

# Chapter

# 7

# Ethnicities



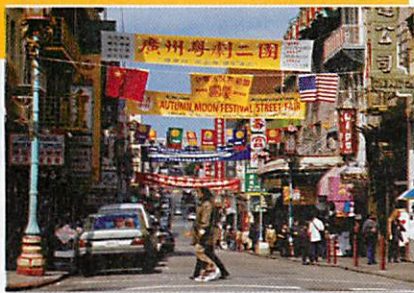
Why was this bridge blown up? Page 250



Why are these people burning torches on a mountain? Page 243

## KEY ISSUE 1

**Where Are Ethnicities Distributed?**



### **A World of Ethnicities p. 227**

Hispanics, African Americans, and Asian Americans are the most numerous U.S. ethnicities.

## KEY ISSUE 2

**Why Do Ethnicities Have Distinctive Distributions?**

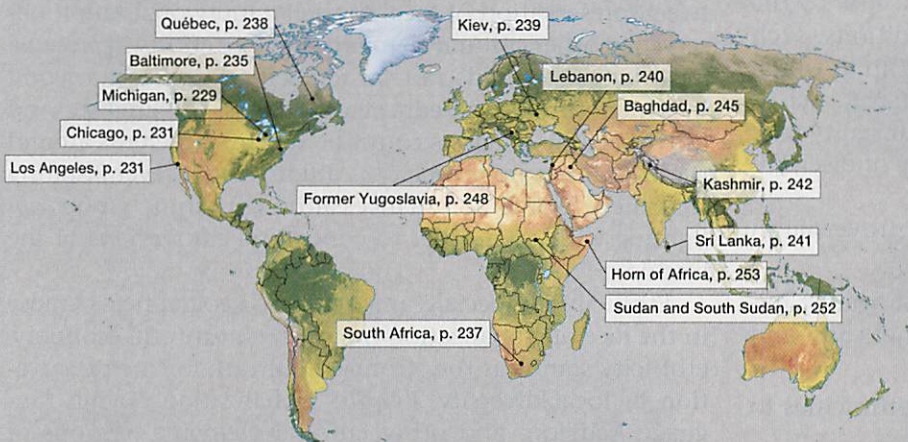


### **Ethnic Segregation p. 232**

Migration of ethnicities can result in patterns of segregation, sometimes caused by discrimination.



▲ South Africa is a country of ethnic diversity. Between 1948 and 1994, the whites who controlled the government enacted laws known as apartheid that segregated the country's ethnicities. Most of the rights of people other than whites were taken away. The laws have been repealed, but many symbols of apartheid remain in South Africa, including these benches outside the law court in Cape Town.



### KEY ISSUE 3

Why Do Conflicts Arise among Ethnicities?

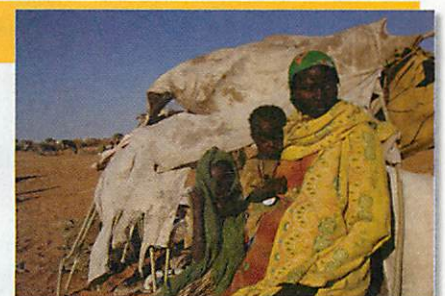


## Ethnic Diversity p. 238

Ethnicities compete to control portions of Earth's surface.

### KEY ISSUE 4

Why Do Ethnicities Engage in Ethnic Cleansing and Genocide?



## Ethnic Cleansing p. 246

At its most extreme, competition among ethnic groups has led to atrocities.

