Ethnic and Racial Studies was established in 1978 by its Founding Editor, John Stone. It was founded at a time when this field of scholarly research was relatively small. In the period since its foundation it has become the pre-eminent scholarly forum for researchers working in the field of ethnic and racial studies in different parts of the world. As a result the journal has been able to make a substantial contribution to the wider field and we have published many of the key papers that have shaped the study of race and ethnicity as well as related areas of scholarly debate, such as the study of nationalism, migration and ethnic conflict. The standing of the journal has been cemented in recent years by its expansion from four issues a year to twelve issues. This has included a number of special issues that have been edited by guest editors and have featured papers on a wide range of themes and topics.

This is the first of a number of e-Special Issues that will bring together papers from the journal’s extensive archive, which has now been digitised. As editors we see the digitisation of all the issues of the journal as a unique opportunity to draw together articles on specific themes that we have published over the years in order to enable the research communities that we serve to identify and access
the development of particular debates and key articles on a particular theme. It will also encourage, hopefully, students and lecturers to make full use of our archive as a teaching resource in this rapidly growing, and changing, field of scholarship. The journal has expanded quickly in the past decade and the availability of our archive is yet another facet of our efforts to keep the journal at the forefront of scholarly debates in this field.

In producing this and future *e-Special Issues* we have two key objectives in mind. First, each of the issues will be organised around specific fields of scholarly research, debate or concepts. The journal has reflected the evolution of this field of scholarship from both a theoretical and empirical angle and we envisage that these issues will help to highlight the role of the journal in developing core research agendas and perspectives. Second, we plan that the selections of papers in each issue will reflect a range of perspectives, taking account of the ways in which particular areas of research and debate have evolved and changed over time. The journal has placed much emphasis over the years on the need to be inclusive of the full range of research agendas in ethnic and racial studies and this is a tradition that we hope will be reflected in these special issues.

In launching this series of *e-Special Issues* it is useful to reflect briefly on the changing research agendas and themes that have helped to shape this field of scholarship since the journal was founded in 1978. This is what we shall do next before turning to the outline of the structure of this special issue.
Context and background

Perhaps the first point to highlight is that the field of race and ethnic studies has changed hugely in the period since the journal was founded. As a field of scholarship and research the study of race and ethnic relations was relatively marginal to the core theoretical and empirical research agendas of sociology and other social science disciplines. Although it had emerged as a field of scholarship in American sociology in the early part of the twentieth century (Collins, 2007; Winant, 2007), it remained relatively marginal to its core research agendas. The same can be said of the situation in British sociology, where it emerged as a distinct area of research and scholarship in the 1960s, in a context where there was increasing public debate about immigration, race relations and concerns about racial conflict (Solomos and Back, 1996). In terms of public policy this has been evident in the development of policies aimed at promoting the social and cultural integration of racial and ethnic minorities, in anti-discrimination legislation aimed at tackling racism and in the promotion of a multicultural idea of Britain (Murji and Solomos, 2005).

This position of relative marginality did not mean that there was no substantive research in this field. Scholars and researchers in various disciplines, chiefly sociology, had already helped to establish it as a lively and innovative area of scholarship. In the British context the work of scholars such as Michael Banton and John Rex had helped to establish the sociological study of race and ethnicity within British sociology during the 1960s and 1970s. In the wider context of American sociology the study of race and ethnicity had become an integral element of research on social divisions and inequality. What is beyond doubt,
however, is that there has been a noticeable expansion of scholarly research and debate during the past three decades, often influenced by radical forms of sociological theory and shaped in some ways by the changes that we have seen in the past three decades.

At the time of the journal’s foundation there were already clear signs of change and new voices and agendas were coming onto the scene. This was partly the result of the work of established scholars as well as the emergence of new scholars whose work was to prove influential in the coming period. The work of Robert Miles and Paul Gilroy, which forms part of this special issue, can be seen as reflecting aspects of these new agendas. Part of this expansion of race and ethnic studies can be linked to the opening up of the sociological and social science agenda to new theories and perspectives influenced by the political and intellectual trends linked to social movements in the 1960s and 1970s (Skeggs, 2008). It was also linked to wider policy and political agendas about race and ethnic issues, both at a global level and in specific societies. In Britain, for example, the emergence of new critical studies of race and ethnicity in the 1970s and 1980s formed part of the growing influence of Marxist and neo-Marxist perspectives in sociology and other social science disciplines. In the U.S. over the same period there was a notable expansion of both research and teaching on questions about race and ethnic relations, fostered in part by the work of scholars who sought to comprehend the historical and contemporary role of race in American society and culture.

In hindsight *Ethnic and Racial Studies* was founded at a time when this expansion of scholarly and policy debate about race and ethnic relations required
a specialist journal to serve as a platform for high quality research and debate. If one explores the first decade of the journal’s archive the overriding impression is that it established itself fairly quickly as a key forum for disseminating research that had both an empirical as well as a conceptual flavour about it. In addition the journal had a clear global orientation, with articles covering comparative race and ethnic issues having a prominent place. The global orientation has, if anything, become even more pronounced over the past four decades, a period that has seen the development of a diverse range of research that is going all over the globe on aspects of race and ethnic relations.

**Trends and developments**

Another important trend in the past four decades has been the emergence of diverse paradigms and perspectives within the broad arena of race and ethnic studies (Back and Solomos, 2009; Collins and Solomos, 2010). We have seen intense debate about the boundaries of what it is that we study when we research race and ethnicity in the contemporary environment. Some of these debates have been centred on academic concerns as well as wider policy and political preoccupations. In the papers we have included in this special issue by John Rex and by Robert Miles we get some insight into some of the debates that went on in various ways throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Both papers highlight the ways in which researching questions about race, ethnicity and racism inevitably draws scholars into questions about the nature of the social, cultural and economic realities that are being examined.

