

# 2

## ASSIMILATION AND PLURALISM

### From Immigrants to White Ethnics

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to do the following:

- 2.1 Explain types of assimilation, including Anglo-conformity, the “melting pot,” and the “traditional” model of assimilation. How does human capital theory relate to each of these types?
- 2.2 Explain types of pluralism, including cultural pluralism and structural pluralism.
- 2.3 Discuss and explain other types of group relationships such as separatism.
- 2.4 Describe the timing, causes, and volume of European immigration to the United States, and explain how those immigrants became “white ethnics.”
- 2.5 Understand the European patterns of assimilation and major variations in those patterns by social class, gender, and religion.
- 2.6 Describe the status of the descendants of European immigrants today, including the “twilight of white ethnicity.”
- 2.7 Analyze contemporary immigration using sociological concepts in this chapter. Explain how the traditional model of assimilation does or does not apply to contemporary immigrants.

*We have room for but one flag, the American flag. . . . We have room for but one language and that is the English language, . . . and we have room for but one loyalty and that is a loyalty to the American people.*

—Theodore Roosevelt, 26th president of the United States, 1915

*If we lose our language [Ojibwa] . . . I think, something more will be lost. . . . We will lose something personal. . . . We will lose our sense of ourselves and our culture. . . . We will lose beauty—the beauty of the particular, the beauty of the past and the intricacies of a language tailored for our space in the world. That Native American cultures are imperiled is important and not just to Indians. . . . When we lose cultures, we lose American plurality—the productive and lovely discomfort that true difference brings.*

—David Treuer (2012, pp. 304–305)

*Welcome to America. Now, speak English.*

—Bumper sticker, 2021

In the United States, people speak 350 different languages, including more than 150 different Native American languages. Although most of these languages are spoken or signed by small numbers of people, the sheer number of languages suggest the scope of diversity in America today.

What do you think about the quotations that opened the chapter? Does the range of languages and cultures create confusion and inefficiency in the United States? Is there room for only one language, as Roosevelt suggested? Or does diversity enrich our society? How much does it matter if a language disappears? Would we, as Treuer suggests, lose our sense of ourselves, our culture, beauty, and the “productive and lovely discomfort” of difference?

Americans (and the citizens of other nations) must consider such questions as we address issues of inclusion and diversity. Should we encourage groups to retain their unique cultural heritage, including language? Or, should we stress conformity? How have we addressed these issues in the past? To what effect? How should we approach them in the future?

In this chapter, we’ll continue looking at how ethnic and racial groups in the United States could relate to each other. Two sociological concepts, assimilation and pluralism, are key to our discussion. **Assimilation** is a process where formerly distinct and separate groups merge socially and come to share a common culture. As a society undergoes assimilation, group differences decrease. **Pluralism** exists when groups maintain their individual identities. In a pluralistic society, groups remain distinct, and their cultural and social differences persist over time.

Assimilation and pluralism are different processes, but they aren’t mutually exclusive. They may occur in various combinations within a society. Some racial or ethnic groups may assimilate while others maintain (or even increase) their differences. Some members assimilate while others preserve or revive traditional cultures. For example, some Native American groups are pluralistic. They live on or near reservations and are strongly connected to their heritage. Members may practice “traditional ways” and native languages as much as possible. Other indigenous Americans are mostly assimilated into the dominant society. They live in urban areas, speak English only, and know relatively little about their traditional cultures.

American sociologists became interested in these processes, especially assimilation, due to the massive migration between the 1820s and the 1920s when more than 31 million people crossed the Atlantic from Europe to the United States. Scholars have devoted tremendous amounts of time and energy to documenting, analyzing, and understanding the experiences of these immigrants and their descendants. These efforts have resulted in a rich and complex body of knowledge about how newcomers were incorporated into American society in the past. We’ll call this the “traditional” perspective.

Next, we’ll consider the traditional perspective on assimilation and pluralism, and briefly examine other possible group relationships. Then, we’ll apply the traditional perspective to European immigrants and their descendants and we’ll develop a model of American assimilation based on those experiences. We’ll use this model of American assimilation throughout this book to analyze other minority group experiences.

Since the 1960s, the United States has experienced a second mass immigration. These newest immigrants differ in many ways from those who came earlier. Therefore, one important issue to consider is if theories, concepts, and models based on the first mass European immigration apply to this second wave. We’ll briefly discuss some of these issues in this chapter and we’ll explore them in detail in Part 3. Finally, we’ll consider the implications of Chapters 1 and 2 for our exploration of intergroup relations throughout the rest of the book.

## ASSIMILATION

We begin with the topic of assimilation because the emphasis in American group relations has historically focused on the goal of assimilation rather than pluralism (Lee, 2009). This section presents key sociological theories and concepts used to describe and analyze 19th-century European immigrant assimilation into American society.

### Types of Assimilation

*Assimilation* is a general term for a process that takes different forms. One type of assimilation is expressed in the idea of the **melting pot**—a metaphor based on smelting pots used to melt different



The melting pot is a popular and powerful image for Americans.

Source: University of Iowa Libraries Special Collections Department

metals together. This type of assimilation occurs when diverse groups come together and create a new, unique society with a common culture. The idea of the melting pot suggests that America would change immigrants and immigrants would, in turn, change America (Thernstrom, 2004). This popular view of assimilation emphasizes sharing and inclusion, sees assimilation positively, and suggests the new immigrants will continuously change the United States.

Although it's a powerful image, the melting pot metaphor doesn't accurately describe how assimilation occurred (Abrahamson, 1980). Whites excluded some minority groups from the "melting" process, resulting in a society with a distinct Anglocentric flavor. As Schlesinger (1992) argues, "For better or worse, the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant tradition was for two centuries—and in crucial respects still is—the dominant influence on American culture and society" (p. 28). Therefore, assimilation in the United States is more accurately called **Americanization** or **Anglo-conformity**.

**Americanization** (or **Anglo-conformity**) is assimilation where the dominant culture pressures other groups to conform to Anglo-American culture and society.

President Roosevelt's quote in the chapter opening offers a good example of the historic emphasis on Anglo-conformity. Today, many Americans agree. A 2016 survey by the Pew Research Center found that 70% of Americans think it's very important to speak English to truly be an American. Those findings were consistent among Black (71%), white (71%), and Hispanic Americans (who can be of any race) (70%). A 2013 Gallup poll produced similar results: 72% of respondents agreed that "it is essential that immigrants living in the U.S. learn to speak English." Specifically, 77% of white, 67% of Black, and 58% of Hispanic Americans agreed, respectively (Jones, 2013).

