Assimilation and Pluralism

This chapter continues to look at the ways in which ethnic and racial groups in the United States relate to one another. Two concepts, assimilation and pluralism, are at the core of the discussion. Each includes a variety of possible group relationships and pathways along which group relations might develop.

Assimilation is a process in which formerly distinct and separate groups come to share a common culture and merge together socially. As a society undergoes assimilation, differences among groups begin to decrease. Pluralism, on the other hand, exists when groups maintain their individual identities. In a pluralistic society, groups remain separate, and their cultural and social differences persist over time.

In some ways, assimilation and pluralism are contrary processes, but they are not mutually exclusive. They may occur together in a variety of combinations within a particular society or group. Some segments of a society may be assimilating, while others are maintaining (or even increasing) their differences. As we shall see in Chapters 5–9, virtually every minority group in the United States has, at any given time, some members who are assimilating and others who are preserving or reviving traditional cultures. Some Native Americans, for example, are pluralistic. They live on or near reservations, are strongly connected to their heritage, and speak their native languages. Other Native Americans are very much assimilated into the dominant society and live in urban areas, speak English
only, and know relatively little about their
cultural traditions. Both assimilation and
pluralism are important forces in the everyday
day lives of Native Americans and most
other minority groups.

In this chapter, I analyze assimilation and
pluralism and consider theories in which they
play central roles. The first two sections of the
chapter explore theories and concepts that
grew out of the sociological examination of
the massive immigration from Europe to the
United States between the 1820s and 1920s. A
great deal of energy has been devoted to docu-
menting, describing, and understanding the
experiences of these immigrants and their
descendants, and a rich and complex literature
has been developed. We then briefly examine
other possible group goals and, in the fourth
section of the chapter, we examine a more
contemporary theory developed in response to
the experiences of recent (post-1965) immi-
greants to the United States. The newest
arrivals differ in many ways from the earlier
wave of European immigrants, and theories
based on the experiences of the latter will not
necessarily apply to the former. By the end of
this chapter, you will be familiar with many of
the concepts needed to understand the variety
of possible minority-dominant group situ-
ations, the directions our society (and the
groups within it) can take, and the relations-
ships between concepts that will guide us
throughout this text.

ASSIMILATION

We begin with assimilation because the
emphasis in U.S. group relations historically
has been on this goal rather than on plural-
ism. This section presents some of the most
important sociological theories and concepts
that have been used to describe and analyze
assimilation in the United States.

Types of Assimilation

Assimilation is a general term for a pro-
cess that can follow a number of different
pathways. One form of assimilation is
expressed in the metaphor of the "melting
pot," a process in which different groups
come together and contribute in roughly equal
amounts to create a common culture and a
new, unique society. Popular understandings
of the American experience of assimilation
often use the melting pot concept and stress
the idea that diverse peoples came together to
construct U.S. society and American culture.
The melting pot metaphor sees assimilation as
benign and egalitarian, a process that empha-
sizes sharing and inclusion.

Although it is a powerful image in our
society, the melting pot is not an accurate
description of how American assimilation
actually proceeded (Abrahamson, 1980,
pp. 152–154). Some groups—especially racial
minority groups—have been largely excluded
from the "melting" process. Furthermore, the
melting pot brew has had a distinctly
Anglo-centric flavor. "Few better or worse, the
white Anglo-Saxon Protestant tradition was
for two centuries—and in crucial respects still
is—the dominant influence on American cul-
ture and society" (Schlesinger, 1992, p. 28).

Contrary to the melting pot image, assimila-
tion in the United States generally has been
a coercive and largely one-sided process better
described by the term Americanization or
Anglo-conformity. Rather than an equal shar-
ing of elements and a gradual blending of
diverse peoples, assimilation in the United
States was designed to maintain the predomi-
nance of the British-type institutional patterns
created during the early years of American
society. Under Anglo-conformity, immigrant
and minority groups were expected to adapt
to Anglo-American culture as quickly as
possible.

Historically, Americanization has been a
precondition for access to better jobs, educa-
tion, and other opportunities. Assimilation
has meant that minority groups have had to
give up their traditions and adopt the traditi-
ions of Anglo-American culture. To be sure,
many groups and individuals were (and con-
tinue to be) eager to conform to Anglo culture
even if it meant losing much or all of their
heritage. For other groups, Americanization
created conflict, anxiety, demoralization, and
resentment, reactions which we will examine later in this text.

The “Traditional” Perspective on Assimilation: Theories and Concepts

The conclusion that the melting pot is not an accurate description of American assimilation comes from research on the immigrants who came from Europe between the 1820s and the 1920s. The sociologists who studied these experiences developed a body of theories and concepts so rich and so well established that we can call it the traditional perspective on assimilation. As you will see, these scholars have made invaluable contributions, and their thinking is impressively complex and comprehensive. This does not mean, of course, that they have exhausted the possibilities or answered (or asked) all the questions. Theorists studying American pluralism and contemporary scholars studying more recent immigrants both have questioned many aspects of traditional assimilation theory and have made a number of important contributions of their own.

Robert Park

Many traditional theories of assimilation are grounded in the work of Robert Park. He was one of a group of scholars who had a major hand in establishing sociology as a discipline in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. Park believed that intergroup relations go through a predictable set of phases that he called a “race relations cycle.” When groups first come into contact (through immigration, conquest, etc.), relations are conflictual and competitive. Eventually, however, the process, or cycle, moves toward assimilation, or the “interpenetration and fusion” of groups (Park & Burgess, 1924, p. 735).

Park argued further that assimilation is inevitable in a democratic and industrial society. In a political system based on democracy, fairness, and impartial justice, all groups eventually will secure equal treatment under the law. In an industrial economy, people tend to be judged on rational grounds—that is, on the basis of their abilities and talents—and not by ethnicity or race. Park believed that as American society modernized, urbanized, and industrialized, the boundaries between ethnic and racial groups would gradually lose their importance. Those boundaries eventually would dissolve, and a more “rational” and unified society would emerge (see also Geschwender, 1978, pp. 19–32; Hirschman, 1983).

Social scientists have examined, analyzed, and criticized Park’s conclusions for nearly 80 years. One frequently voiced criticism is that he did not specify a time frame for the completion of assimilation, and therefore his idea that assimilation is “inevitable” cannot be tested. Until the exact point in time when assimilation was complete, we would not know whether the theory was wrong or whether we just had not waited long enough.