It is a facet of the journal that it sought from the beginning to operate a policy of being open to a diversity of perspectives, research strategies and conceptual
frames. As a peer reviewed journal we have sought to include different generations of scholars in the work of the journal both as referees and authors. Rather than assume that the journal will have either a narrow disciplinary or theoretical frame it has worked on the principle that it is best to recognise the contributions of scholars and researchers working on questions about race and ethnicity from a wide range of perspectives. This openness has allowed us to give space in the journal to a wide range of theoretical and empirical studies, an approach which is reflected in the choice of articles to include in this special issue.

**Selection of papers**

In terms of the selection of papers to include in *e-Special Issues* there are inevitably some constraints of space and in general we shall include in each of them a selection of at least 8 papers, which is the usual length of our regular issues. Given the scope of our archive this will inevitably involve being very selective in our choice of papers for each issue. Given the focus on this first issue on theories and changing research agendas we have selected twelve papers to reflect the evolution of theoretical perspectives in this field. There are many more papers that we could have included, but constraints of space required us to be selective.

The first paper by Donald Baker comes from the first volume of the journal and it serves to provide an insight into debates about the comparative study of race relations. This was an important point of reference in a number of the early volumes of the journal and reflected a concern to link the study of race relations
to the comparative study of forms of racial domination and differential access to politics and power.

The next two papers are examples of the impact of Marxist perspectives on the research agenda. The paper by John Gabriel and Gideon Ben-Tovim was one of the first attempts to provide the foundations of a Marxist critique of the sociological theories about race and ethnic relations. In developing their critique of sociological theories of race relations they also outlined their attempt to develop an alternative conceptualisation that drew on debates going on at the time about Marxism and social theory. Their paper is followed by Robert Miles critique of the earlier work of Oliver Cromwell Cox which sought to develop a Marxist analysis interrelationship between class, race and ethnicity.

One of the intellectual foundations for the sociological study of race relations was outlined as early as 1970 by John Rex in his classic *Race Relations in Sociological Theory* (Rex, 1983). In this book Rex had been concerned to set out a frame for integrating the study of race within sociological theory and analysis, and it remains an important point of reference to this day. It had, however, become a book that attracted much critical comment, and it is partly in response to these commentaries that Rex sought to outline what he saw a paradigm for developing the agenda of race relations research further. Rex's contribution links up with the paper by David Mason, which sought to draw on comparative research to provide a theoretical frame for the analysis of the ways in which race relations situations were shaped by patterns of group formation and differential power relations.
The paper by Barbara Ballis Lal takes a more historical angle by exploring the contribution of the classic studies of the Chicago School to the study of ethnicity. The work of the earlier generation of sociologists working on questions about race and ethnicity remained relatively neglected at the time and Ballis Lal sought to situate their concerns in the context of the questions that were being explored by more contemporary theorists.

The second paper by Robert Miles is included in this issue in order to give voice to his effort to develop a critical analysis of the ‘race relations’ analytical frame from a neo-Marxist perspective. This paper helpfully provides a summary of some of the key themes that were to be developed more fully by him in a number of studies during the 1980s and 1990s (Miles, 1989; Miles, 1993).

The role of race in American society has been an important point of reference in the journal since its foundation, and we receive a large number of submissions from U.S. based authors. The paper by Jeffrey Prager is included here as an example of the papers we published in this area. Prager’s account provides an overview of the changing meanings of the idea of race within American society and culture and he argues forcefully for the need to situate the analysis of racial ideas within the changing racial structures rather than seeing them in isolation.

This is followed by Paul Gilroy’s concise call for a radical rethinking of how we research race and talk about race. Gilroy’s paper had been presented at a conference that celebrated the first twenty years of the journal, and is framed by his critique of what he saw as the reification of the concept of race in both the mainstream of sociology and in some neo-Marxist accounts. His analysis in this paper prefigures the more detailed account of his critique of what he defines as
raciology which is to be found in *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race*, which was published in 2000.

The final three papers in this issue can be seen as interventions in debates about the focus of research on race and ethnicity. The first of these by Rohit Barot and John Bird is a detailed exploration of the origins and usage of the concept of racialisation in much of the literature on race and ethnic relations. Barot and Bird argue forcefully that there is a need for sociologists to be more precise in their usage of this notion and aware of the analytical implications that underpin it. Many of the issues they touch upon in this paper led to more debate and analysis in a wide range of contexts (Murji and Solomos, 2005).

The next paper by Michael Banton builds on his wider body of scholarship to offer a perspective into how sociologists today should be studying ethnic and racial relations in diverse contexts. Banton has been a regular contributor to the journal over the years and his work can be seen as an important voice in shaping this field of scholarship over the past few decades. In this paper he helpfully seeks to situate the ways in which the classic contribution of Max Weber to the analysis of ethnicity can provide a basis for developing analytical tools to explore the formation of ethnic and racial identities.

The final paper by David Goldberg is the most recent to be included in this special issue, and its focus is on the question of racial comparisons and how best to develop methods that overcome the limits of what he sees as comparativism. Goldberg’s account is framed around the need for social theorists and researchers working in this area to think beyond the method of comparativism and explore the complex and varied ways in which racial ideas circulate and cross borders.
Taken together we hope that the papers in this e-Special Issue highlight both the range and the scope of the journal’s contribution to the study of race and ethnic relations. We envisage that future issues in this series will focus on other core areas in which the journal has made an important contribution.

References


