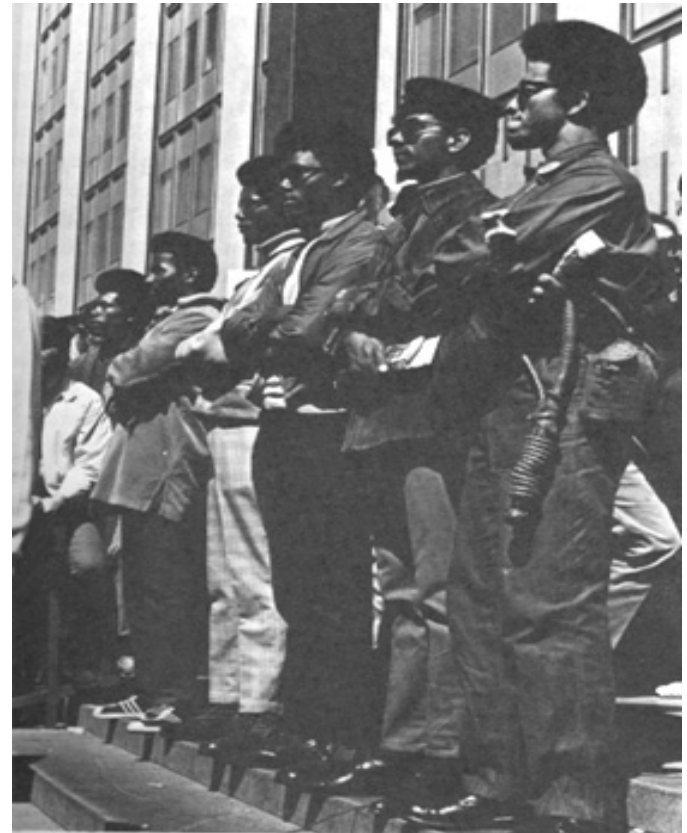
- Hutus slaughtered Tutsis in 1994 (Tutsis thus attempted to “pass” as Hutus)
- Tutsis later found power in 1995, and some Hutus fearing revenge attempted to pass as Tutsis.



(CNN)

# Example: Ethnic Groups as Interest Groups

- Civil Rights and Black power movement led “Whites” as a group to see the benefits of cooperating with other whites to assert their power
- Other groups—Italians, Poles, Irish—asserted their identities as a competitive response

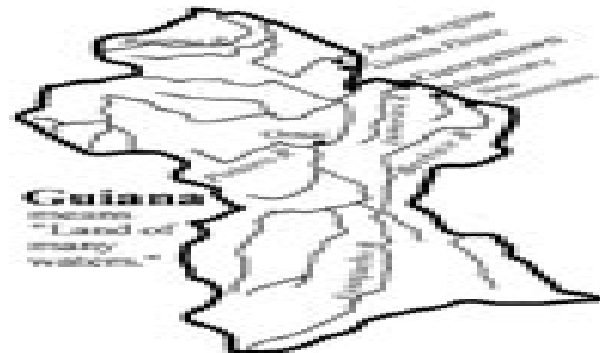
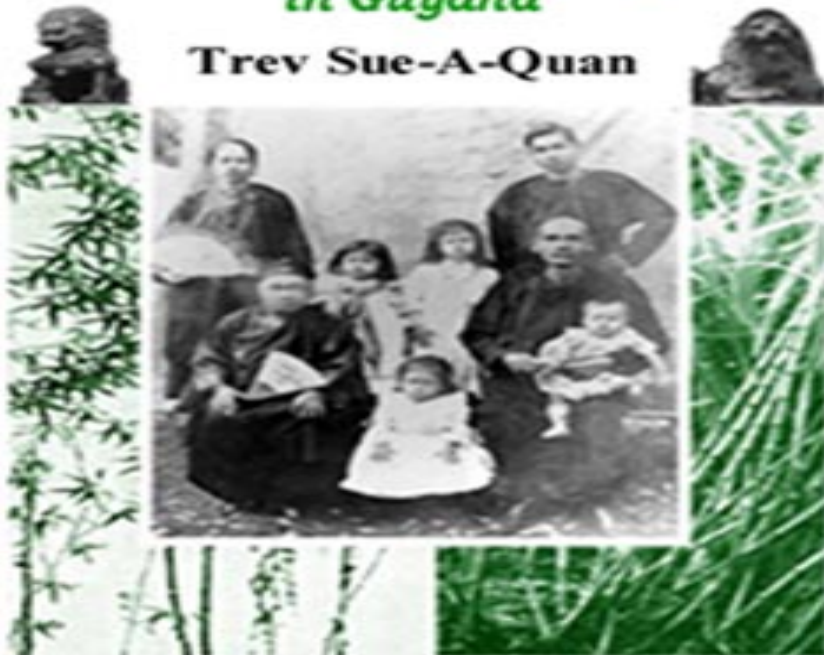


# Example: Ethnic Groups as Interest Groups

## CANE REAPERS

*Chinese Indentured Immigrants in Guyana*

Trev Sue-A-Quan



# Summary

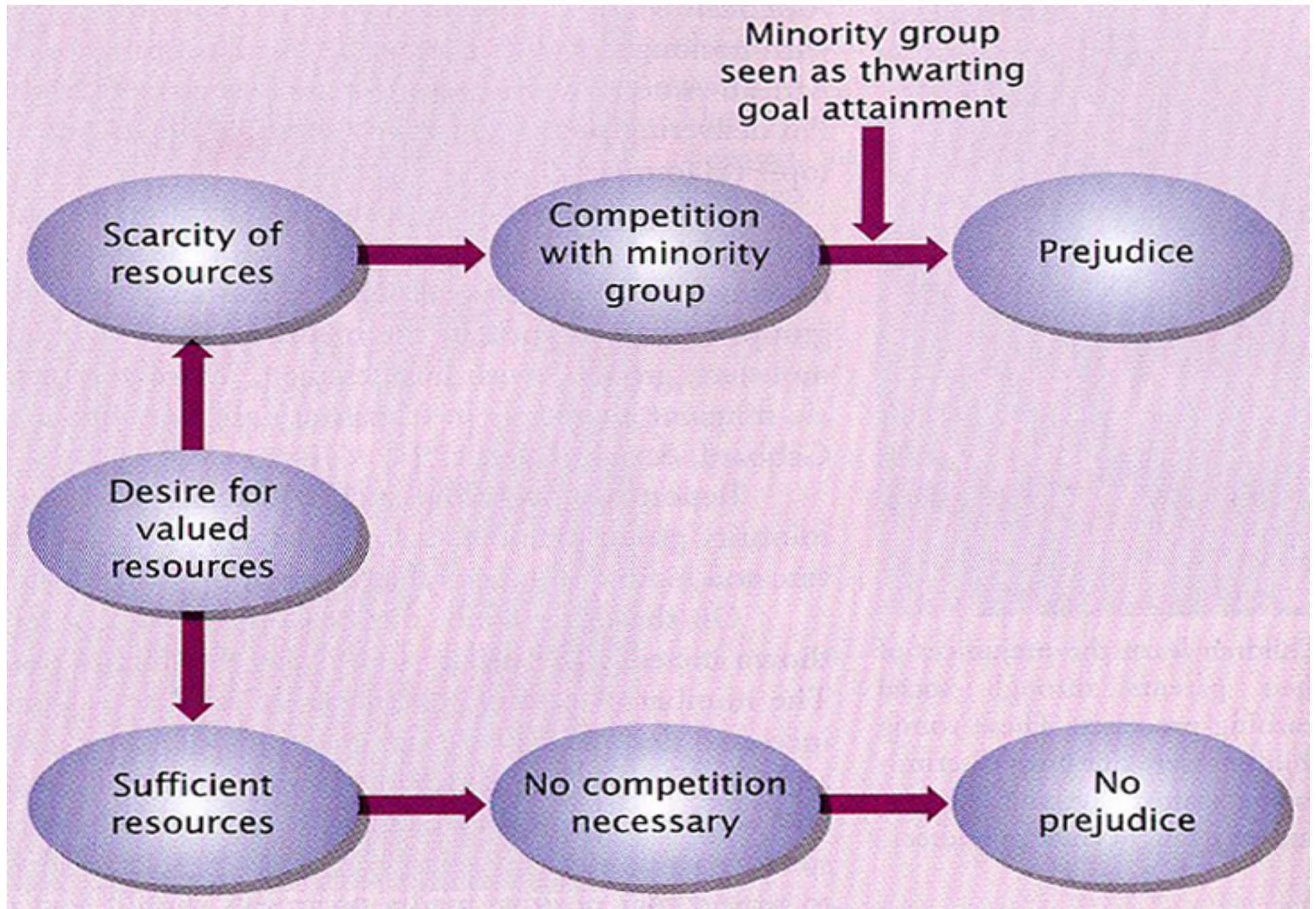
- Circumstantialist account: individuals and groups emphasize their own ethnic or racial identities when such identities are advantageous to them.
- “Where ethnic allegiance is in individuals’ own interests, intense feelings will be attached to it”
- Both identity and interests, mediated or determined by the circumstances and contexts of the situation. Thus, we should expect to see variation.