Under Anglo-conformity, immigrant and minority groups are expected to adapt to Anglo-American culture as a precondition of acceptance and access to better jobs, education, and other opportunities. This type of assimilation means that minority groups have had to give up their traditions and adopt Anglo-American culture. Certainly, many groups and individuals were (and remain) eager to undergo Anglo-conformity, even if it meant losing most or all of their heritage. For others, the emphasis

on Americanization created conflict, anxiety, demoralization, and resentment. In Part 3, we consider how different minority groups have experienced and responded to the pressures of Anglo-conformity.

## The “Traditional” Perspective on Assimilation: Theories and Concepts

Traditional assimilation theory emerged from research about European immigrants who came to America between the 1820s and the 1920s. Sociologists and other scholars using the traditional perspective made invaluable contributions, and their thinking is complex and comprehensive. This doesn't mean, however, that they've exhausted the possibilities or answered (or asked) all the significant questions. Theorists working in the pluralist tradition and contemporary scholars studying the experiences of recent immigrants have critiqued aspects of traditional assimilation theory and you'll also learn about their important contributions, too.

### Robert Park

Robert Park's research provided the foundation for many theories of assimilation. In the 1920s and 1930s, Park was one of a group of scholars who played a significant role in establishing sociology as an academic discipline in the United States. Park felt that intergroup relations go through a predictable set of phases that he called a **race relations cycle**. When groups first come into contact (e.g., through immigration, conquest, or by other means), relations are conflictual and competitive. However, the process (cycle) eventually moves toward assimilation, or the “interpenetration and fusion” of groups (Park & Burgess, 1924).

Park argued further that assimilation is inevitable in a democratic and industrial society. Specifically, he believed that in a political system based on democracy, fairness, and impartial justice, all groups should eventually secure equal treatment under the law. Additionally, in industrial societies, people's abilities and talents—rather than their ethnicity or race—would be the criteria used to judge them. Park believed that as the United States continued to modernize, urbanize, and industrialize, race and ethnicity would gradually lose their importance, allowing the boundaries between groups to eventually dissolve. The result, he thought, would be a more “rational” and unified society (see also Geschwender, 1978; Hirschman, 1983).

Social scientists have long examined, analyzed, and criticized Park's conclusions. One frequent criticism is that he didn't specify how long it would take to completely assimilate. Without a definitive time frame, researchers can't test his idea that assimilation is “inevitable” and we can't know whether his theory is wrong or if we haven't waited long enough for it to occur. Another criticism of Park's theory is that he doesn't describe the assimilation process in detail. How would assimilation proceed? How would everyday life change? Which aspects of the group would change first? What do you think about these criticisms?

### Milton Gordon

Gordon sought to clarify some issues Park left unresolved. He made a major contribution to theories of assimilation in his book, *Assimilation in American Life* (1964). Gordon broke down the overall process of assimilation into seven subprocesses; we'll focus on the first three. Before considering these phases of assimilation, let's consider some new concepts.

Gordon makes a distinction between the cultural and the structural components of society. **Culture** encompasses a group's way of life, including language, beliefs systems, values, norms of behavior, customs, technology, and the ideas that people use to organize and interpret their lives. **Social structure** includes relatively enduring networks and patterns of social relationships (e.g., families, organizations, communities), social institutions (e.g., the economy, media, government), and stratification systems. Social structure organizes societal labor and connects individuals to one another and to the society.

Sociologists often separate social structure into primary and secondary sectors. The **primary sector** includes small, intimate, and personal relationships such as families and groups of friends. The **secondary sector** consists of large groups and organizations that are task oriented and impersonal such as businesses, schools, factories, and other bureaucracies.

Table 2.1 summarizes Gordon's earliest stages of assimilation.

1. **Acculturation** or **cultural assimilation**. Minority group members learn and adopt the dominant group's culture. This may include changes great and small, such as learning the

**TABLE 2.1** ■ **Gordon's Stages of Assimilation**

Stage	Process
Acculturation (cultural assimilation)	The minority group adopts the dominant group's culture.
Integration (structural assimilation) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the secondary level</li> <li>• At the primary level</li> </ul>	<p>The minority group has full access to the dominant (majority) society's organizations and institutions.</p> <p>Minority group members enter friendships, clubs, and interpersonal networks with majority group members.</p>
Intermarriage (marital assimilation)	Widespread patterns of marriage between minority and majority group members.

Source: Adapted from Gordon's Stages of Assimilation, *Assimilation in American Life*, Oxford University Press, 1964.

primary language, changing eating habits, adopting new values and norms, and altering the spelling of family names.

2. **Integration** or **structural assimilation**. The minority group has full access to the society's social structure. Integration typically begins in the secondary sector and gradually moves into the primary sector. Specifically, before people form friendships, they must become acquaintances. Initial contact between group members typically occurs first in public sectors such as schools and workplaces (secondary sector). Then, integration into the primary sector—and the other stages of assimilation—will follow (although not necessarily quickly). Greater integration of minority groups into the secondary sector, the greater the equality between minority and majority groups in education, income, and occupational prestige. Measures of integration into the primary sector include the extent of people's interpersonal relationships (e.g., acquaintances, close friends, neighbors) with members of other groups.
3. **Intermarriage** or **marital assimilation**. People are most likely to select spouses from their primary relations. Thus, in Gordon's view, widespread primary structural integration typically comes before the third stage of assimilation—intermarriage.

Gordon argued that acculturation was a prerequisite for integration. Given the stress on Anglo-conformity in the United States, an immigrant or minority group member couldn't compete for jobs or other opportunities in the secondary sector until they adopted the dominant group's culture. Gordon recognized, however, that successful acculturation doesn't ensure that a group will begin the integration phase. The dominant group may still exclude the minority group from its institutions and limit their opportunities. Gordon argued that "acculturation without integration" (or Americanization without equality) is a common situation for many minority groups, especially the racial minority groups.

In Gordon's theory, movement from acculturation to integration is crucial to the assimilation process. Once integration occurs, the other subprocesses would occur, although movement through the stages could be slow. Gordon's idea that assimilation proceeds in a particular order echoes Park's ideas about the inevitability of assimilation.