An additional criticism of Park’s theory is that he did not describe the nature of the assimilation process in much detail. How would assimilation proceed? How would everyday life change? Which aspects of the group would change first?

Milton Gordon

To clarify some of the issues left unresolved by Park, we turn to the works of sociologist Milton Gordon, who made a major contribution to theories of assimilation in his book Assimilation in American Life (1964). In it, he broke down the overall process of assimilation into seven subprocesses; we will focus on the first three. Before considering these phases of assimilation, we need to consider some new concepts and terms.

Gordon made a distinction between the cultural and the structural components of society. Culture encompasses all aspects of the way of life associated with a group of people. It includes language, religious beliefs, customs and rules of etiquette, and the values and ideas people use to organize their lives and interpret their existence. The social structure, or structural components of a society, includes networks of social relationships,
Exhibit 2.1  Gordon’s Stages of Assimilation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Acculturation (cultural assimilation)</td>
<td>The group learns the culture, language, and value systems of the dominant society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Integration (structural assimilation)</td>
<td>Members of the group enter the public institutions and organizations of the dominant society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the secondary level:</td>
<td>Members of the group enter into the cliques, clubs, and friendship groups of the dominant society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the primary level:</td>
<td>Members of the group intermarry with members of the dominant group on a large-scale basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Intermarriage (marital assimilation)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Adapted from Gordon (1964, p. 71). Adapted with permission.

groups, organizations, stratification systems, communities, and families. The social structure organizes the work of the society and connects individuals to one another and to the larger society.

It is common in sociology to separate the social structure into primary and secondary sectors. The primary sector includes interpersonal relationships that are intimate and personal, such as families and groups of friends. Groups in the primary sector are small. The secondary sector consists of groups and organizations that are more public, task oriented, and impersonal. Organizations in the secondary sector often are very large and include businesses, factories, schools and colleges, and bureaucracies.

With these distinctions in mind, we can examine Gordon’s model of assimilation, also summarized in Exhibit 2.1. The first three stages, in order, are

1. Cultural assimilation, or acculturation. In this phase, members of the minority group learn the culture of the dominant group. Acculturation to the dominant Anglo-American culture might include learning the English language, changing eating habits, adopting new value systems, or altering the spelling of the family surname.

2. Structural assimilation, or integration. In the second stage of assimilation, the minority group enters the social structure of the larger society. Integration typically begins in the secondary sector and gradually moves into the primary sector. That is, before people can form friendships with members of other groups (integration into the primary sector), they must first become acquaintances. The initial contact between groups often occurs in public institutions such as schools and workplaces (integration into the secondary sector). Once a group has entered the institutions and public sectors of the larger society, according to Gordon, integration into the primary sector and the other stages of assimilation will follow (although not necessarily quickly). The greater their integration into the secondary sector, the more nearly equal the minority group will be to the dominant group in income, education, and occupational prestige. Measures of integration into the primary sector include the extent to which people have acquaintances, close friends, or neighbors from other groups.

3. Marital assimilation, or intermarriage. When integration into the primary sector becomes substantial, the basis for Gordon’s third stage of assimilation is established. People are most likely to select spouses from
among their primary relations, and thus, in Gordon’s view, primary structural integration typically precedes intermarriage.

Gordon argued that acculturation was a prerequisite for integration. Given the stress on Anglo-conformity, a member of an immigrant or minority group would not be able to compete for jobs or other opportunities in the secondary sector of the social structure until he or she had learned the dominant group’s culture. Gordon also believed, however, that successful acculturation does not automatically ensure that a group will begin the integration phase. The dominant group may still exclude the minority group from its institutions and limit the opportunities available to the group. Gordon argued that “acculturation without integration” (or Americanization without equality) is a common situation in the United States for many minority groups, especially racial minority groups.

In Gordon’s theory, movement from acculturation to integration is the crucial step in the assimilation process. Once that step is taken, all the other subprocesses will occur in due time. Gordon’s idea that assimilation runs a certain course in a certain order echoes Park’s conclusion regarding the inevitability of the process.

Forty years after Gordon published his analysis of assimilation, some of his conclusions have been called into question. For example, the individual subprocesses of assimilation that Gordon saw as linked in a certain order are often found to occur independently of one another (Yinger, 1985, p. 154). A group may integrate before acculturating or combine the subprocesses in other ways. In addition, many researchers no longer think of the process of assimilation as necessarily linear or one-way (Greeley, 1974). Groups (or segments thereof) may “reverse direction” and become less assimilated over time, revive their traditional cultures, relearn the old language, or revitalize ethnic organizations or associations.

Nonetheless, Gordon’s overall model continues to guide our understanding of the process of assimilation, to the point that a large part of the research agenda for contemporary studies of immigrants consists of assessing the extent to which their experiences can be described in Gordon’s terms (Alba & Nee, 1997). In fact, Gordon’s model will provide a major organizational framework for the case studies presented in Chapters 5-9.

**Human Capital Theory**

Why did some European immigrant groups acculturate and integrate more rapidly than others? Although not a theory of assimilation per se, human capital theory offers one possible answer to this question. This theory explains status attainment—or the level of success achieved by an individual in society—as a direct result of educational levels, personal values and skills, and other individual characteristics and abilities. Education is seen as an investment in human capital, not unlike the investment a business might make in machinery or new technology. The greater the investment in a person’s human capital, the higher the probability of success. Blau and Duncan (1967), in their pioneering statement of status attainment theory, found that even the relative advantage conferred by having a high-status father is largely mediated through education. In other words, high levels of affluence and occupational prestige are not so much a result of being born into a privileged status as they are the result of the superior education that affluence makes possible.

Human capital theory would explain upward mobility for immigrant groups in terms of the resources and cultural characteristics of the members of the group, especially their levels of education and familiarity with English. Success would be seen as a direct result of individual effort and the wise investment of personal resources. According to this theory, people or groups that do not achieve success haven’t tried hard enough, haven’t made the right kinds of educational investments, or have values or habits that limit their ability to compete.