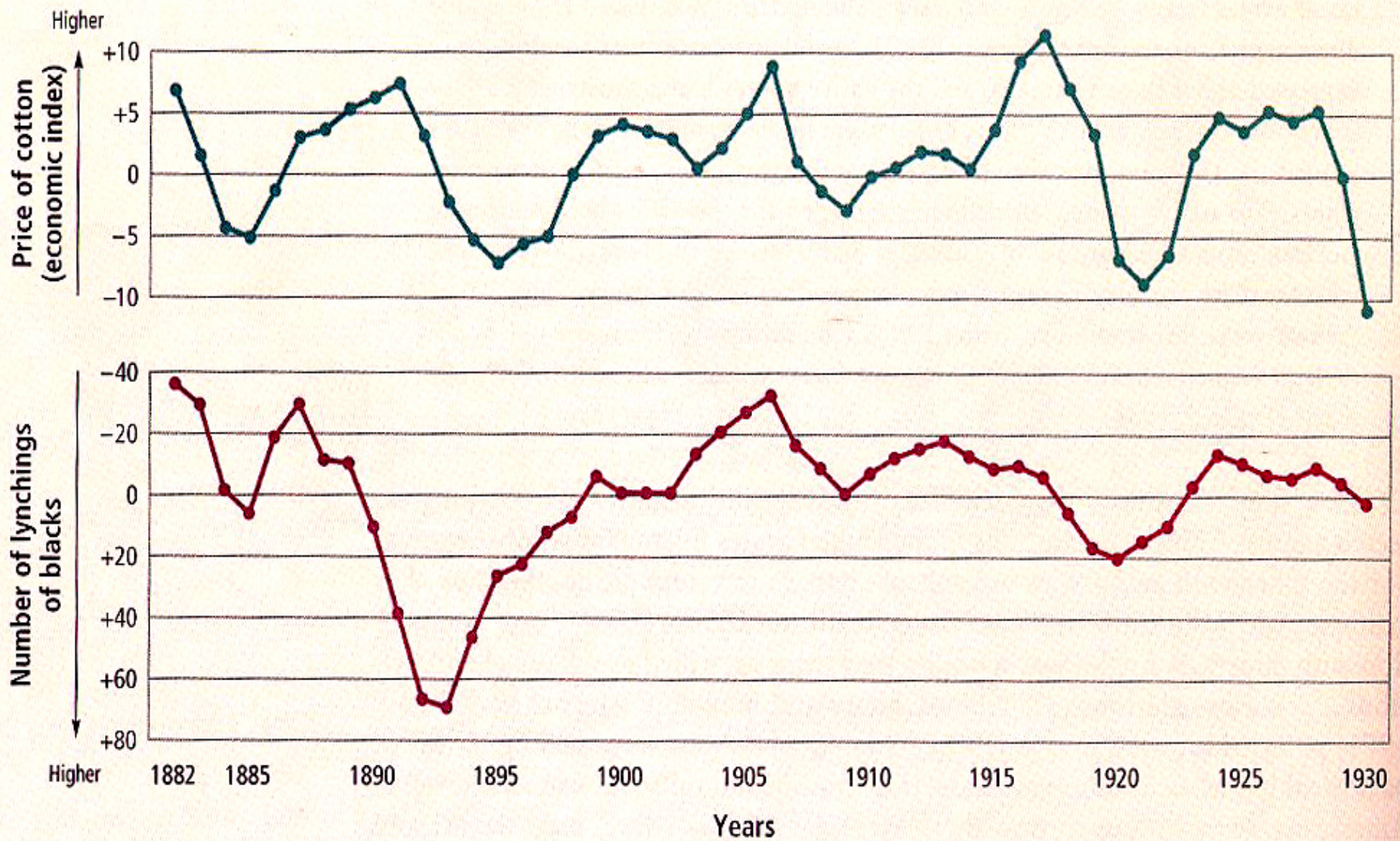
# Circumstantialism and Instrumentalism

- Authors use circumstantialism because:
  - 1.) Interests are subjective; better to focus on the circumstances that put groups in particular situations involving strategic action
  - 2.) “Logic of interests” may be less important than the logic of social organization.

# Competition and Conflict

- Competition and conflict have been central concepts in circumstantialist theorizing
- Ethnic and racial identities become bases of collective conception and action when distinct populations are thrown into competition with one another for scarce resources such as jobs, housing, political power and social status.





■ FIGURE 13.7 Relation of total lynchings to the price of cotton. Note that the lynching scale shows greatest frequency at the bottom of the graph. (Adapted from Hovland & Sears, 1940)

# Realistic Group Conflict Theory

## Central Assumptions

1. People are selfish and out for own gain
2. Incompatible group interests cause intergroup conflict
3. Incompatible group interests cause social psychological processes (e.g., in-group favoritism; stereotyping)

## Summary

Competition between groups for scarce resources produces inter-group conflict. Without such competition, inter-group conflict would fade.

# Sherif and Colleagues: The Robbers Cave Experiments

Purpose: understand conflict between groups to identify how intergroup relations can be more positive.