Recent scholarship calls some of Gordon's conclusions into question. For example, the individual subprocesses that Gordon saw as occurring in order can happen independently (Yinger, 1985). For example, a group may integrate before it acculturates. Other researchers reject the idea that assimilation is a linear or one-way process (Greeley, 1974). For example, minority groups (or its members) may

revive parts of their traditional culture such as language and foodways. This process has been called “reactive assimilation,” “reverse assimilation,” or “indigenization,” among other names.

Ngo (2008), among others, offers critiques of assimilationist models such as Gordon’s, suggesting that a one-size-fits-all, unidirectional (stage) approach to acculturation overlooks critical issues. For example, because immigrants in the second (post-1960) wave are more diverse compared to those in the first wave (1820s–1920s), it’s logical to think that their assimilation process would, too. An intersectional approach helps us understand this critique and the diversity of immigration experiences. For example, how might the immigration and assimilation process be for a 16-year-old, middle-class, heterosexual Catholic girl from Russia moving to Nashville, TN? How would that experience be different for a 40-year-old gay Muslim man from Nigeria? How would age, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, gender, and class shape their immigration process and their lives?

Additionally, traditional assimilation models rarely account for the influence that one minority group has on another. For example, Fouka, Mazumder, and Tabellini (2020) analyzed data from the “Great Migration” of Black Americans out of the south that began in the early 20th century (see Chapter 5). They argue that as areas diversified, native-born whites perceived more in common with white immigrants as a reaction to newly arrived Black Americans. In areas where Blacks settled in larger numbers, white immigrants experienced higher levels of assimilation (e.g., higher rates of intermarriage) as a result.

Gans observes that many early scholars of assimilation were white men who had little experience with immigrants or speaking foreign languages. Thus, their conceptualization of the assimilation process may reflect their own backgrounds and, perhaps, ethnocentric assumptions that assimilation into the dominant culture is desirable and completely possible (1979, c.f. Ngo, 2008). Critics argue that such models ignore power dynamics, as if assimilation is merely a matter of personal effort and will. Do all immigrants have an equal chance at full assimilation? To what degree should we consider structural and cultural inequities that immigrants face? For example, can people fully assimilate if the dominant culture doesn’t want them?

Indeed, some scholars suggest that models such as Gordon’s idealize assimilation; others question assimilation as a goal. Therefore, they argue, any use of such frameworks for national immigration or educational policy—is akin to a form of colonization (see Ngo, 2008). As you’ll see in Part 3, the degree of minority groups’ assimilation into the dominant culture varies. Because of such critiques, scholars have developed other models of assimilation. For example, Berry (1980) offers a bidimensional model and argues that we need to consider people’s cultural identity and connection to or participation in the dominant society. When we consider these factors, four possibilities result: (1) assimilation (which he defines as a desire to interact with the new culture and low interest in retaining one’s ethnic heritage), (2) separation (immigrants maintain their cultural heritage and reject the dominant culture), (3) integration (immigrants keep their cultural heritage but also adopt the majority culture), and (4) marginalization (immigrants reject their cultural heritage and that of the host nation).

These critiques and others are useful to consider because as social life changes, our theoretical models for understanding them need to change. It would be useful to assess assimilation in other ways (e.g., psychological well-being). However, most of the research continues to assess contemporary immigrant experiences in Gordon’s terms. Because language acquisition, generation, and time in the country remain relevant, we’ll use his model to guide our understanding, particularly in the Part 3 case studies (Alba & Nee, 1997).

### 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. This theory states that a person’s success (status attainment) results from individual traits (e.g., educational attainment, values, skills). From this perspective, education is an investment in human capital, like an 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 work on status attainment theory, found that even the relative advantage that comes from

having a high-status father is largely mediated through education. That is, high levels of affluence and occupational prestige aren't due to being born into a privileged status as much as they result from the advanced educational attainment that affluence makes possible.

Human capital theory answers questions about the different pace of upward mobility for immigrant groups in terms of group members' resources and cultural characteristics, especially their education levels and English proficiency. From this perspective, people or groups who "fail" 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 with others which limits their movement up the social class ladder.

Human capital theory is consistent with traditional American beliefs. Both (a) frame success as an individual phenomenon, a reward for hard work, sustained effort, and good character; (b) assume that success is equally available to everyone with rewards and opportunities distributed fairly; and (c) generally see assimilation as a highly desirable, benign process that blends diverse peoples and cultures into a strong, unified society. From this standpoint, people or groups that resist Americanization or question its benefits threaten societal cohesion.

Human capital theory is an important theory of upward mobility; we'll use it occasionally to analyze the experiences of minority and immigrant groups. However, because human capital theory resonates with American "common sense" views of success and failure, people may use it uncritically, ignoring its flaws.

We'll offer a final judgment on the validity of human capital theory at the end of the book, but you should be aware of its major limitations. First, human capital theory is an incomplete explanation of the minority group experience because it doesn't consider all factors that affect assimilation and mobility. Second, its assumption that American society is equally open and fair to all groups is simply wrong. We'll illustrate this issue and note this theory's other strengths and limitations throughout this book.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What are the limitations of the melting-pot view of assimilation?
2. Why does Gordon place acculturation as the first step in the assimilation process? Could one of the other stages occur first? Why or why not?
3. What does human capital theory leave out? In what ways is it consistent with American values?

## PLURALISM

Sociological discussions of pluralism often begin with a consideration of Horace Kallen's work. Kallen argued that people shouldn't have to surrender their culture and traditions to become full participants in American society. He rejected the Anglo-conformist, assimilationist model 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).

Assimilation has been such a powerful theme in U.S. history that in the decades following the publication of Kallen's analysis, support for pluralism was low. In recent decades, however, some people have questioned whether assimilation is desirable. People's interest in pluralism and diversity has increased, in part because the assimilation that Park (and many Americans) anticipated hasn't occurred. Indeed, as the 21st century unfolds, social distinctions and inequalities between dominant and minority groups show few signs of disappearing. Unfortunately, as you'll learn in upcoming chapters, some have increased.

The significance of white identity has generally weakened and changed form over time. A nationally representative survey found that just 15% of white participants say that being white is extremely or very "important to their identity" (Horowitz et al., 2019). However, rhetoric during the 2016 and 2020

presidential elections stoked a sense of “cultural, economic, and physical threats posed to whites from non-whites” has amplified a sense of white identity among some Americans (Sides et al., 2017, p. 2). We’ll explore issues of “white ethnicity” at the chapter’s end.

