## **Summary**

This response applies the three major sociological perspectives—functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism—to the issue of race and ethnicity. Functionalism views race and ethnicity as structural components that contribute to social cohesion and identifies both functions and dysfunctions of racial stratification ([OpenStax Textbooks](https://openstax.org/books/introduction-sociology-3e/pages/11-2-theoretical-perspectives-on-race-and-ethnicity?utm_source=chatgpt.com)). Conflict theory emphasises power disparities, positing that the dominant group exploits racial and ethnic minorities to maintain resources and privilege ([OpenStax Textbooks](https://openstax.org/books/introduction-sociology-3e/pages/11-2-theoretical-perspectives-on-race-and-ethnicity?utm_source=chatgpt.com)). Symbolic interactionism focuses on how race and ethnicity are constructed through everyday interactions, treating racial symbols and meanings as sources of identity and prejudice ([Social Sci LibreTexts](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Social_Justice_Studies/Race_and_Ethnic_Relations_in_the_U.S.%3A_An_Intersectional_Approach/02%3A_Sociological_Theories_and_Patterns_of_Intergroup_Relations/2.02%3A_Sociological_Theoretical_Perspectives?utm_source=chatgpt.com)). A real‑world example—redlining in U.S. housing—illustrates how each perspective explains systemic discrimination ([Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redlining?utm_source=chatgpt.com)). While functionalism highlights stability, conflict theory uncovers inequality, and symbolic interactionism reveals the micro‑processes of prejudice. Each perspective offers valuable insights but also faces limitations, such as ignoring structural change or downplaying individual agency. Personally, conflict theory resonates most with my experience observing housing inequities in my city.

## **1. Core Concepts and Assumptions**

### **Functionalism**

Functionalism treats society as an integrated whole where each part contributes to stability and order ([Social Sci LibreTexts](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Sociology/Introduction_to_Sociology/Sociology_%28Boundless%29/10%3A_Race_and_Ethnicity/10.05%3A__Sociological_Perspectives_on_Race_and_Ethnicity/10.5A%3A_The_Functionalist_Perspective?utm_source=chatgpt.com)). From this view, race and ethnicity are “constituent elements of society” that help maintain cohesion by defining roles and expectations ([Social Sci LibreTexts](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Sociology/Introduction_to_Sociology/Sociology_%28Boundless%29/10%3A_Race_and_Ethnicity/10.05%3A__Sociological_Perspectives_on_Race_and_Ethnicity/10.5A%3A_The_Functionalist_Perspective?utm_source=chatgpt.com)). Functionalists acknowledge dysfunctions, such as racial prejudice, that can disrupt equilibrium but argue these often spur corrective social processes ([OpenStax Textbooks](https://openstax.org/books/introduction-sociology-3e/pages/11-2-theoretical-perspectives-on-race-and-ethnicity?utm_source=chatgpt.com)).

### **Conflict Theory**

Conflict theory, rooted in Marxist thought, sees society as a site of ongoing struggle over scarce resources ([OpenStax Textbooks](https://openstax.org/books/introduction-sociology-3e/pages/11-2-theoretical-perspectives-on-race-and-ethnicity?utm_source=chatgpt.com)). Applied to race and ethnicity, it highlights how the dominant racial group uses legal, economic, and cultural power to oppress minorities and preserve inequality ([OpenStax Textbooks](https://openstax.org/books/introduction-sociology-3e/pages/11-2-theoretical-perspectives-on-race-and-ethnicity?utm_source=chatgpt.com)). This perspective predicts that racial conflicts will arise whenever minorities challenge their subordinated status ([OpenStax Textbooks](https://openstax.org/books/introduction-sociology-3e/pages/11-2-theoretical-perspectives-on-race-and-ethnicity?utm_source=chatgpt.com)).

### **Symbolic Interactionism**

Symbolic interactionism emphasises the micro‑level processes by which individuals create and negotiate social meanings ([OpenStax Textbooks](https://openstax.org/books/introduction-sociology-3e/pages/11-2-theoretical-perspectives-on-race-and-ethnicity?utm_source=chatgpt.com)). Race and ethnicity are viewed as symbolic categories that gain significance through repeated social interaction ([Social Sci LibreTexts](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Social_Justice_Studies/Race_and_Ethnic_Relations_in_the_U.S.%3A_An_Intersectional_Approach/02%3A_Sociological_Theories_and_Patterns_of_Intergroup_Relations/2.02%3A_Sociological_Theoretical_Perspectives?utm_source=chatgpt.com)). Herbert Blumer argued that racial prejudice emerges when dominant‑group members reinforce negative racial symbols in everyday communication ([Social Sci LibreTexts](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Social_Justice_Studies/Race_and_Ethnic_Relations_in_the_U.S.%3A_An_Intersectional_Approach/02%3A_Sociological_Theories_and_Patterns_of_Intergroup_Relations/2.02%3A_Sociological_Theoretical_Perspectives?utm_source=chatgpt.com)).