Created three situations to foster 1.) group identity, 2.) inter-group conflict, and 3.) group harmony

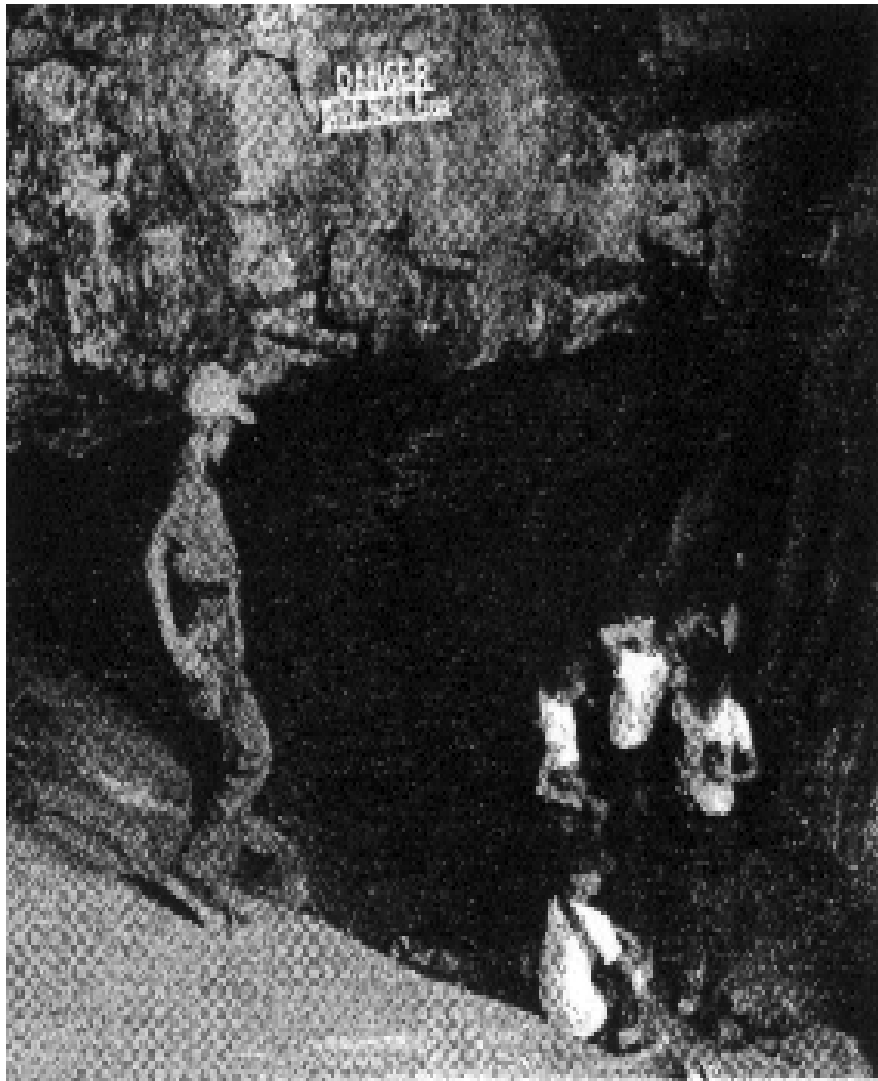
# Sherif and Colleagues

## Participants

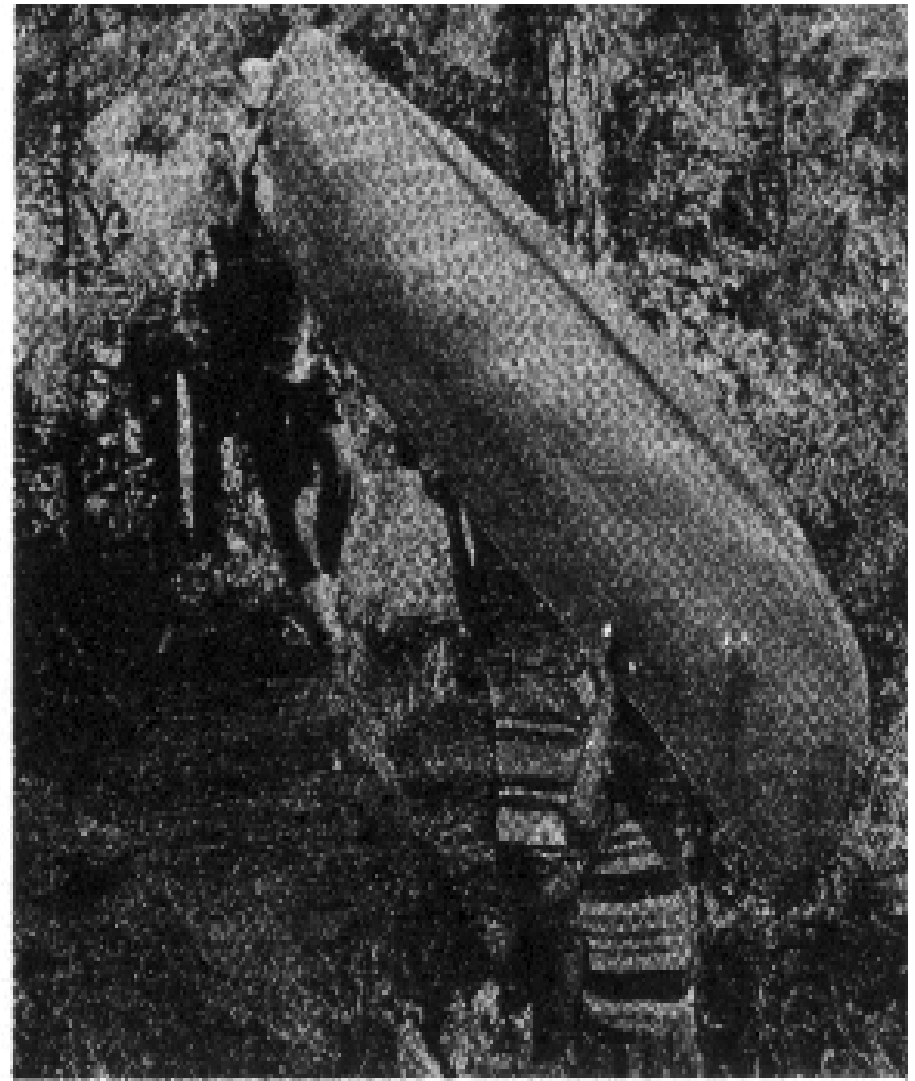
- 11-12 year old boys who signed up for a camp in Oklahoma
- Camp lasted 3 weeks
- Boys had similar backgrounds, no behavioral/psychological problems
- Boys were brought to camp in two separate groups, and kept separate for the first few days at camp.

# Stage 1: Group Formation

- Boys developed strong in-group identity
  - interacted with own group exclusively
  - activities fostered liking
- 95% of listed friends from in-group
- Each group, later to be called the *Eagles* and the *Rattlers*, conducted their own separate activities. The groups developed within-group identities.
- Upon, learning about the other group, both groups became insistent that competitive sports be organized between them.