Another reason for the growing interest in pluralism is the everyday reality of increasing diversity in the United States (see Figure 1.1), particularly related to illegal immigration. Controversies over issues such as “English only” language policies, bilingual education, family separation and immigrant detention, birthright citizenship, immigrant eligibility for government benefits, and border wall construction are common and often bitter. In 2019, Pew Research Center (2019) found that nearly one third (32%) of Americans feel that diversity or pluralism has exceeded acceptable limits and that the unity and identity of the nation is at risk.

Finally, developments around the world have stimulated interest in pluralism. Several nation-states have reformed into smaller units based on language, culture, race, and ethnicity. Recent events in India, the Middle East, former Yugoslavia, the former USSR, Canada, and Africa (to mention a few) have provided dramatic and often tragic evidence of how ethnic identities and hostilities can persist for decades (or even centuries) of submergence and suppression in larger national units.

People often couch contemporary debates about diversity and pluralism in the language of **multiculturalism**, a general term for programs and ideas that stress mutual respect for all groups and for the multiple heritages that have shaped the United States. Some people find aspects of multiculturalism controversial and, therefore, oppose them (Kymlicka, 2010). In many ways, however, these debates merely echo a recurring argument about the character of American society, a debate we’ll revisit throughout this book.

### Types of Pluralism

You can distinguish distinct types of pluralism by using concepts from our discussion of assimilation. **Cultural pluralism** exists when groups haven’t acculturated and maintain their unique identities. The groups might speak different languages, practice different religions, and have different value systems. The groups are part of the same society and might live in adjacent areas, but in some ways, they live in different worlds. Many Native Americans are culturally pluralistic and are committed to preserving



Mulberry Street, New York City, around 1900, a bustling marketplace for Italian immigrants.

Source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division



their traditional cultures. The Amish, a religious community sometimes called the Pennsylvania Dutch, are a culturally pluralistic group, also. They are committed to a way of life organized around farming, and they maintain a culture and an institutional life that's largely separate from the dominant culture (see Hostetler, 1980; Kephart & Zellner, 1994; Kraybill & Bowman, 2001).

Following Gordon's subprocesses, a second type of pluralism exists when a group has acculturated but not integrated. That is, the group has adopted the Anglo-American culture but, because of the resistance of the dominant group, doesn't have equal access to the institutions of the dominant society. In this situation, called **structural pluralism**, cultural differences are minimal, but the groups are socially segregated; they 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 may also maintain separate organizational systems, including different churches, clubs, schools, and neighborhoods.

Structural pluralism occurs when groups practice a common culture but do so in different places and with minimal interaction across group boundaries. For example, local Christian churches may have congregations affiliated with specific racial or ethnic groups. Worshipers share a culture and express it through statements of core values and beliefs, rituals, other expressions of faith. However, they do so in separate congregations in different locations.

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 (e.g., measured by wealth or income) but hasn't become fully "Americanized" (e.g., become fluent in English or adopted uniquely American values and norms). Some immigrant groups have found niches in American society in which they can survive and occasionally prosper economically without acculturating very much.

Two different situations illustrate this pattern. First, an **enclave minority group** establishes its own neighborhood and relies on interconnected businesses, usually small in scope, for its economic survival. Some of these businesses serve the group, while others serve the wider society. The Cuban American community in South Florida and Chinatowns in many larger American cities are two examples.

A second, similar pattern of adjustment, the **middleman minority group**, also relies on small shops and retail firms. However, the businesses are more dispersed throughout a large area rather than concentrated in a specific locale. For example, Cuban American bodegas (small corner stores) throughout Miami are one example. Indian American-owned motels across the United States are another (Dhingra, 2012; Portes & Manning, 1986). We discuss these types of minority groups further in Part 3.

The economic success of enclave and middleman minorities is partly due to the strong ties of cooperation and mutual aid within their groups. The ties, based on cultural bonds, would weaken if acculturation took place. Contrary to Gordon's idea that acculturation is a prerequisite to integration, whatever success these groups enjoy is due, in part, to the fact that they *haven't* Americanized. Kim Park, who you read about in Chapter 1, is willing to work in his uncle's grocery store for room and board and the opportunity to learn the business and gain experience. His willingness to forego a salary and prioritize the group's needs over his own needs reflects the strength of family and kin relationships. At various times and places, Jewish, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Cuban Americans have been enclave or middleman minorities, as you'll see in future chapters (see Bonacich & Modell, 1980; Kitano & Daniels, 2001).

The situation of enclave and middleman minorities—integration without acculturation—can be considered either a type of pluralism (emphasizing the absence of acculturation) or a type of assimilation (emphasizing the relatively high level of economic equality). Keep in mind that assimilation and pluralism aren't opposites; they can occur in many combinations. It's best to think of acculturation, integration, and the other stages of assimilation (or pluralism) as independent processes.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

4. Is the United States becoming more pluralistic? Explain. What are some costs and benefits to pluralism?

5. How do middleman and enclave minority groups differ? How do these groups challenge the assumption that assimilation progresses in a certain order?

## OTHER GROUP RELATIONSHIPS

Separatism and revolution are two other possible relationships that minority groups may want (Wirth, 1945). **Separatism** is when the minority group desires self-determination; thus, it may seek to sever political, cultural, and/or geographic ties with the society. Some Native American communities have expressed pluralist and separatist goals. Other groups, such as Native Hawaiians and the Nation of Islam, have pursued separatism. Separatist groups exist around the world, for example in French Canada, Scotland, Chechnya, Cyprus, Algeria, Spain, Mexico, and many other places.

A minority group promoting **revolution** seeks to become the dominant group or to create a new social order, sometimes in alliance with other groups. In the United States, this goal is relatively rare although some groups have pursued it (e.g., the Black Panthers; see Chapter 6). Revolutionary minority groups occur more commonly in countries that another nation has conquered and controlled (e.g., in Morocco, India, Mozambique colonized by France, the United Kingdom, and Portugal, respectively).

The dominant group may also pursue: **forced migration** (expulsion), **continued subjugation**, or **genocide** against minority groups. The Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) is an example of expulsion. The law forbid immigration from China and the government made concerted efforts to compel Chinese people to leave the country (see Chapter 8). Similarly, the U.S. government forced tribal communities out of their homelands via the Indian Removal Act (1830). This expulsion, and other harmful policies, led to what many people consider genocide of indigenous people. (See Chapters 4 and 7.)

Continued subjugation occurs when the dominant group exploits a minority group and tries to keep them powerless. Systemic slavery and Jim Crow segregation are good examples. (Many people argue that the Middle Passage, slavery, and Jim Crow constitute genocide. See Chapters 4 to 6.)