More than most sociological theories, human capital theory is consistent with traditional American culture and values. Both tend to see success as an individual phenomenon, a
reward for hard work, sustained effort, and good character. Both tend to assume that success is equally available to all and that the larger society is open and neutral in its distribution of rewards and opportunity. Both tend to see assimilation as a highly desirable, benign process that blends diverse peoples and cultures into a strong, unified whole. Thus, people or groups that resist Americanization or question its benefits are seen as threatening, illegitimate, or dangerous.

On one level, human capital theory is an important theory of success and upward mobility, and we will, on occasion, use the theory to analyze the experiences of minority and immigrant groups. On another level, the theory is so resonant with American "commonsensical" views of success and failure that we may tend to use it uncritically. A final judgment on the validity of the theory will be more appropriately made at the end of the text, but you should be aware of the major limitations of the theory from the beginning. First, as an explanation of minority group experience, human capital theory is not so much "wrong" as it is incomplete. In other words, and as we shall see, it doesn't take account of all the factors that affect mobility and assimilation. Second, the assumption that U.S. society is— or ever has been—equally open and fair to all groups is simply wrong. We will point out other strengths and the limits of this perspective as we move through the text.

Assimilation Patterns

In this section, we will explore the patterns of assimilation followed by European immigrants and their descendants. These patterns have been established by research conducted in the traditional perspective and are consistent with the model of assimilation developed by Gordon.

The Importance of Generations

People today—social scientists, politicians, and ordinary citizens—often fail to recognize the time and effort it takes for a group to become completely Americanized.
### Exhibit 2.2 Some Comparisons Between Italians and WASPs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WASPs(^a)</th>
<th>First</th>
<th>Second</th>
<th>Third and Fourth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with some college</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average years of education</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage white collar</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage blue collar</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average occupational prestige</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of &quot;unnixed&quot; Italian males marrying non-Italian females</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>67.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(a\). WASPs were not separated by generation, and some of the differences between groups may be the result of factors such as age. That is, the older WASPs may have levels of education more comparable to first-generation Italian Americans than WASPs as a whole.

of parents, customs, and expectations that conflicted sharply with American ideas about individualism and romantic love. Differences of this sort often caused painful conflict between the ethnic first generation and their Americanized children.

As the second generation progressed toward adulthood, they tended to move out of the old neighborhoods. Their geographic mobility often was motivated by social mobility. They were much more acculturated than their parents, spoke English fluently, and enjoyed a wider range of occupational choices and opportunities. Discriminatory policies in education, housing, and the job market sometimes limited them, but they were upwardly mobile, and in their pursuit of jobs and careers, they left behind the ethnic subcommunity and many of the customs of their parents.

The members of the third generation, or the-grandchildren of the immigrants, typically were born and raised in non-ethnic settings. English was their first (and often their only) language, and their values and perceptions were thoroughly American. Although family and kinship ties with grandparents and the old neighborhood often remained strong, ethnicity for this generation was a relatively minor part of their daily realities and their self-images. Visits on weekends and holidays and family rituals revolving around the cycles of birth, marriage, and death might connect the third generation to the world of their ancestors, but in terms of their everyday lives, they were American, not ethnic.

The pattern of assimilation by generation is as follows:

- The first generation began the process and was at least slightly acculturated and integrated.
- The second generation was very acculturated and highly integrated (at least in the secondary sectors of the society).
- The third generation finished the acculturation process and enjoyed high levels of integration at both the secondary and the primary levels.

Exhibit 2.2 illustrates these patterns in terms of the structural assimilation of Italian Americans (see Chapter 9 for additional data on the assimilation of white ethnic groups).
the generations change. For example, the percentage of Italian Americans with some college shows a gap of more than 20 points between the first and second generations and WASPs. Italians of the third and fourth generations, though, are virtually identical to WASPs on this measure of integration in the secondary sector. The other differences between Italians and WASPs shrink in a similar fashion from generation to generation.

The first five measures of educational and occupational attainment in Exhibit 2.2 illustrate the generational pattern of integration (structural assimilation). The last comparison measures marital assimilation, or intermarriage. It displays the percentage of males of unmixed, or 100% Italian heritage, who married females outside the Italian community. Once more, the tendency is for integration, now at the primary level, to increase across the generations. The huge majority of first-generation males married within their group (only 21.9% married non-Italians). By the third generation, 67.3% of the males were marrying non-Italians.

This generational pattern fits the experiences of groups other than European immigrants and their descendants. For example, Exhibit 2.3 illustrates some patterns of acculturation for Latino Americans today. By the third generation, only 1% speak “only or more Spanish” as the primary home language, and cultural values closely approximate those of the dominant group.

Of course, this model of step-by-step, linear assimilation by generation fits some groups better than others. For example, immigrants from Northern and Western Europe (except the Irish) generally were more similar, racially and culturally, to the dominant group and tended to be more educated and skilled. They experienced relatively easier acceptance and tended to complete the assimilation process in three generations or less. In contrast, immigrants from Ireland and from Southern and Eastern Europe were mostly uneducated, unskilled peasants who were more likely to join the huge army of industrial labor that manned American factories, mines, and mills. These groups were more likely to remain at the bottom of the American class structure for generations and to have risen to middle-class prosperity only in the recent past.

It’s important to keep this generational pattern in mind when examining present-day immigration. It is common for newcomers to be criticized for their “slow” pace of assimilation, but their “progress” takes on a new aspect when viewed in the light of the time frame for assimilation followed by European immigrants, especially with modern forms of transportation, immigration can be very fast. Assimilation, on the other hand, is by nature slow.

**Immigration as a Collective Experience**

Another noteworthy pattern in the immigration experience is the way that immigrant groups tended to follow “chains” established and maintained by their members. Some versions of the traditional assimilation perspective (especially human capital theory) treat immigration and status attainment as purely individual matters. To the contrary, scholars have demonstrated that immigration to the United States was in large measure a group phenomenon. Immigrant chains stretched across the oceans, and these chains were held together by the ties of kinship, language, religion, culture, and a sense of common peoplehood (Bodnar, 1983; Tilly, 1990). The networks supplied information, money for passage, family news, and job offers.

Here’s how chain immigration worked. Someone from a village in, say, Poland, would make it to the United States. The successful immigrant would send word to the home village, perhaps by hiring a letter writer. Along with news and stories of his adventures, he would send his address. Within months, another immigrant from the village, perhaps a brother or other relative, would show up at the address of the original immigrant. After his months of experience in the new society, the original immigrant could lend assistance, provide a place to sleep, help with job hunting, and orient the newcomer to the area.