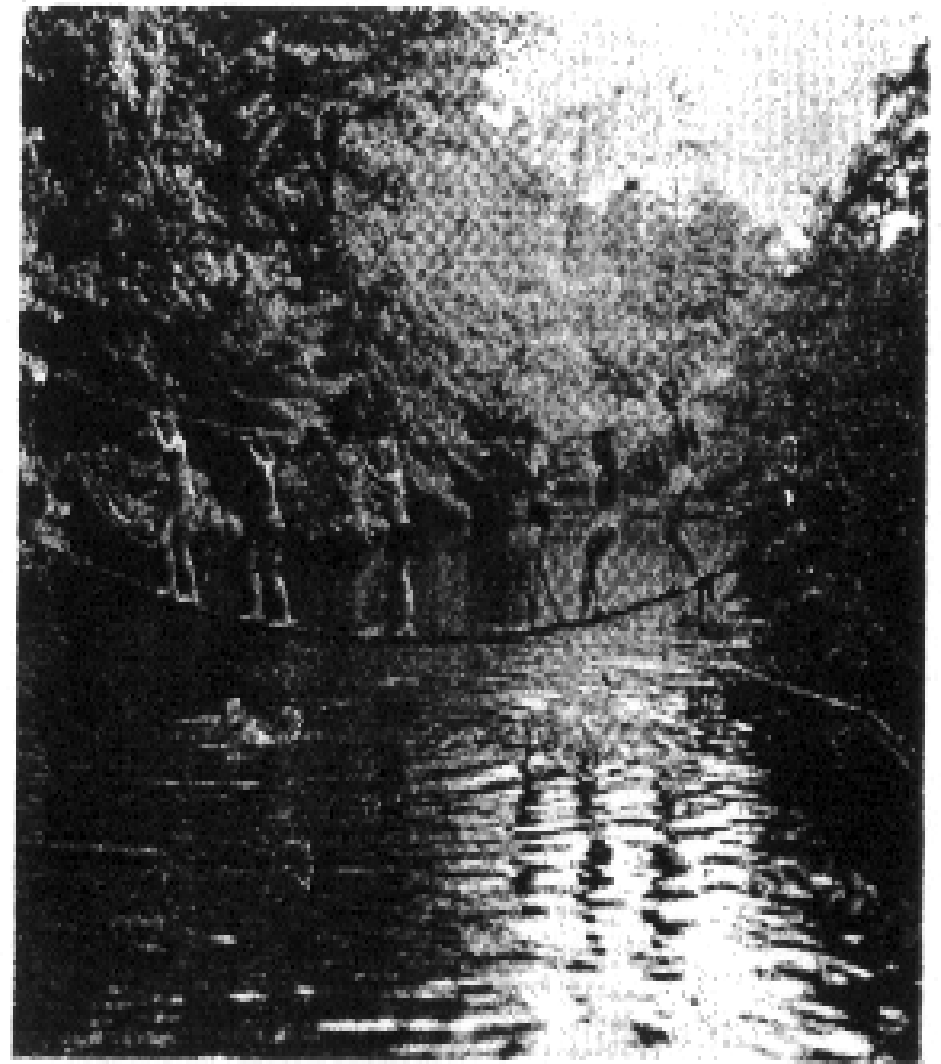
**Rattlers first exploration of Robbers Cave.**



**Carrying their canoe to swimming hole at their hideout.**



**Putting up a sign at their swimming hole  
labelled: "Moccasin Creek".**



**Eagles on their rope bridge  
over "Moccasin Creek".**

# Stage 2: Intergroup Conflict

- The two in-groups set the stage for the friction phase of inter-group relations.
- “Councilors” announced their would be a Tournament of Games:
  - 5\$ prize
    - baseball
    - touch football
    - tug of war
    - treasure hunt

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**(STAGE 2)**



**Eagles' strategy in 2nd Tug-of-war: Sitting down to dig in while rattlers (standing)**



**Rattlers adopt the Eagle strategy: Both sides dig in sitting down.**

# Stage 2: Intergroup Conflict

The tournament led to increasing competition and animosity between the groups.

## Intergroup conflict:

- name calling
- stealing flags
- fights

CONFLICT:

**“You can tell those guys I did it if they say anything. I’ll fight ‘em!”**



Ongoing conflict led to the Eagles finally stealing the Rattlers flag and burning it.

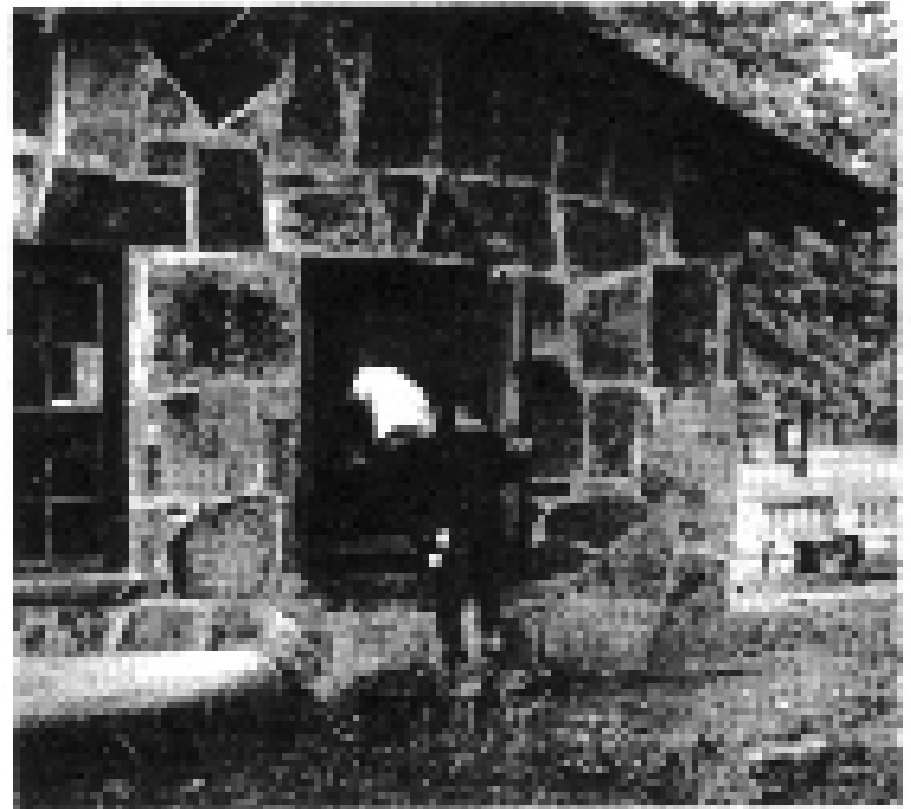
**Rattlers with banner proclaiming "The Last of the Eagles".**

# RATTLERS AND EAGLES: INTERGROUP RELATIONS

(STAGE 2)