Finally, the dominant group may pursue genocide against minority groups. Millions of people have been killed in contemporary genocides (e.g., in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia), and genocide continues today in Myanmar and Sudan, against the Yazidi in Iraq and the Uyghurs in China.

The most well-known genocide is the Holocaust (1941–1945) which killed at least six million Jews and millions of other people (e.g., Poles, Russians, Roma, gays and lesbians). Germany's defeat in World War I (1914–1918) and the economic destruction that followed laid the foundation for the Holocaust. Hitler became the leader of the Nazi party in 1921. His charisma and promises to restore Germany's economic prosperity and power on the world's stage made him popular. He was appointed as Chancellor of Germany in 1933 and quickly expanded his powers and those of his party (The National WWII Museum, n.d.).

Like other forms of group relations, genocide is a process. Nazi propaganda—including Hitler's speeches and writing—portrayed Jews as animals (e.g., rats, roaches), outsiders, deviants, and enemies of the state. Such dehumanization paved the way for widespread discrimination that, ultimately, led to horrific, systematic murder. For example, early laws banned Jews from public spaces (e.g., restaurants, theaters, parks, public schools) and professions (e.g., law, medicine, teaching). Then, Jews were forced to identify their minority status by wearing the Star of David and by adding Jewish identifiers to their official names (e.g., on passports and other documents). The Nazis stole their possessions, evicted them from their homes, segregated them into ghettos, banned them from intermarriage, rescinded their citizenship, and forbid their escape.

Researchers have documented more than 42,500 locations in 21 countries (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2021) where people were imprisoned or killed, including 30,000 slave labor camps; 1,150 ghettos; 980 concentration camps; and 1,000 prisoner-of-war camps. It's hard to imagine. Yet, thousands of “regular people” worked at these facilities or saw them regularly. Some acted as informants by reporting anything “suspicious” to the police and security officials (Gellately, 2002). Still others supported the Holocaust by refusing to “ask any questions” because they didn't want to know what was happening (c.f. Ezard, 2001).

Dominant groups may simultaneously pursue different policies with different minority groups and policies may change over time. This book will explore these diverse group relations but concentrates on assimilation and pluralism because they're the most typical forms in the United States.

## FROM IMMIGRANTS TO WHITE ETHNICS

Next, we'll explore the experiences of the minority groups that stimulated the development of what we're calling the traditional perspective of assimilation. Massive immigration from Europe began in the 1820s. Over the next century, millions of people made the journey from the Old World to the New. They came from every corner of the European continent: Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Ukraine, and scores of other nations and provinces. They came as young men and women seeking jobs, as families fleeing religious persecution, as political radicals fleeing the police, as farmers seeking land and a fresh start, and as paupers barely able to scrape together the cost of their passage. They came as immigrants, became minority groups upon their arrival, experienced discrimination and prejudice in all its forms, went through all the varieties and stages of assimilation and pluralism, and eventually merged into the society that had once rejected them so viciously. Figure 2.1 shows the major European sending nations.

These immigrants were a diverse group, and their experiences in America varied along crucial sociological dimensions. For example, native-born (white European) Americans marginalized and rejected some groups (e.g., Italians and other Southern Europeans) as racially inferior while they viewed others (Irish Catholics and Eastern European Jews) as inferior because of their religions. And, of course,

**FIGURE 2.1** ■ Approximate Number of Immigrants to the United States for Selected European Nations, 1820–1920



gender shaped the immigration experience—from start to finish—which was decidedly different for women and men.

Social class was another major differentiating factor: Many European immigrants brought few resources and very low human capital. They entered American society at the bottom of the economic ladder and often remained on the lowest occupational and economic rungs for generations. Other

groups brought skills or financial resources that led them to a more favorable position and faster rates of upward mobility. All these factors—race, gender, and class—affected their experiences and led to very different outcomes in terms of social location, mobility paths, and acceptance within American society.

This first mass wave of immigrants shaped America in many ways. When the immigration started, America was an agricultural nation clustered along the East Coast, not yet 50 years old. The nation was just coming into contact with Mexicans in the Southwest, slavery was flourishing in the South, and conflict with Native Americans was intense and brutal. When this period of intense immigration ended in the 1920s, the U.S. population had increased from fewer than 10 million to more than 100 million. Society had industrialized, stretched from coast to coast, established colonies in the Pacific and the Caribbean, and become a world power.

It was no coincidence that America's industrialization and rise to global prominence occurred simultaneously with European immigration. These changes were intimately interlinked and were the mutual causes and effects of one another. Industrialization fueled the growth of American military and political power, and the industrial machinery of the nation depended heavily on the flow of labor from Europe. By World War I, for example, 25% of the American labor force was foreign-born, and more than half the workforce in New York, Detroit, and Chicago consisted of immigrant men. Immigrants were the majority of the workers in many important sectors of the economy, including coal mining, steel manufacturing, the garment industry, and meatpacking (Martin & Midgley, 1999; Steinberg, 1981).

In the sections that follow, we'll explore these groups' experiences. First, we'll review the forces that caused them to leave Europe and come to the United States. Then, we'll assess their present status.

### Industrialization and Immigration

What forces stimulated this mass movement of people? Like any complex phenomenon, immigration from Europe had a multitude of causes, but underlying the process was a massive and fundamental shift in subsistence technology: the **Industrial Revolution**. We mentioned the importance of subsistence technology in Chapter 1. Dominant–minority relations are intimately related to the system a society uses to satisfy its basic needs, and those relations change as the economic system changes. The immigrants were pushed out of Europe as industrial technology wrecked the traditional agricultural way of life. They were drawn to America by the jobs created by the spread of the very same technology. Let's consider the impact of this fundamental transformation of social structure and culture.

Industrialization began in England in the mid-1700s, spread to other parts of Northern and Western Europe, and then, in the 1800s, to Eastern and Southern Europe. As it rolled across the continent, the industrial revolution replaced people and animal power with machines and new forms of energy (steam, coal, and eventually oil and gas), causing an exponential increase in the productive capacity of society.

At the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, most Europeans lived in small, rural villages and survived by traditional farming practices that had changed very little over the centuries. The work of production was **labor intensive**, done by hand or with the aid of draft animals. Productivity was low, and the tasks of food production and survival required the efforts of virtually the entire family working ceaselessly throughout the year.