Before long, others from the village would arrive, in need of the same sort of introduction.
## Latino Acculturation

### Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Only/More Spanish</th>
<th>Both Equally</th>
<th>Only/More English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First generation</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second generation</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third generation</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Only/More Spanish</th>
<th>Both Equally</th>
<th>Only/More English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First generation</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second generation</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third generation</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Family Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First generation</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second generation</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third generation</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Latinos</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### In general, the husband should have the final say in family matters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First generation</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second generation</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third generation</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Latinos</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: These results are from a telephone survey of about 2,000 Latinos and 2,000 non-Latino adults conducted in the summer of 1999. Projections to the population are accurate to within ±2 percentage points.

To the mysteries of America. The compatriots would tend to settle close to one another, in the same building or on the same block. Soon, entire neighborhoods were filled with people from a certain village, province, or region. In these ethnic enclaves, the old language was spoken and the old ways were observed. Businesses were started, churches or synagogues were founded, families were begun, and mutual aid societies and other organizations were formed. There was safety in numbers as well as comfort and security in a familiar, if transplanted, set of traditions and customs.

As we saw earlier in this chapter, the immigrants often responded to U.S. society by attempting to re-create as much of their old
world as possible. Partly to avoid the harsher forms of rejection and discrimination and partly to band together for solidarity and mutual support, immigrants created their own miniature social worlds within the bustling metropolises of the industrializing Northeast and the West Coast. These Little Italys, Little Warsaws, Little Irelands, Greecetowns, Chinatowns, and Little Tokyos were safe havens that insulated the immigrants from the larger society and allowed them to establish bonds with one another, organize a group life, pursue their own group interests, and have some control over the pace of their adjustment to American culture. For some groups and in some areas, the ethnic subcommunity was a short-lived phenomenon. For others—especially Jewish immigrants—the neighborhood became the dominant structure of their lives, and the networks continued to function long after arrival in the United States.

Variations in Assimilation

Assimilation is a complex process that is never exactly the same for any two groups. Sociologists have paid particular attention to the way that religion, social class, and gender have shaped the overall patterns of European immigration in the late 1800s and early 1900s. They also have investigated the way that immigrants' reasons for coming to this country have affected the experiences of different groups.

Religion

A major differentiating factor in the experiences of European immigrant groups, recognized by Gordon and other students of American assimilation, was religion. Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish immigrants lived in different neighborhoods, occupied different niches in the workforce, formed separate networks of affiliation and groups, and chose their marriage partners from different pools of people.

One important study that documented the importance of religion for European immigrants and their descendants (and also reinforced the importance of generations) was conducted by sociologist Ruby Jo Kennedy (1944). She studied intermarriage patterns in New Haven, Connecticut, over a 70-year period ending in the 1940s and found that the immigrant generation chose marriage partners from a pool whose boundaries were marked by ethnicity and religion. For example, Irish Catholics married other Irish Catholics, Italian Catholics married Italian Catholics, Irish Protestants married Irish Protestants, and so forth across all the ethnic/religious divisions she studied.

As the children and grandchildren of the immigrants married, their pool of partners continued to be bounded by religion, but not so much by ethnicity. Thus, later generations of Irish Catholics continued to marry other Catholics but were less likely to marry other Irish. As assimilation proceeded, ethnic group boundaries faded (or "melted"), but religious boundaries did not. Kennedy described this phenomenon as a triple melting pot: a pattern of structural assimilation within each of the three religions (Kennedy, 1944, 1952).

Will Herberg (1960), another important scholar of American assimilation, also explored the connection between religion and ethnicity. He noted that the pressures of acculturation did not affect all aspects of ethnicity equally. European immigrants and their descendants were strongly encouraged to learn English, but they were not so pressured to change their religious beliefs. Very often, their religious faith was the strongest connection between later generations and their immigrant ancestors. The American tradition of religious tolerance allowed the descendants of the European immigrants to preserve this tie to their roots without being seen as "un-American." As a result, the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish faiths came to occupy roughly equal degrees of legitimacy in American society.

Thus, for many descendants of European immigrants, religion became a vehicle through which their ethnicity could be expressed. For many members of this group, religion and ethnicity were fused, and ethnic
traditions and identities came to have a religious expression. For countless millions, attendance at church or synagogue became not only a religious act but also a way of connecting with one's ancestors and a way of locating oneself in time and space, an aspect of identity that linked oneself, however tenuously, to the old country and to ancestors.

**Social Class**

Social class is a central feature of social structure, and not surprisingly, it affected the European immigrant groups in a number of ways. First, social class combined with religion to shape the social world of the descendants of the European immigrants. In fact, one of Gordon's (1964) most important conclusions was that U.S. society in the 1960s actually consisted of not three but four melting pots, one for each of the major ethnic/religious groups and one for black Americans; each of these was subdivided internally by social class. In his view, the most significant structural unit within American society was the ethnos, defined by the intersection of the religious/ethnic and social class boundaries (e.g. working-class Catholic, upper-class Protestant, etc.). Thus, people weren't "simply American" but tended to identify with, associate with, and choose their spouses from within their ethnos.

Second, social class also affected structural integration. The huge majority of the post-1980s European immigrants were working class, and because they "entered U.S. society at the bottom of the economic ladder, and...stayed close to that level for the next half century, ethnic history has been essentially working class history" (Morawski, 1996, p. 215; see also Bodnar, 1985). For generations, many groups of Eastern and Southern European immigrants acculturated not to middle-class American culture but to an urban, working-class, blue-collar set of lifestyles and values. Even today, ethnicity for many groups remains interconnected with social class factors, and a familiar stereotype of the white ethnic is the hard-hat construction worker.

**Gender**

Anyone who wants to learn about the experience of immigration will find a huge body of literature incorporating every imaginable discipline and genre. The great bulk of this material, however, concerns the immigrant experience in general or is focused specifically on male immigrants. The experiences of female immigrants have been much less recorded and, hence, are far less accessible. We are still learning how different male and female immigration experiences sometimes were.

Many immigrant women came from cultures with strong patriarchal traditions and had much less access than the men to leadership roles, education, and prestigious, high-paying occupations. As was the case with slave women, the voices of immigrant women have been muted. The research that has been done, however, documents the fact that immigrant women played multiple roles both during immigration and during the process of adjusting to U.S. society. As would be expected in patriarchal societies, the roles of wife and mother were central, but immigrant women were involved in other activities as well.

