

## A Note on Racial and Ethnic Classifications

We acknowledge the complexity of identity and the inadequacy of the racial classifications used in American society in the past and today. Race classifications are complex, and they are not sufficient to capture the diversity that exists within any single group. Nevertheless, an important part of learning about the history of educational justice in Boston in the 1960s and 1970s is understanding how race and ethnicity were conceptualized at the time. In this inquiry, we have attempted to use terms denoting racial and ethnic groups with care and intention.

When we refer to *Black Americans*, we include numerous groups of people of African descent who arrived or were brought by force to the United States at different times in history, from the colonial period until today. They have different, though connected, histories and experiences and may self-identify by a variety of different, more specific, terms.

When we refer to *African Americans*, we are referring to Black Americans who trace their families' histories in the United States back multiple generations. Americans whose ancestors were enslaved in the American South before the Civil War often identify this way. Some Americans whose ancestors immigrated to the United States from the Caribbean and Africa in the late 1800s and early 1900s also identify as African American, even as they may still maintain parts of the culture from where their family came. Because large-scale immigration from the Caribbean and Africa to Boston did not occur until after the time period of focus in this inquiry, we most often identify the leaders of the effort to desegregate Boston's school system up until the 1970s as African American.

When we refer to *Latinx Americans*, we are referring to people with roots in the countries of Central and South America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. Due to Latin America's complex history of colonization and migration, there is a significant diversity of ethnic and racial backgrounds in Latinx identity. As a result, the ways that many Latinx people identify themselves do not fit neatly into the Black-white dichotomy predominantly used in the United States to classify race. During the historical period on which this inquiry is focused, Latinx Bostonians were predominantly Spanish-speaking. We acknowledge that many in Boston's burgeoning Brazilian community today also identify as Latinx. Large-scale

immigration from Brazil to Boston began in the 1980s, after the time period of focus in this inquiry.

This inquiry specifies the efforts of *Chinese* American Bostonians, rather than using the broader classification of Asian Americans, because up until the time period of focus, Chinese American Bostonians were the only people of Asian descent who lived in the city in significant numbers. This was largely due to US immigration law, which excluded immigrants from China and other Asian countries from 1882 until 1965. Boston's Chinese American community predated the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. After the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, immigrants from all countries in Asia began to arrive in larger numbers to the United States and to Boston.

When we refer to *white* Bostonians, we are referring to numerous groups of people of European descent who came to the United States at different times in history, beginning in the colonial era. The definition of "white" has changed over time, and situationally, according to the desires of those with most power and status in American society. Some European immigrant groups, including those from Ireland and Italy, were not conferred all of the privileges of whiteness upon their arrival to the United States, but were given those privileges over time. In Boston during much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there were clear distinctions of class and status between groups that are largely considered white today. Specifically, Protestants of English descent—known then colloquially as the "Boston Brahmin"—were generally of higher socioeconomic status and influence than those of Irish and Italian descent, who were mostly Catholic. Some Americans with roots in other parts of the world, including North Africa, Asia, and Latin America, challenged the definition of whiteness at different times in US history. In response, American legal and political institutions sometimes redefined the meaning of whiteness in seemingly arbitrary ways to include or exclude those groups from the privileges of being white.

We do not wish to erase the complexity of identity through our use of these terms, and we recognize the countless ways in which these categories overlap and interfere with each other in trying to understand the identity of any individual person. We acknowledge the tension felt by those who are forced to choose, or accept someone else's choice, between multiple identifications. Students will encounter examples of individuals in such situations in this inquiry. We acknowledge that these categories and classifications are inadequate and that they have shifted shapes and meanings throughout history to suit the needs of the white institutions and individuals in power.