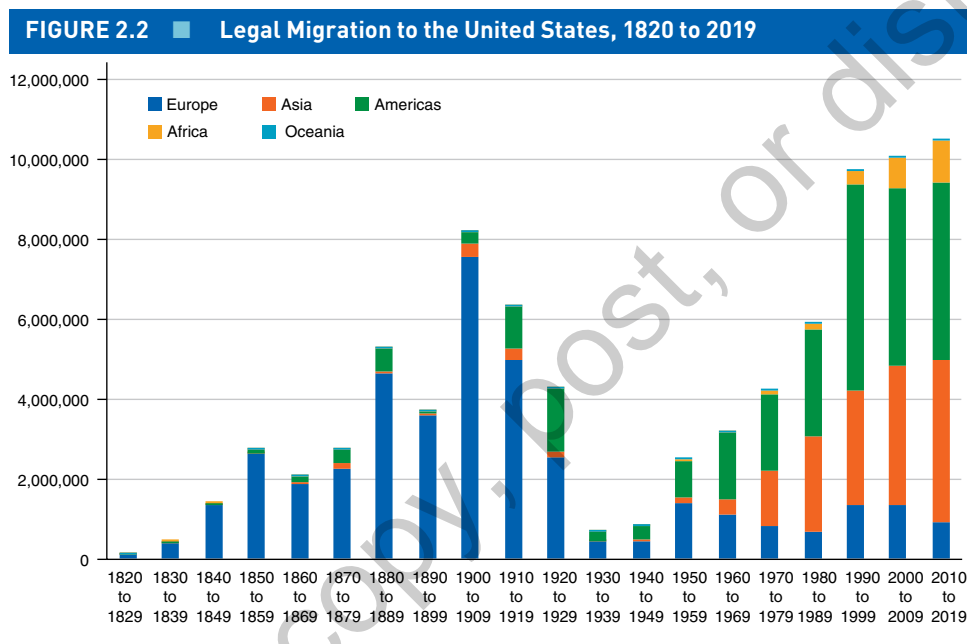
Industrialization destroyed this traditional way of life as it introduced new technology, machines, and sources of energy to the tasks of production (e.g., steam engines). The new technology was **capital intensive** (dependent on machine power). As agriculture modernized, the need for human labor in rural areas decreased. During this time, landowners consolidated farmland into larger and larger tracts for the sake of efficiency, further decreasing the need for human laborers. Yet, as survival in this rapidly changing rural economy became more difficult, the rural population began growing.

In response to these challenges, peasants left their home villages and moved to urban areas. Factories were being built in or near the cities, opening up opportunities for employment. The urban population tended to increase faster than the job supply. Thus, many migrants couldn't find work and had to move on; many of them responded to opportunities in the United States. At the same time, the abundance of frontier farmland encouraged people to move westward, contributing to a fairly constant

demand for labor in the East Coast areas, places that were easiest for Europeans to reach. As industrialization took hold on both continents, the population movement to European cities and then to North America eventually grew to become one of the largest in human history. The timing of migration from Europe followed the timing of industrialization. The first waves of immigrants, often called the **Old Immigration**, came from Northern and Western Europe starting in the 1820s. A second wave, the **New Immigration**, began arriving from Southern and Eastern Europe in the 1880s. Figure 2.2 shows the waves and rates of legal immigration up to 2019. Note that the New Immigration was much more voluminous than the Old Immigration, and that the number of immigrants declined drastically after the 1920s. Later, we'll explore the reasons for this decline and discuss the more recent (post-1965) increase in immigration—overwhelmingly from the Americas (mostly Mexico) and Asia—in Chapters 8 and 9.

### European Origins and Conditions of Entry

European immigrants varied from one another in innumerable ways. They followed different pathways to America, and their experiences were shaped by their cultural and class characteristics, their countries



Sources: 1820–2010: U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2014); 2010 to 2019: U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2020).

of origin, and the timing of their arrival. Some groups encountered much more resistance than others, and different groups played different roles in the industrialization and urbanization of America. To discuss these diverse patterns systematically, we distinguish three subgroups of European immigrants: Protestants from Northern and Western Europe, the largely Catholic immigrant laborers from Ireland and from Southern and Eastern Europe, and Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. We look at these subgroups in the approximate order of their arrival. In later sections, we'll consider other sociological variables such as social class and gender that further differentiated the experiences of people in these groups.

### Northern and Western Protestant Europeans

Northern and Western European immigrants included Danes (from Denmark), Dutch, English, French, Germans, Norwegians, Swedes, and Welsh. These groups were like the dominant group in their racial and religious characteristics. They also shared many American values, including the **Protestant ethic**—which stressed hard work, success, and individualism—and support for the principles of democratic government. These similarities eased their acceptance into a society that was highly intolerant of

religious and racial differences. These immigrant groups experienced a lower degree of ethnocentric rejection and racist disparagement than the Irish and immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe.

Northern and Western European immigrants came from nations as developed as the United States. Thus, these immigrants tended to be more skilled and educated than other immigrant groups, and often brought money and other resources with which to secure a comfortable place in their new society. Many settled in the sparsely populated Midwest and in other frontier areas, where they farmed the fertile land that became available after the conquest and removal of Native Americans and Mexican Americans (see Chapter 3). By dispersing throughout the midsection of the country, they lowered their visibility and their degree of competition with dominant group members. Two brief case studies, first of Norwegians and then of Germans, outline these groups' experiences.



Newly arrived Ruthenian immigrant.

New York Public Library / Wikimedia Commons

**Immigrants From Norway** Norway had a small population, and immigration from this Scandinavian nation to America was never large in absolute numbers. However, on a per capita basis, Norway sent more immigrants to America before 1890 than any other European nation except Ireland (Chan, 1990).

The first Norwegian immigrants were moderately prosperous farmers searching for cheap land. They found abundant, rich land in the upper Midwest states such as Minnesota and Wisconsin. However, the local labor supply was too small to cultivate the available land effectively. Many used their networks of relatives and friends to recruit a labor force from their homeland. Once chains of communication and migration linked Norway to the Northern Plains, Norwegian immigrants flocked to these areas for decades (Chan, 1990). Farms, towns, and cities of the upper Midwest still reflect this Scandinavian heritage.

**Immigrants From Germany** The stream of immigration from Germany was much larger than that from Norway. In the latter half of the 19th century, at least 25% of the immigrants each year were German (Conzen, 1980, p. 406) and they left their mark on the economy, political structure, and cultural life of their new homeland. In 2015, about 45 million Americans (14.4%) traced their ancestries to Germany—more than to any other country, including England and Ireland (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a).