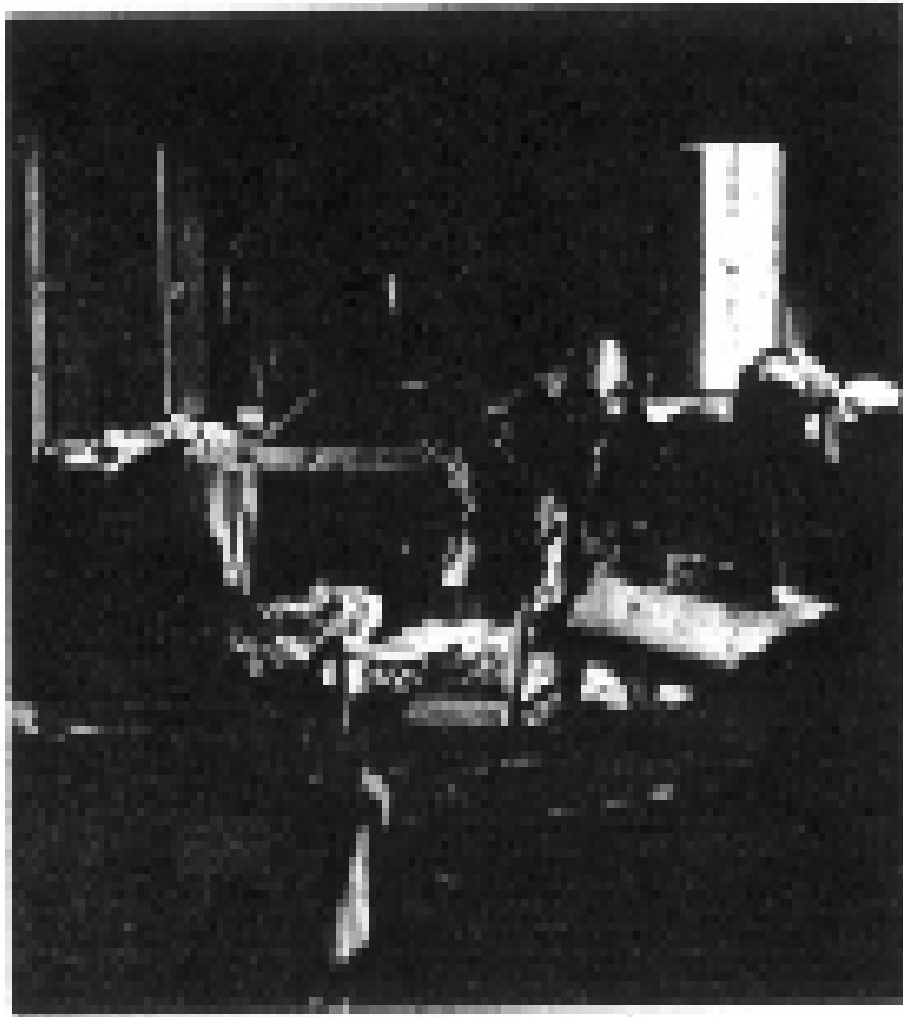
One of the tournament contests: Tent pitching.



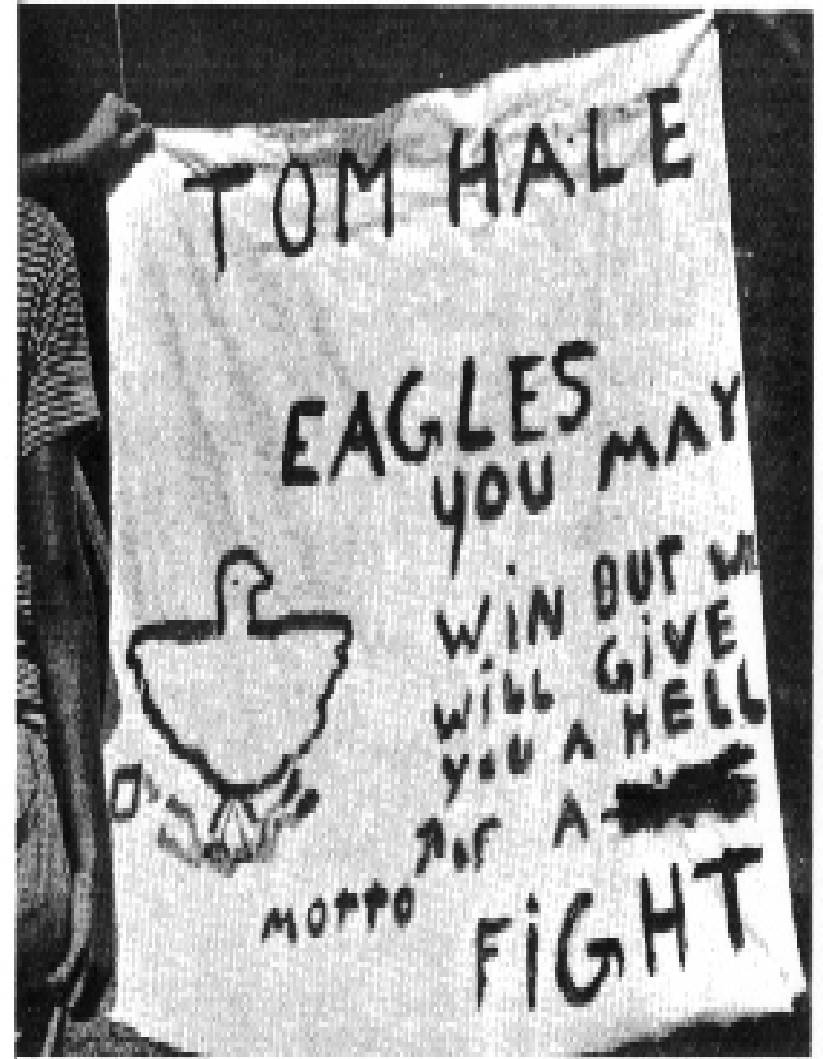
Raiding Eagles entering Rattler cabin.

## RATTLERS AND EAGLES: INTERGROUP RELATIONS

(STAGE 2)