In general, male immigrants outnumbered female immigrants. It was common for the male members of a family to immigrate first and send for the women only after they had secured lodging, a job, and a certain level of stability. Women immigrants' experiences were quite varied, however, and in some cases, women were prominent among the "first wave" of immigrants. During the 19th century, for example, a high percentage of Irish immigrant women in New York City worked as servants, and most of the rest were employed in textile mills and factories. As late as 1920, 81% of employed Irish-born women in the United States worked as domestics. Factory work was the second most prevalent form of employment (Blessing, 1980; see also Steinberg, 1981).
Because the economic situation of immigrant families typically was precarious, it was common for women to be involved in wage labor. The type and location of the work varied from group to group. Whereas Irish women were concentrated in domestic work and factories and mills, these forms of employment were rare for Italian women. Italian culture had strong norms of patriarchy, and “one of the culture’s strongest prohibitions was directed against contact between women and male strangers” (Alba, 1985, p. 53). Thus, acceptable work situations for Italian women were likely to involve tasks that could be performed at home: doing laundry, taking in boarders, and doing piecework for the garment industry. Italian women who worked outside the home were likely to find themselves in single-sex settings among other immigrant women. Thus, women immigrants from Italy tended to be far less acculturated and integrated than those from Ireland.

Eastern European Jewish women represent a third pattern of adjustment to America. They were part of a flow of refugees from religious persecution, and most came with their husbands and children in intact family units. According to Steinberg (1981), “Few were independent bread-winners, and when they did work, they usually found employment in the...garment industry. Often they worked in small shops as family members” (p. 161).

It was common for the women of immigrant groups to combine work and home. “Peasant women were accustomed to productive work within the family economy...Placing their highest priority on family needs, women stayed home whenever possible, shifting roles quickly according to family necessity” (Evans, 1989, p. 131). More closely connected to home and family than the men were, immigrant women typically were less likely than the men to learn to read or speak English, or otherwise to acculturate, and were significantly more influential in preserving the heritage of their groups. Younger, single, second generation women tended to seek employment outside the home. They found opportunities in the industrial sector and in clerical and sales work, occupations that were quickly stereotyped as “women’s work.” Women were seen as working only to supplement the family treasury, and this assumption was used to justify a lower wage scale. Evans reports that in the late 1800s, “Whether in factories, offices, or private homes...women’s wages were about half of those of men” (1989, p. 135). These patterns of discrimination motivated women, both immigrant and native born, to join the labor movement (Evans, 1989; Seller, 1987; Wertheimer, 1979).

On a positive note, Seller (1987) rejected the stereotype of immigrant women as subservient, unassimilated preservers of the “old ways” who were content to remain in the background and concluded that they played a central role in both acculturation and immigration:

Immigrant women built social, charitable, and educational institutions that spanned the neighborhood and the nation. They established day care centers, restaurants, hotels, employment agencies, and legal aid bureaus. They wrote novels, plays, and poetry. They campaigned for a variety of causes, from factory legislation to birth control, from cleaner streets to cleaner government. (p. 198)

Motivation for Immigration: Sojourn

Some versions of the traditional perspective and the “taken-for-granted” views of many Americans assume that assimilation is desirable and therefore desired. However, immigrant groups were highly variable in their interest in Americanization, a factor that greatly shaped their experiences. Some groups were very committed to Americanization. Eastern European Jews, for example, came to America because of religious persecution and planned to make America their home from the beginning. They left their homeland in fear for their lives and had no plans and no possibility of returning. They intended to stay, for they had nowhere else to go. (The nation of Israel was not founded until 1948.) These immigrants
committed themselves to learning English, becoming citizens, and familiarizing themselves with their new society as quickly as possible.

Other immigrants had no intention of becoming American citizens and therefore had little interest in Americanization. These *sojourners*, or "birds of passage," were oriented to the old country and intended to return once they had accumulated enough capital to be successful in their home villages or provinces. Because immigration records are not very detailed, it is difficult to assess the exact numbers of immigrants who returned to the old country (see Wynman, 1993). We do know, however, that a large percentage of Italian immigrants were sojourners. It is estimated that 3.8 million Italians landed in the United States between 1899 and 1924, and 2.1 million departed during the same interval (Nelli, 1980, p. 547).

**PLURALISM**

Sociologists and the public in general have become more interested in pluralism and ethnic diversity in the past few decades. Interest has been stimulated in part by the fact that the assimilation predicted by Park (and implicit in the conventional wisdom of many Americans) has not materialized. Perhaps we simply haven't waited long enough, but as the 21st century begins, distinctions among the racial minority groups in our society show few signs of disappearing, and the descendants of the European immigrants maintain a stubborn, if diminishing, interest in their ethnicity (see Chapter 9).

The increased interest in pluralism no doubt also has been stimulated by the increasing social and cultural diversity of U.S. society that is reflected in Exhibit 1.1. Controversies over issues such as "English-only" policies, bilingual education, and welfare rights for immigrants are common, often bitter, and sometimes violent. Many Americans feel that diversity or pluralism has now exceeded acceptable limits and that the unity of the nation is at risk.

Finally, interest in pluralism and ethnicity in general has been stimulated by developments around the globe. In recent years, several nation-states have disintegrated into smaller units based on language, culture, race, and ethnicity. Recent events in Afghanistan, Iraq, India, Eastern Europe, the former U.S.S.R., Yugoslavia, Canada, Rwanda, and other African nations, to mention just a few examples, have provided dramatic and often tragic evidence of the persistence of ethnic identities and enmities throughout decades or even centuries of subjugation and suppression in larger national units.

In short, pluralism has become more prominent because domestic cultural diversity has increased and because ethnic groups, in the United States and elsewhere, have persisted as consequential forces in modern industrialized society. In contemporary debates, discussions of diversity and pluralism often are couched in the language of *multiculturalism*, a general term for a variety of programs and ideas that stress mutual respect for all groups and for the multiple heritages that shaped the United States. In the rest of this section, we discuss the nature of pluralism and present some of the relevant theoretical background for the continuing debate.