The German immigrants who arrived in the early 1800s moved into the newly opened farmland and the rapidly growing cities of the Midwest, as had many Scandinavians. By 1850, Germans had established communities in Milwaukee, St. Louis, and other Midwestern cities (Conzen, 1980). Some German immigrants followed the trans-Atlantic route of the cotton trade between Europe and the southern United States and entered through the port of New Orleans, moving from there to the Midwest and Southwest.

German immigrants arriving later in the century were more likely to settle in urban areas, in part because fertile land was less available. Many of these city-bound German immigrants were skilled workers and artisans, and others found work as laborers in the rapidly expanding industrial sector. The influx of German immigrants into the rural and urban economies is reflected in the fact that by 1870, most employed German Americans were involved in skilled labor (37%) or farming (25%) (Conzen, 1980, p. 413).

German immigrants took relatively high occupational positions in the U.S. labor force, and their sons and daughters were able to translate that relative affluence into economic mobility. By the dawn of the 20th century, large numbers of second-generation German Americans were finding their way into

white-collar and professional careers. Within a few generations, German Americans had achieved parity with national norms in education, income, and occupational prestige.

**Assimilation Patterns** Assimilation for Norwegian, German, and other Protestant immigrants from Northern and Western Europe was consistent with the traditional model discussed earlier. Although members of these groups felt the sting of rejection, prejudice, and discrimination, their movement from acculturation to integration and equality was relatively smooth, especially when compared with the experiences of racial minority groups. Table 2.3, later in this chapter, illustrates their relative success and high degree of assimilation.

### Immigrant Laborers From Ireland and Southern and Eastern Europe

The relative ease of assimilation for Northern and Western Europeans contrasts sharply with the experiences of non-Protestant, less educated, and less skilled immigrants. These immigrant laborers came in two waves. The Irish were part of the Old Immigration that began in the 1820s, but the bulk of this group—Bulgarians, Greeks, Hungarians, Italians, Poles, Russians, Serbs, Slovaks, Ukrainians, and scores of other Southern and Eastern European groups—made up the New Immigration that began in the 1880s.

**Peasant Origins** Most immigrants in these nationality groups (like many recent immigrants to America) were peasants or unskilled laborers, with few resources other than their willingness to work. They came from rural, village-oriented cultures in which family and kin took precedence over individual needs or desires. Family life for them tended to be patriarchal and autocratic; Specifically, men dominated decision making and controlled family resources. Parents expected children to work for the good of the family and forgo their personal desires. Arranged marriages were common. This cultural background was less consistent with the industrializing, capitalistic, individualistic, Protestant, Anglo-American culture of the United States and was a major reason that these immigrant laborers experienced a higher level of rejection and discrimination than the immigrants from Northern and Western Europe.

The immigrant laborers were much less likely to enter the rural economy than were the Northern and Western European immigrants. Much of the better frontier land had already been claimed by the time these new immigrant groups arrived, and a large number of them had been permanently soured on farming by the oppressive and exploitative agrarian economies from which they were trying to escape (see Handlin, 2002).

**Regional and Occupational Patterns** The immigrant laborers of this time settled in the cities of the industrializing Northeast and found work in plants, mills, mines, and factories. They supplied the armies of laborers needed to power the industrial revolution in the United States, although their view of this process was generally from the bottom looking up. They arrived during the decades when the American industrial and urban infrastructure was being constructed. They built roads, canals, and railroads and the buildings that housed the machinery of industrialization. For example, the first tunnels of the New York City subway system were dug, largely by hand, by laborers from Italy. Other immigrants found work in the coalfields of Pennsylvania and West Virginia and the steel mills of Pittsburgh, and they flocked by the millions to the factories of the Northeast.

Like other low-skill immigrant groups, these newcomers were employed in jobs where strength and stamina were more important than literacy or skilled labor. In fact, as industrialization proceeded through its early phases, the skill level required for employment declined. To keep wages low and take advantage of what seemed like an inexhaustible supply of cheap labor, industrialists and factory owners developed technologies and machines that required few skills and little knowledge of English to operate. As mechanization proceeded, unskilled workers replaced skilled workers. Frequently, women and children replaced men because they could be hired for lower wages (Steinberg, 1981).

**Assimilation Patterns** Eventually, as the generations passed, the prejudice, systematic discrimination, and other barriers to upward mobility for the immigrant laborer groups weakened, and their descendants began rising out of the working class. Although the first and second generations of these

groups were largely limited to jobs at the unskilled or semiskilled level, the third and later generations rose in the American social class system. As Table 2.3 shows (later in this chapter), the descendants of the immigrant laborers achieved parity with national norms by the latter half of the 20th century.

### Eastern European Jewish Immigrants and the Ethnic Enclave

Jewish immigrants from Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe followed a third pathway into American society. These immigrants were a part of the New Immigration and began arriving in the 1880s. Unlike the immigrant laborer groups, who were generally economic refugees and included many young, single men, Eastern European Jews were fleeing religious persecution and arrived as family units intending to settle permanently and become citizens. They settled in the urban areas of the Northeast and Midwest. New York City was the most common destination, and the Lower East Side became the best known Jewish American neighborhood. By 1920, about 60% of all Jewish Americans lived in the urban areas between Boston and Philadelphia, with almost 50% living in New York City.



Many “breaker boys” who worked in coal mines came from immigrant families.

Lewis Hine / National Archives and Records Administration / Wikimedia Commons

Another 30% lived in the urban areas of the Midwest, particularly in Chicago (Goren, 1980, p. 581).

**Urban Origins** In Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe, Jews had been barred from agrarian occupations and had come to make their livelihoods from jobs in the urban economy. For example, almost two thirds of the immigrant Jewish men had been tailors and other skilled laborers in Eastern Europe (Goren, 1980). When they immigrated to the United States, these urban skills and job experiences helped them find work in the rapidly industrializing U.S. economy of the early 20th century.

Other Jewish immigrants joined the urban working class and took manual labor and unskilled jobs in the industrial sector (Morawska, 1990). The garment industry became the lifeblood of the Jewish community and provided jobs to about one third of all Eastern European Jews residing in the major cities (Goren, 1980). Jewish women, like the women of more recent immigrant laborer groups, created ways to combine their jobs and their domestic responsibilities. As young girls, they worked in factories and sweatshops. After marriage, they did the same work at home, sewing precut garments together or doing other piecework such as wrapping cigars or making artificial flowers, often assisted by their children (Amott & Matthaiei, 1991).