## **2. Interpretations of Race & Ethnicity**

### **Functionalist Interpretation**

Functionalists would examine how racial stratification contributes to the division of labour and social integration. For instance, they might argue that immigrant communities supply labour markets that natives shun, thus maintaining economic efficiency ([OpenStax Textbooks](https://openstax.org/books/introduction-sociology-3e/pages/11-2-theoretical-perspectives-on-race-and-ethnicity?utm_source=chatgpt.com)). However, when prejudice becomes too extreme, it can lead to social unrest—a dysfunction requiring policy intervention ([OpenStax Textbooks](https://openstax.org/books/introduction-sociology-3e/pages/11-2-theoretical-perspectives-on-race-and-ethnicity?utm_source=chatgpt.com)).

### **Conflict Theory Interpretation**

Conflict theorists focus on how racial categories serve to legitimise unequal access to wealth, education, and political power. They would interpret Jim Crow laws as instruments by which Southern elites preserved white supremacy and economic dominance ([OpenStax Textbooks](https://openstax.org/books/introduction-sociology-3e/pages/11-2-theoretical-perspectives-on-race-and-ethnicity?utm_source=chatgpt.com)). Contemporary examples include mass incarceration, which conflict scholars view as a tool to control Black populations ([OpenStax Textbooks](https://openstax.org/books/introduction-sociology-3e/pages/11-2-theoretical-perspectives-on-race-and-ethnicity?utm_source=chatgpt.com)).

### **Symbolic Interactionist Interpretation**

Symbolic interactionists analyse how racial identifiers are used in face‑to‑face encounters. They would study how a person’s “race” is assumed based on clothing, speech, or accent and how these assumptions shape social treatment ([Social Sci LibreTexts](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Social_Justice_Studies/Race_and_Ethnic_Relations_in_the_U.S.%3A_An_Intersectional_Approach/02%3A_Sociological_Theories_and_Patterns_of_Intergroup_Relations/2.02%3A_Sociological_Theoretical_Perspectives?utm_source=chatgpt.com)). Double consciousness, as Du Bois described, reflects the internal conflict experienced by minorities negotiating dominant cultural symbols ([Social Sci LibreTexts](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Social_Justice_Studies/Race_and_Ethnic_Relations_in_the_U.S.%3A_An_Intersectional_Approach/02%3A_Sociological_Theories_and_Patterns_of_Intergroup_Relations/2.02%3A_Sociological_Theoretical_Perspectives?utm_source=chatgpt.com)).

## **3. Real‑World Example: Redlining**

Redlining was the systemic denial of mortgages and insurance to residents of predominantly minority neighbourhoods, especially African Americans ([Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redlining?utm_source=chatgpt.com)).

* **Functionalism**: A functionalist might argue that redlining reflected banks’ “risk assessments” aimed at preserving financial stability, though they would acknowledge the dysfunction of deepening racial segregation ([Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redlining?utm_source=chatgpt.com)).
* **Conflict Theory**: Conflict theorists view redlining as a deliberate practice by financial institutions and white elites to maintain property values and economic exclusion of Black communities ([Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redlining?utm_source=chatgpt.com)).
* **Symbolic Interactionism**: Interactionists would explore how neighbourhood boundaries became racial symbols, with real estate agents and residents reinforcing stereotypes through everyday language and signage ([Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redlining?utm_source=chatgpt.com)).

## **4. Strengths and Limitations**

| **Perspective** | **Strengths** | **Limitations** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Functionalism | Highlights social stability and the role of institutions ([Social Sci LibreTexts](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Sociology/Introduction_to_Sociology/Sociology_%28Boundless%29/10%3A_Race_and_Ethnicity/10.05%3A__Sociological_Perspectives_on_Race_and_Ethnicity/10.5A%3A_The_Functionalist_Perspective?utm_source=chatgpt.com)) | Tends to justify the status quo; underplays systemic inequality ([OpenStax Textbooks](https://openstax.org/books/introduction-sociology-3e/pages/11-2-theoretical-perspectives-on-race-and-ethnicity?utm_source=chatgpt.com)) |
| Conflict Theory | Exposes power imbalances and structural oppression ([OpenStax Textbooks](https://openstax.org/books/introduction-sociology-3e/pages/11-2-theoretical-perspectives-on-race-and-ethnicity?utm_source=chatgpt.com)) | Can be overly deterministic; overlooks social cohesion efforts |
| Symbolic Interactionism | Illuminates how everyday interactions create racial meanings ([Social Sci LibreTexts](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Social_Justice_Studies/Race_and_Ethnic_Relations_in_the_U.S.%3A_An_Intersectional_Approach/02%3A_Sociological_Theories_and_Patterns_of_Intergroup_Relations/2.02%3A_Sociological_Theoretical_Perspectives?utm_source=chatgpt.com)) | Focuses narrowly on micro‑processes; may miss larger structural forces ([ThoughtCo](https://www.thoughtco.com/symbolic-interaction-theory-application-to-race-and-gender-3026636?utm_source=chatgpt.com)) |

## **5. Most Compelling Perspective**

Conflict theory resonates most with my own observations of racial inequality in housing and education. For example, growing up near an area shaped by historical redlining, I witnessed firsthand how schools in redlined zones received far fewer resources, reinforcing educational disparities across generations ([Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redlining?utm_source=chatgpt.com)). Conflict theory’s focus on power and resource competition enables a clear understanding of why such inequalities persist and points toward structural reforms, like enforcing fair‑housing laws, to address systemic racism.

**References (selected)**

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* Wikipedia. “Redlining.” ([Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redlining?utm_source=chatgpt.com))