**Types of Pluralism**

We can distinguish various types of pluralism by using some of the concepts introduced in the discussion of assimilation. Cultural pluralism exists when groups have not acculturated and each maintains its own identity. The groups might speak different languages, practice different religions, and have different value systems. The groups are part of the same society and might even live in adjacent areas, but in some ways, they live in different worlds. Many Native Americans are culturally pluralistic, maintaining their traditional languages and cultures and living on isolated reservations. The Amish, a religious community sometimes called the Pennsylvania Dutch, are also a culturally pluralistic group. They are committed to a way of life organized around farming, and they maintain a culture and an institutional life that is separate from the dominant culture (see Hostetler, 1980;

A second type of pluralism, following Gordon's subprocesses, exists when a group has acculturated but not integrated. That is, the group has adopted the Anglo-American culture but does not have full and equal access to the institutions of the larger society. In this situation, called *structural pluralism*, cultural differences are minimal, but the groups occupy different locations in the social structure. The groups may speak with the same accent, eat the same food, pursue the same goals, and subscribe to the same values, but they also may maintain separate organizational systems, including different churches, clubs, schools, and neighborhoods. Under structural pluralism, the various groups practice a common culture but do so in different places and with minimal interaction across group boundaries. An example of structural pluralism can be found on any Sunday morning in the Christian churches of the United States. Not only are local parishes separated by denomination, but they are also often identified with specific ethnic groups or races. What happens in the various churches—the rituals, the expressions of faith, the statements of core values and beliefs—is similar and expresses a common, shared culture based on Christianity. Structurally, however, this common culture is expressed in separate buildings and by separate congregations. Gordon's conclusion that U.S. society consisted of four separate melting pots, or subsocieties—differentiated by race, ethnicity, religion, and class—illustrates one conception of structural pluralism.

A third type of pluralism reverses the order of Gordon's first two phases: integration without acculturation. This situation is exemplified by a group that has had some material success (measured by wealth or income, for example) but has not become Americanized (learned English, adopted American values and norms, etc.). Some immigrant groups have found niches in American society in which they can survive and, occasionally, prosper economically without acculturating.

Two different situations can be used to illustrate this pattern. An *enclave minority* establishes its own neighborhood and relies on a set of interconnected businesses, each of which usually is small in scope, for its economic survival. Some of these businesses serve the group, whereas others serve the larger society. The Cuban American community in South Florida and "Chinatowns" in many larger American cities are examples of ethnic enclaves. A similar pattern of adjustment, the *middleman minority*, also relies on small shops and retail firms, but the businesses are more dispersed throughout a large area rather than concentrated in a specific locale. Some Chinese American communities fit this second pattern, as do Korean American green grocers and Indian American–owned motels (Portes & Manning, 1986).

The economic success of enclave and middleman minorities is due in part to the strong ties of cooperation and mutual aid within their groups. The ties are based, in turn, on cultural bonds that would weaken if acculturation took place. In contrast with Gordon's idea that acculturation is a prerequisite to integration, whatever success these groups enjoy is due in part to the fact that they have not Americanized. At various times and places, Jewish, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Cuban Americans have formed enclaves or been middleman minorities (see Bonczich & Modell, 1980; Kitano & Daniels, 2001).

Each of these situations (enclave and middleman minorities) can be considered either as a type of pluralism (emphasizing the absence of acculturation) or as a type of assimilation (emphasizing a high level of economic equality). Keep in mind that assimilation and pluralism are not opposites but can occur in a variety of combinations.

**Theoretical Perspectives on Pluralism**

Many theoretical discussions of pluralism begin with a consideration of the work of Horace Kallen. In articles published in the magazine *The Nation* (1915a, 1915b), Kallen argued that people should not have to surrender their culture and traditions to become full
participants in American society. He rejected the Anglo-conformist, assimilationist model of his day and contended that the existence of separate ethnic groups, even with separate cultures, religions, and languages, was consistent with democracy and other core American values. In Gordon’s terms, Kallen believed that integration and equality were possible without extensive acculturation and that American society could be a federation of diverse groups, a mosaic of harmonious and interdependent cultures and peoples (Kallen, 1915a, 1915b; see also Abrahamson, 1980; Gleason, 1980).

Indeed, distinctive ethnic groups persist in American society, a fact that contemporary scholars have tried to understand. Most of their work deals with white ethnic groups, the descendants of immigrants from Europe. The persistence of racial minority groups—with their more visible identifying characteristics and their long histories of rejection, exploitation, prejudice, and racism—is less difficult to explain.

In their influential study *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Glazer and Moynihan (1970) analyzed both ethnic and racial minority groups in New York City. They found that, well into the 1960s, white ethnic groups retained a vital significance for their members despite massive acculturation over the decades. The groups changed form and function over time but remained important social entities, valued by their members and showing few signs of disappearing. White ethnic groups in New York City helped to shape the self-image of their members while providing a way to belong to the larger society. They linked members to one another through networks of mutual support and aid, and they served as a base of organization for political purposes and for relationships with other ethnic groups. Glazer and Moynihan concluded, “The point about the melting pot is that it did not happen” (p. 250).

In a study of ethnicity that relied heavily on public opinion polls given to large, representative samples of Americans, Greeley (1974) also found a great deal of evidence for the continuing existence and importance of white ethnic groups in American life. Greeley criticized the common assumption that differences between groups would diminish over time in a simple, straightforward process of homogenization to the Anglo-American norm. He concluded that the sense of ethnicity or the strength of a person’s identification with his or her ethnic group can vary from time to time and take on new dimensions. For example, Greeley used the term *ethnogenesis* to describe a process in which new minority groups can be formed from combinations of a variety of traditions, including Anglo-American traditions. He noted that there is “a deliberate and self-conscious attempt to create a ‘Spanish-speaking’ ethnic group”; that “an American Indian group is struggling to emerge”; and that “in Chicago there is even an effort . . . to create an Appalachian white ethnic group” (Greeley, 1974, pp. 295–296, emphasis added). In all three examples, Greeley identified situations in which single, unified, self-conscious groups could emerge in the future, even though they did not exist at the time he was writing. Greeley concluded that “ethnicity is not a residual social force that is slowly and gradually disappearing; it is, rather, a dynamic, flexible social mechanism that can be called into being rather quickly and transformed and transmuted to meet changing situations and circumstances” (1974, p. 301; see also Alba, 1989).