# Introducing Ethnicities

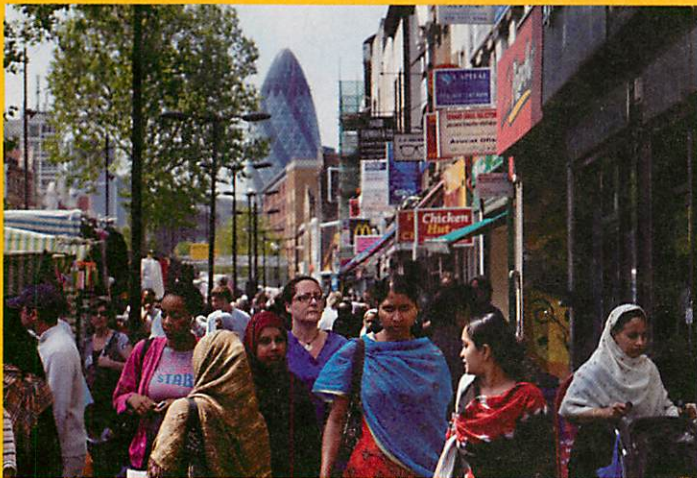
**Few humans live in total isolation. People are members of groups with which they share important attributes. If you are a citizen of the United States of America, you are identified as an American, which is a nationality.**

Many Americans further identify themselves as belonging to an ethnicity, a group with which they share cultural background. One-third of Americans identify their ethnicity as African American, Hispanic, or Asian American. Other Americans identify with ethnicities tracing back to Europe.

Ethnicity is a source of pride to people, a link to the experiences of ancestors and to cultural traditions, such as food and music preferences. The ethnic group to which one belongs has important measurable differences, such as average income, life expectancy, and infant mortality rate. Ethnicity also matters in places with a history of discrimination by one ethnic group against another.

The significance of ethnic diversity is controversial in the United States:

- To what extent does discrimination persist against minority ethnicities, especially African Americans and Hispanics?
- Should preferences be given to minority ethnicities to correct past patterns of discrimination?



▲ **FIGURE 7-1 ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN LONDON** Whitechapel Road is a major road in East London. The street has long been a commercial center for immigrants to the United Kingdom, currently primarily from South Asia. In the background is central London, including the highrise building housing the insurance company Swiss Re, which is known informally as the gherkin (British for pickle).

- To what extent should the distinct cultural identity of ethnicities be encouraged or protected?

Geographers are interested in where ethnicities are distributed across *space*, like other elements of culture (Figure 7-1). An ethnic group is tied to a particular *place* because members of the group—or their ancestors—were born and raised there. The cultural traits displayed by an ethnicity derive from particular conditions and practices in the group's homeland.

The reason ethnicities have distinctive traits should by now be familiar. Like other cultural elements, ethnic identity derives from the interplay of *connections* with other groups and isolation from them.

Ethnicity is an especially important cultural element of local diversity because our ethnic identity is immutable. We can deny or suppress our ethnicity, but we cannot choose to change it in the same way we can choose to speak a different language or practice a different religion. If our parents come from two ethnic groups or our grandparents from four, our ethnic identity may be extremely diluted, but it never completely disappears.

The study of ethnicity lacks the tension in *scale* between preservation of local diversity and globalization observed in other cultural elements. Despite efforts to preserve local languages, it is not far-fetched to envision a world in which virtually all educated people speak English. And universalizing religions continue to gain adherents around the world. But no ethnicity is attempting or even aspiring to achieve global dominance, although ethnic groups are fighting with each other to control specific *regions* of the world.

Ethnicity is especially important to geographers because in the face of globalization trends in culture and economy, ethnicity stands as the strongest bulwark for the preservation of local diversity. Even if globalization engulfs language, religion, and other cultural elements, *regions* of distinct ethnic identity will remain.

- **KEY ISSUE 1** discusses *where* ethnicities are distributed, particularly in the United States. Ethnicity is especially important to geographers because in the face of *globalization* trends in culture and economy, ethnicity stands as the strongest bulwark for the preservation of *local diversity*.
- **KEY ISSUE 2** explains *why* ethnicities have distinctive distributions. Spatial patterns derive from patterns of migration and in some cases discrimination.
- **KEY ISSUE 3** looks at geographic factors underlying conflicts among ethnicities. Conflicts result in many places when more than one ethnic group fights to occupy the same space.
- **KEY ISSUE 4** analyzes examples of conflicts among ethnicities that lead to large-scale forced migration and killings.