Eagles messing-up Rattler cabin during

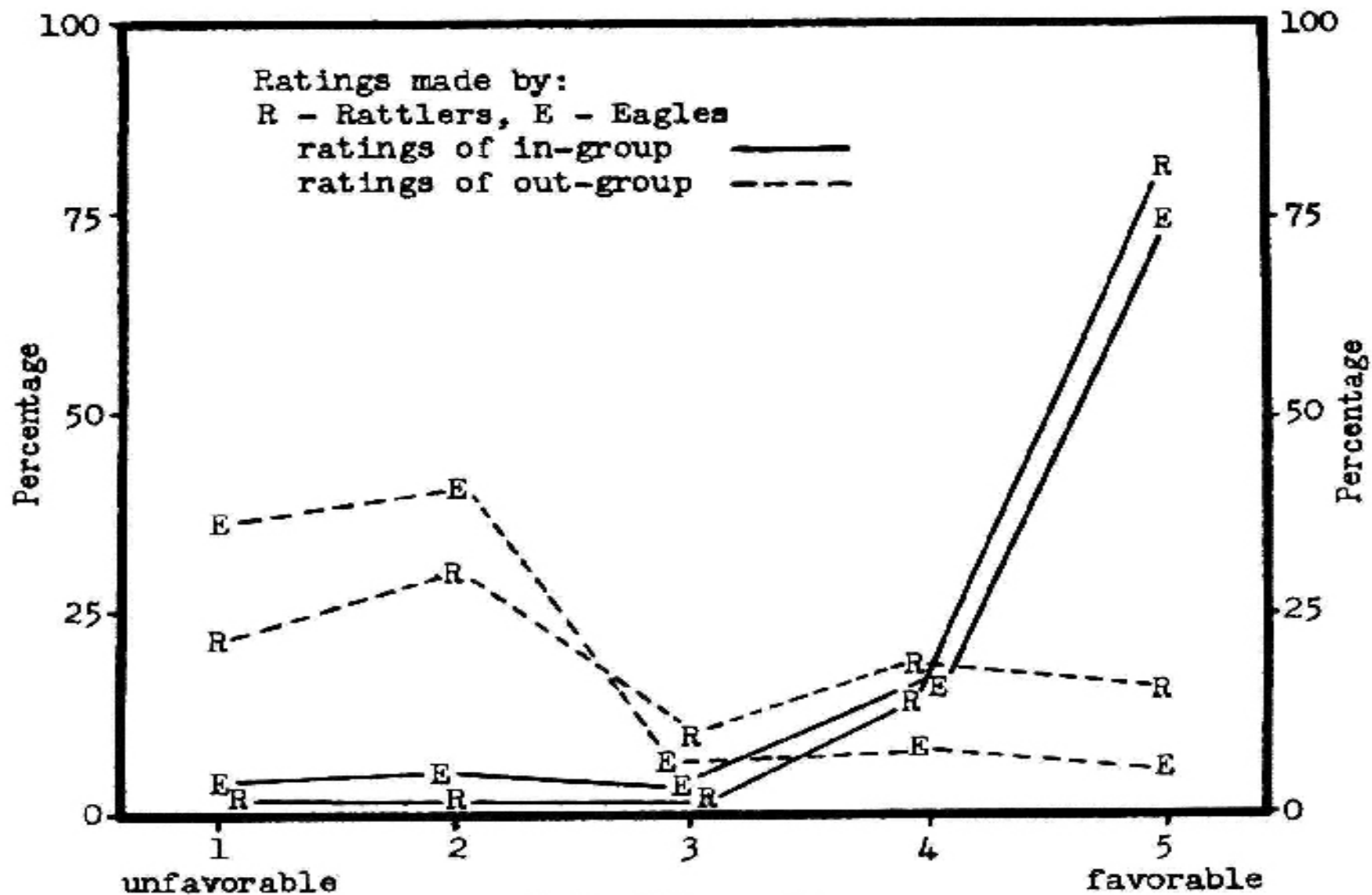


One of the Eagle banners during the tournament.

## Stage 2: Intergroup Conflict

Other data illustrated how prejudice and stereotypes developed among the two groups.

- 1.) Boys developed stereotypes favorable towards in-groups and unfavorable towards out-groups.



End of Stage 2.  
 Stereotype Ratings of In-Group and Out-Group Members on Six Characteristics (Combined)

## Stage 3: Intergroup Harmony

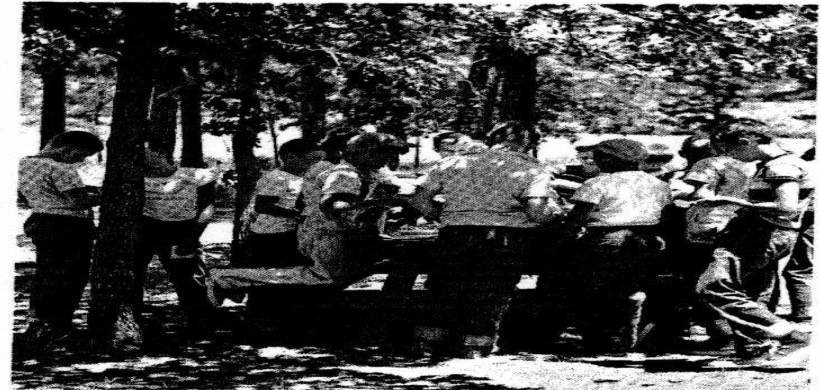
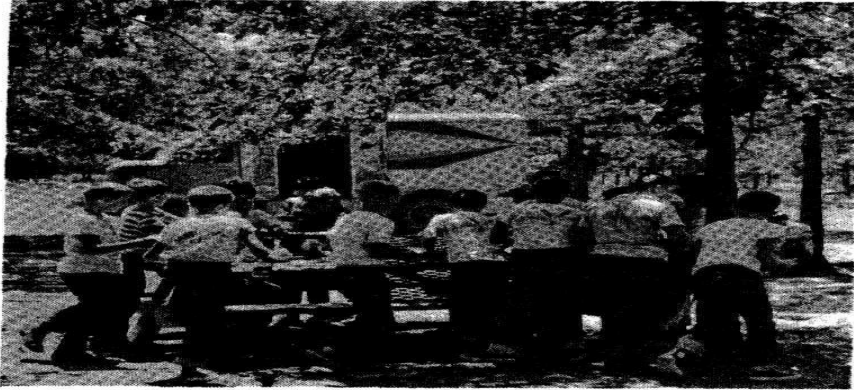
Experimenters tried to reduce intergroup conflict and in-group bias