A process parallel to ethnogenesis can also occur with racial minority groups. Just as new ethnic groupings can emerge by combining different traditions, so can new “racial” groups arise from intermarriage. As I noted in Chapter 1, people of mixed racial heritages have organized to promote their own interests. They desire recognition from governmental agencies and revisions of the racial choices available on official surveys and census forms. The multiple racial choices used in the 2000 Census reflect the desires of this emerging group in American society. Note that, contrary to the traditional perspective on assimilation, the development of a new mixed-race group (or groups) indicates that increasing rates of intermarriage can lead to more minority groups, not fewer. The creation of racially
based minority groups independent of the traditional racial divisions based on skin color is also a striking illustration of the essentially social nature of race (see Chapter 1).

What social forces might cause ethnic or racial groups to become more cohesive? In what kinds of situations might people come to identify more strongly with their groups? In his book *The Ethnic Myth* (1981), Steinberg contended that ethnic diversity and strength of group identification may be a result of group conflict over valued goods and services, a way of defending privilege and position. Unlike Greeley or Glazer and Moynihan, Steinberg argued that white ethnic groups would soon be assimilated. He analyzed the "ethnic resurgence" of the 1960s: an apparent increase in interest in and commitment to white ethnicity. According to Steinberg, the resurgence was essentially a defensive reaction to the perceived advances of African Americans and other racial minorities. The white ethnic groups organized around their common heritage as a way of protecting their control of resources.

More recently, Gallagher (2001) reported a series of interviews that seem to confirm Steinberg's point regarding the demise of white ethnicity. He interviewed 92 white ethnic respondents from all walks of life and found very little evidence or trace of ethnic identity. Only 13% of his respondents, usually those who had a parent born in Europe or lived in ethnic neighborhoods, said that their ethnicity was an important part of their identity. This finding supports Steinberg's (1981) prediction that white ethnic identity would fade away.

Consistent with Steinberg's other conclusion, that ethnic identity can be a defensive reaction against other groups, Gallagher found that his respondents often used their understanding of the struggles of their own ethnic ancestors as a context for criticizing and disparaging blacks and other racial minorities today. The understanding of these respondents was that their ancestors succeeded in America against odds just as formidable as those faced by blacks (a very dubious equation, as we shall see).

Furthermore, they used their (sometimes exaggerated) family tales of immigrant success as a rhetorical device for denigrating other groups: "My family came with nothing and succeeded; why can't blacks?"

Although some of their conclusions differ, Glazer and Moynihan, Greeley, and Steinberg all found that white ethnic groups played important roles in intergroup conflicts and remained viable and important social entities late in the 20th century, even though they changed form and function as the surrounding society changed. New groupings appeared even as old ones declined in importance. Gallagher found that ethnic identity has faded in salience and importance to people but still retains a role as a rhetorical device for expressing disdain for other groups, especially African Americans.

In the current era of multiculturalism and high rates of immigration, ethnicity is frequently celebrated, and people are encouraged to know and express their heritage. Pluralism is seen as sophisticated and progressive because it seems to be associated with increased tolerance for diversity and respect for all peoples and ways of life. Steinberg and Gallagher remind us that ethnicity has a negative as well as a positive side: It may be the result of conflict and a disguise for expressing prejudice and denying opportunity to other groups.

**OTHER GROUP GOALS**

Although this book concentrates on assimilation and pluralism, there are, of course, other possible group relationships and goals. Two minority group goals that are commonly noted are separatism and revolution (Wirth, 1945). The goal of *separatism* is for the group to sever all ties (political, cultural, geographic) with the larger society. Thus, separatism goes well beyond pluralism. Native Americans have expressed both separatist and pluralist goals, and separatism also has been pursued by some African American organizations, such as the Black Muslims.

A minority group promoting *revolution* seeks to switch places with the dominant group and become the ruling elite or create a new
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social order, perhaps in alliance with members of the dominant group. Although revolutionary activity can be found among some American minority groups (e.g., the Black Panthers), this goal has been relatively rare for minority groups in the United States. Revolutionary minority groups are more commonly found in situations such as those in colonial Africa, in which one nation conquers and controls another racially or culturally different nation.

The dominant group may also pursue goals other than assimilation and pluralism, including forced migration or expulsion, extermination or genocide, and continued subjugation of the minority group. Chinese immigrants, for example, were the victims of a policy of expulsion beginning in the 1880s (see Chapter 8), and Native Americans also have been the victims of this policy (see Chapter 6). The most infamous example of genocide is the Holocaust in Nazi Germany, during which 6 million Jews were murdered. The dominant group pursues "continued subjugation" when, as in slavery in the antebellum South, it attempts to maintain the status quo. A dominant group may simultaneously pursue different policies with different minority groups and may, of course, change policies over time.

CONTEMPORARY IMMIGRANTS: SEGMENTED ASSIMILATION

Recall that the theories of assimilation and pluralism presented in this chapter focus on European immigrants who arrived between the 1820s and 1920s and their descendants. Although their experiences were varied, all these groups eventually acculturated and integrated. Today, white ethnic groups are equal to national norms in terms of average income, education, employment, and other measures of economic success (see Chapter 9).

What relevance do the experiences of these groups have for the immigrants who have arrived in recent decades? How are the complex forces of American assimilation and pluralism shaping the fate of these new arrivals (and their children)? Contemporary immigrants are unlikely simply to duplicate the experiences of earlier groups. Present-day immigrants are much more diverse racially and culturally than immigrants from Europe, and they come (literally) from all over the globe. In addition, the United States today is a very different place from the society European immigrants confronted in the 19th and 20th centuries. Industrialization has advanced, and relatively fewer of the blue-collar, manual labor jobs that sustained European immigrants are now available. Economic inequality is greater and social mobility more difficult than in previous generations.

Will religion and social class be important forces in the lives of these newest immigrants? Will these groups acculturate before they integrate? Will they take as many as three (or more) generations to assimilate? What will their patterns of intermarriage look like? Will they follow the pattern of the European groups and eventually achieve socioeconomic parity with the dominant group? When? How?

To deal with these and other questions, one group of researchers has proposed the concept of segmented assimilation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 1993). These scholars argue that assimilation in the United States today is fragmented and can have a number of different outcomes. Some contemporary immigrants will follow the pattern established by the earlier European immigrants and analyzed by Gordon: Eventually, they will integrate into the white, middle-class mainstream. Others will become part of the urban poor and will find themselves mired in permanent poverty. Still other immigrant groups will form close-knit enclaves based on their traditional cultures and become successful in the United States by resisting acculturation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, p. 45).

The key factors that shape the fate of current immigrants include the degree of racial discrimination and rejection directed at them, the degree of cohesion and solidarity they maintain, the physical and monetary resources and human capital they bring with them (e.g., wealth, education, business skills), and the nature of the job market. For example, immigrants who are nonwhite, less educated, and unskilled (e.g., many Latin American
immigrants) will be forced by racial discrimination and by their relatively low levels of human capital into the lower social and economic classes of American society. On the other hand, immigrants who bring high levels of education (e.g., many Asians) will be able to penetrate the mainstream job market and achieve socioeconomic equality, regardless of their race.

Furthermore, U.S. society and American culture are more fragmented and diverse today. The traditional perspective on assimilation assumes a "two-group" model: immigrant groups on one hand and middle-class, white, mainstream society and culture on the other. Today, new groups can assimilate into one of the varieties of African American subcultures or into any number of other niches and spaces in American society (Alba & Nee, 1997). Thus, the notion of the triple melting pot (already expanded to four melting pots by Gordon in the 1960s) might have to be multiplied many times to accommodate the various types of ethnic and racial intermixing in contemporary society.

**COMPARATIVE FOCUS**

**IMMIGRATION, EMIGRATION, AND IRELAND**

Immigration and assimilation are among the most wrenching, exciting, disconcerting, exhilarating, and heartbreaking of human experiences. Immigrants have recorded these feelings—along with the adventures and experiences that sparked them—in every possible medium, including letters, memoirs, poems, stories, movies, jokes, and music. These immigrant tales recount the traumas of leaving home, adjusting to a new society, coping with rejection and discrimination, and thousands of other experiences. Some of the most poignant of these stories express the sadness of parting with family and friends, perhaps forever. Peter Jones captured some of these feelings in his song "Killkelly," based on letters written nearly 150 years ago by an Irish father to his immigrant son—Jones’s great-grandfather—in the United States. Each verse of the song paraphrases a letter and includes news of the family and community left behind. The song expresses, in simple but powerful language, the deep sadness of separation and the longing for reunion.

"Kilkelly, Ireland, 18 and 90, my dear and loving son John
I guess that I must be close on to eighty,
It's thirty years since you're gone.
Because of all of the money you send me,
I'm still living out on my own.
Michael has built himself a fine house
And Bridget's daughters have grown.
Thank you for sending your family picture,
They're lovely young women and men.
You say that you might even come for a visit,
What joy to see you again."

It is particularly appropriate to use an Irish song to illustrate the sorrows of immigration. Just as the United States has been a major receiver of immigrants for the last 200 years, Ireland has been a major supplier. Mass immigration from Ireland began with the potato famines of the 1840s and continued through the end of the 20th century, motivated by continuing hard times, political unrest, and unemployment. The sadness of Peter Jones’s ancestors has been repeated over and over as the youth of Ireland left for jobs in Great Britain, the United States, and hundreds of other places, never expecting to return. The famines of the 1840s and the continuing immigration in the decades that followed
cut the Irish population of 7 million in half; today, the population is still less than 4 million.

History rarely runs in straight lines, however. Today, after nearly 200 years of supplying immigrants, Ireland (along with the other nations of Northern and Western Europe) has become a consumer. The number of immigrants entering Ireland has nearly tripled since the late 1980s, and, in 2001, more than 45,000 newcomers arrived. This is a tiny number compared to the hundreds of thousands of immigrants entering the United States, but as a proportion of the population, immigration to Ireland actually is larger. By one count, Ireland received 5.3 immigrants per 1,000 population in the year 2000, while the United States received only 3.5 per 1,000 population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2001).

What explains this switch from immigration to emigration? The answers are not hard to find. After decades of unemployment and depression, the Irish economy entered a boom phase in the early 1990s. Spurred by the investments of multinational corporations (many headquartered in the United States) and the benefits of joining the European Economic Union, the Irish economy and the job supply have grown rapidly. In fact, there is now a labor shortage in Ireland. One estimate from the year 2000 was that the nation would need 200,000 more workers—about 10% of the present workforce—by the year 2005 to fill the jobs that would become available (“A Sorry Tale,” 2000, p. 51). To fill this gap, the Irish government has mounted a worldwide recruiting effort, and many of the recent immigrants are ethnic Irish returning home. Others come from the same pool of workers in the developing world who are flowing to the United States. In addition, Ireland is receiving refugees and people seeking asylum from the former Yugoslavia, the Middle East, Nigeria, and other trouble spots around the globe.

What awaits these newcomers when they arrive on the Emerald Isle? Will they be subjected to the Irish version of “Anglo-conformity”? Will Irish society become a melting pot? Will Gordon’s ideas about assimilation be applicable to their experiences? Will their assimilation be segmented? Will the Irish—such immigrants themselves—be especially understanding of and sympathetic to the traumas faced by the newcomers?

Of course, it is too early to answer any of these questions. We can note, however, that the Irish are responding to this wave of immigration in a variety of ways. The national government is officially supportive of immigrants and stresses tolerance for diversity and a welcoming attitude. The attitudes of the Irish public are more mixed. Unlike the United States, Ireland has no experience in dealing with newcomers and strangers (at least in modern times). Compared to the United States, Ireland is extremely homogeneous in race (virtually 100% Caucasian), religion (92% Roman Catholic), and language (Gaelic is an official language, along with English, but few Irish speak Gaelic exclusively). This homogeneity no doubt makes the newcomers feel even more isolated, and it also means that the Irish do not have a backlog of experiences to draw on when confronted with language, cultural, and racial differences in their own country.

Many Irish are very sympathetic to the immigrants and refugees. For others, predictably, the influx of newcomers has aroused racist sentiments and demands for exclusion—reactions that ironically echo the rejection experienced by Irish immigrants to the United States in the 19th century (for example, job advertisements that included the stipulation that “No Irish Need Apply”). Irish radio and TV talk shows commonly discuss issues of immigration and assimilation, and they frequently evoke prejudiced statements from the audience. Spokespersons for “Keeping Ireland for the Irish” have found a ready audience and have spread their views in political campaigns, in newspaper interviews, and on the Internet.