Goals that could only be achieved if boys from both groups **cooperated**

- water supply malfunctioned
- bus broke down
- Joint meals and cooking

**INTERGROUP RELATIONS: REDUCTION OF FRICTION**

**STAGE 3**

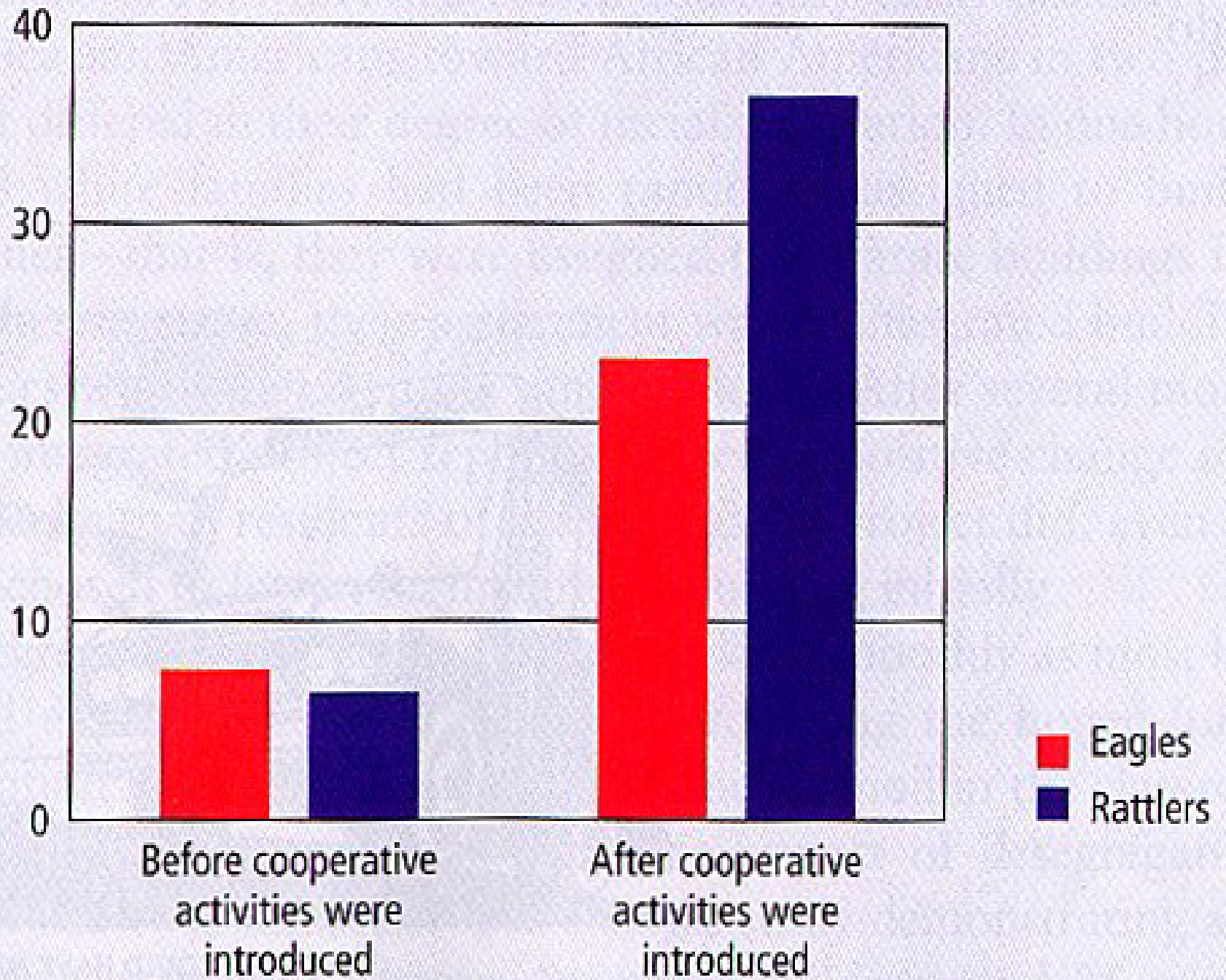


**Joint meals on the overnight camp-out show intergroup mingling in preparation and ser**



**Members from both groups asked to be photographed on attaining the Arkansas**

Percentage of boys who had a best friend in the out-group



# Ethnicity and social closure according to Max Weber

- **Max Weber referred to the processes of exclusion as “social closure”**
- by social closure he means the process by which various groups attempt to improve their lot by restricting access to rewards and privileges to a limited circle
- In order to do this they single out certain social and physical attributes they themselves possess and define these as the criteria of eligibility
- Weber says that almost any characteristic may be used to this end provided it can serve as a means of identifying and excluding outsiders

# Ethnicity as an Identifiable Barrier

- Ethnicity and race are visible markers that can serve to limit material and symbolic resources to one or a few groups.
- Competition, through social closure, leads people to produce, emphasize and reinforce ethnic and racial boundaries.

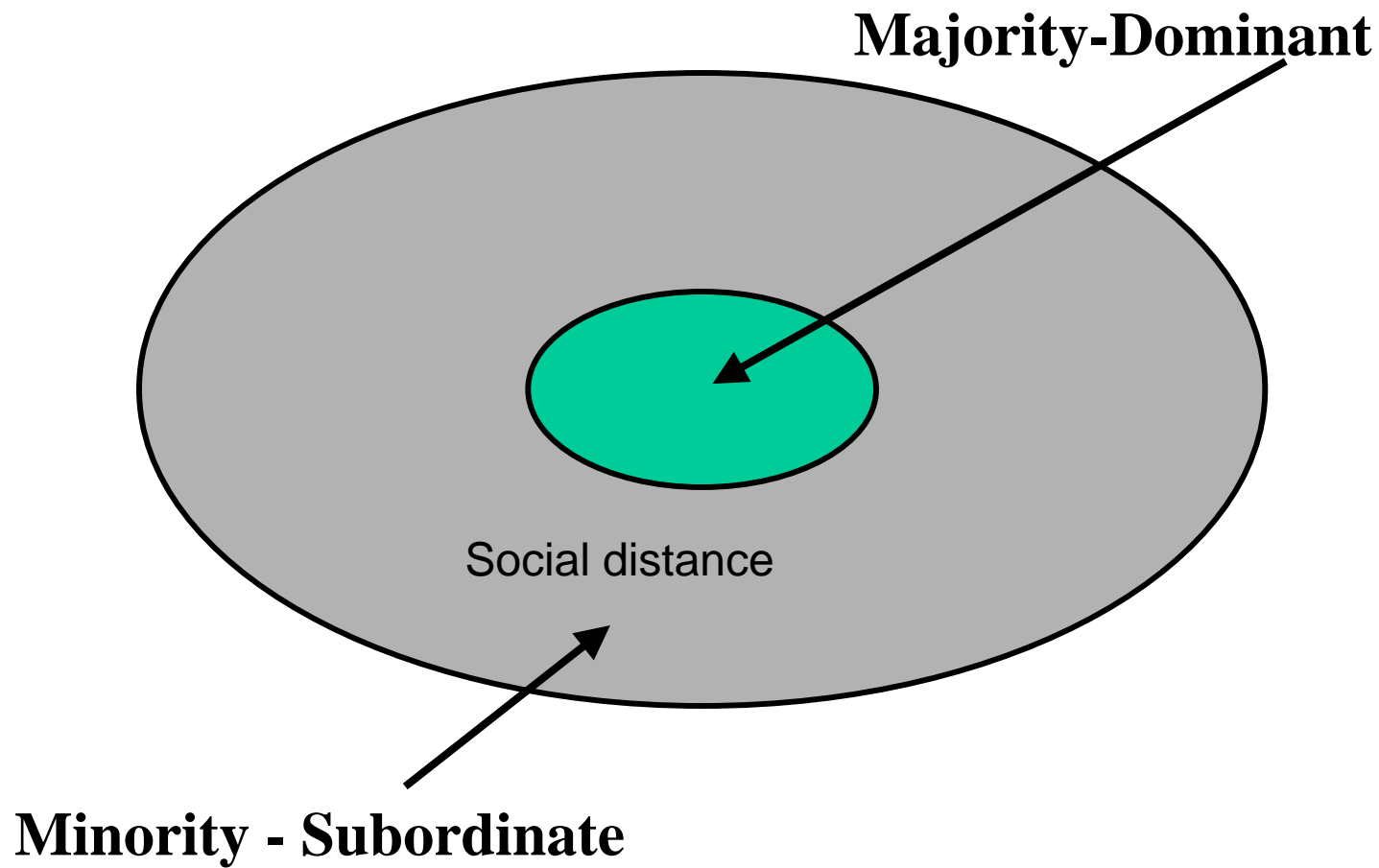
# Modern Conflict Theories

- Modern theories also address how competition and conflict reinforce preexisting ethnic or racial boundaries or even generate them anew

# Internal Colonialism

- Draws a parallel between European colonialism and social dominance within one society
- Richer, culturally dominant group subordinates an ethnically or racially identified “subordinate” group within the same country
- Similar to Social Dominance Theory to be discussed in a few lectures.

# Ethnic Stratification (Thinking in Spheres)



# Internal Colonialism in US

- Black experiences viewed in terms of economic exploitation and rigid stratification. America's treatment of Blacks resembles past European subjugation and exploitation of non-Western peoples
- Black ghettos are more nearly permanent than immigrant ghettos and are controlled economically, politically, and administratively from the outside.
- Continual exploitation of Blacks produces conflict and confrontation (this theory may also apply to Mexican Americans and Native Americans).

# Inequality: Measures

Table 1. Selected socioeconomic indicators for groups in the United States in 1990						
<b>Ethnic racial groups</b>		<b>Median family income, 1989</b>		<b>Percentage persons in poverty</b>		<b>Labor force participation (%)</b>
White not Hispanic		37,630		10		65
Black		22,430		30		63
American Indian		21,750		31		66
Hispanic		25,064		25		68
Mexican		24,119		26		68
Puerto Rican		21,941		32		60
Cuban		32,417		15		65
Asian		41,583		14		67
Japanese		51,550		7		65
Chinese		41,316		14		66
Filipino		46,698		6		75
Korean		33,909		14		63
Asian Indian		49,309		10		72
Vietnamese		30,550		26		65
Cambodian		18,126		43		47
Hmong		14,327		64		29
Laotian		23,101		35		58
Source: U.S. Census of Population, 1990, Social and Economic Characteristics CP2-1, Washington DC, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993.						

# Split labor Market theory

- Competition between ethnic or racial groups from the same class.
- Ethnic antagonism results from a combination of economic exploitation by employers and economic competition between two or more groups of laborers that produces a wage differential for labor.
- Much ethnic antagonism is based not on ethnicity and race but on the conflict between higher-paid and lower-paid labor. If the higher-paid group is strong enough, it may be able to block the cheaper competition through an exclusionary movement or a caste system.
- Video to come: Skinheads USA

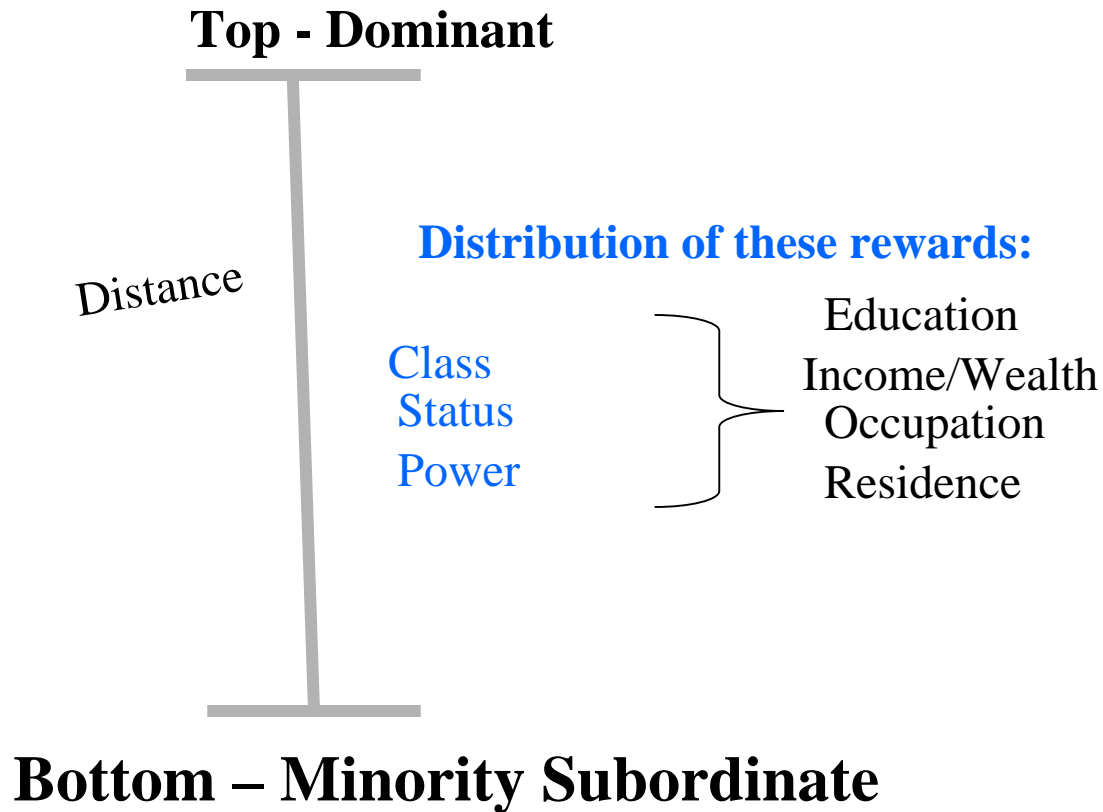
# Middleman/Enclave Theory

- Focus on the niches that various ethnic groups carve out for themselves in the larger economy
- Employ members of their own group and either serve their own or other minority populations as “middleman” traders
- Sometimes they compete in the larger economy in areas where dominant-group entrepreneurs are paying little attention

# Middleman Ethnic Minority

- Middleman between
  - Producer and consumer
  - Employer and employee
  - Owner and renter
  - Elite and masses
- Jews in Europe, Chinese in Southeast Asia, Asians in East Africa, Armenians in Turkey,
- Many 1<sup>st</sup> generation Jewish, Japanese and Korean Americans – but now?

# Ethnic Stratification



# Ethnic Stratification

**Top - Majority**



**Middleman Minority**

**Bottom - Minority**

## Koreans: Middleman Minority

- The 12 percent self-employment rate of Korean Americans is the highest of all groups. In cities and exurbs, small Korean family-operated businesses are especially conspicuous.
- In Los Angeles, they dominate the retail wig and liquor business. In D.C., Philadelphia, New York City, and Chicago, they are visible as grocery-store owners and fruit-stand operators. Others work as employees in these small stores and firms, which penetrate the black and Hispanic markets.
- Because they occupy an intermediate position in trade and commerce between producer and consumer, Koreans are a middleman minority.

# Summary of Conflict Theories

- 1.) Show that conflict and competition can promote ethnic and racial boundaries
- 2.) Clarify that power is important in ethnic and racial processes; some groups have the power to make social boundaries
- 3.) Introduces a class dimension into the topic of race and ethnicity

# Limits of Circumstantialism

- There are good examples of ethnicity and split labor theory (South Africa). But why does ethnicity persist among Native Americans in a disadvantageous way?
- Internal colonialism makes sense for many examples, but why is it that French-speaking Quebecois (who are relatively affluent) are trying to separate from Canada?

# Limits of Circumstantialism

- How can this perspective deal with ethnicity in and of itself when it boils ethnicity down to instrumental economic and political processes?
- Like assimilation, what forces are to keep ethnicity from gradually disappearing?

# Two positions

- 1.) Ethnicity is a by-product of other more basic interests and processes
- 2.) Ethnicity is an identity exploited by elites to energize political populations and advance their own agendas.



# Two Problems

- 1.) Ignores the sentiments and emotions of the ethnic groups (there is much evidence that these exist)
- 2.) How come interests are not attached to other collective identities such as class, religion, gender, region or occupation?

# Main Solution

- We will need to be sophisticated in accounting for BOTH the forces of primordial ties and instrumental processes
- In sum, we need to revise and blend the approaches covered so far.