**An Enclave Economy** Unlike most European immigrant groups, Jewish Americans became heavily involved in commerce. Drawing on their experience in the “old country,” many started businesses and





Hester Street, New York City, was the center of the Jewish immigrant enclave a century ago.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

small independent enterprises. Jewish neighborhoods were densely populated and provided a ready market for all kinds of services such as bakeries, butcher and candy shops, and other retail enterprises.

Capitalizing on their residential concentration and close proximity, Jewish immigrants created an enclave economy founded upon dense networks of commercial, financial, and social cooperation. The Jewish American enclave survived because of the cohesiveness of the group; the willingness of wives, children, and other relatives to work for little or no monetary compensation; and the commercial savvy of the early immigrants. Also, a large pool of cheap labor and sources of credit and other financial services were available within the community. The Jewish American enclave grew and provided a livelihood for many of the immigrants' children and grandchildren (Portes & Manning, 1986). As with other enclave groups that we'll discuss in future chapters—including Chinese Americans and Cuban Americans—Jewish American economic advancement preceded extensive acculturation. That is, they made significant strides toward economic equality before they became fluent in English or were otherwise Americanized.

**Americanized Generations** One way an enclave immigrant group can improve its position is to develop an educated and acculturated second generation. The Americanized, English-speaking children of these immigrants used their greater familiarity with the dominant society and their language facility to help preserve and expand the family enterprise. Furthermore, as the second generation appeared, the American public school system was expanding, and education through the college level was free or inexpensive in New York City and other cities (Steinberg, 1981). There was also a strong push for the second and third generations to enter professions, and as Jewish Americans excelled in school, resistance to and discrimination against them increased. By the 1920s, many elite colleges and universities, such as Dartmouth, had established quotas that limited the number of Jewish students they would admit (Dinnerstein, 1977). These quotas weren't abolished until after World War II.

**Assimilation Patterns** The enclave economy and the Jewish neighborhoods the immigrants established proved to be an effective base from which to integrate into American society. The descendants of the Eastern European Jewish immigrants moved from their ethnic neighborhoods years ago, and their positions in the economy—their pushcarts, stores, and jobs in the garment industry—were taken up by more recent immigrants. When they left the enclave economy, many second- and third-generation Eastern European Jews didn't enter the mainstream occupational structure at the bottom, as the immigrant laborer groups tended to do. They used the resources generated through the hard work, skills, and entrepreneurship of the early generations to gain access to prestigious and advantaged social class positions (Portes & Manning, 1986). Today, Jewish Americans, as a group, surpass national averages in levels of education and income (Masci, 2016) and occupational prestige (Sklare, 1971; see also Cohen, 1985; Massarik & Chenkin, 1973). The relatively higher status of Russian Americans (shown in Table 2.3) is due, in part, to the fact that many are of Jewish heritage.



Chinatowns were the centers of social and economic life for Chinese immigrants.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs

### Chains of Immigration

Immigrants tend to follow chains established and maintained by group 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 (sociological) phenomenon. Immigrant chains stretched across the oceans, held together by the ties of kinship, language, religion, culture, and a sense of connection (Bodnar, 1985; Tilly, 1990).

Here's how chain immigration worked (and, although modified by modern technology, continues to work today): Someone from a village in, for instance, Poland would make it to the United States. This successful immigrant would send word to the home village, perhaps by hiring a letter writer. Along with news and adventure stories, they would send their address. Within months, another immigrant from the village, another relative perhaps, would show up at the address of the original immigrant. After 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 would arrive from the village in need of the same sort of introduction to the mysteries of America. The compatriots would typically 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 neighborhoods, people spoke the old language and observed the old ways. They started businesses, founded churches or synagogues, had families, and began mutual aid societies and other organizations. There was safety in numbers and comfort and security in a familiar, if transplanted, set of traditions and customs.

Immigrants often responded to American society by attempting to recreate as much of their old world as possible within the bustling metropolises of the industrializing Northeast and West Coast. They did so, in part, to avoid the harsher forms of rejection and discrimination and for solidarity and mutual support. These Little Italys, Little Warsaws, Little Irelands, Greektowns, Chinatowns, and Little Tokyos were safe havens that insulated the immigrants from the dominant U.S. society and helped them to establish bonds with one another, organize 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—such as the Jewish

enclave discussed earlier—the neighborhood became the dominant structure of their lives, and these networks functioned long after the arrival of group members in the United States.

### The Campaign Against Immigration: Prejudice, Racism, and Discrimination

Today, it may be hard to conceive of the bitterness and intensity of the prejudice that greeted the Irish, Italians, Jews, Poles, and other new immigrant groups (though it parallels anti-immigrant sentiment held by some Americans today). Even as immigrants became an indispensable part of the workforce, Americans castigated, ridiculed, attacked, and disparaged them. The Irish were the first immigrant laborers to arrive; thus, they were the first to experience this intense prejudice and discrimination. White Americans waged campaigns against them; mobs attacked Irish neighborhoods and burned Roman Catholic churches and convents. Some employers blatantly refused to hire the Irish, often posting signs that read “No Irish Need Apply.” Until later arriving groups immigrated and pushed them up, the Irish were mired at the bottom of the job market (Blessing, 1980; Dolan, 2010; Potter, 1973; Shannon, 1964).

Other groups felt the same sting of rejection as they arrived. Italian immigrants were particularly likely to be the victims of violent attacks; one of the most vicious took place in New Orleans in 1891. The city’s police chief was assassinated, and rumors of Italian involvement in the murder were rampant. The police arrested hundreds of Italians, and nine were brought to trial. All were acquitted. Anti-Italian sentiment ran so high that a mob lynched 11 Italians while police and city officials did nothing (Higham, 1963; Zecker, 2011).

#### Anti-Catholicism

Much of the prejudice against the Irish and the new immigrants was expressed as anti-Catholicism. Prior to the mid-19th century, Anglo-American society had been almost exclusively Protestant. Catholicism, with its Latin masses, saints, celibate clergy, and cloistered nuns seemed alien, unusual, and threatening to many Americans. The growth of Catholicism in the United States, especially because it was associated with non-Anglo immigrants, raised fears among Protestants that their religion was threatened or would lose status. This fear was stoked by false rumors that the pope prohibited Protestants from worshipping in Rome (Franco, 2008) and that with increasing numbers of Catholics in the United States, such prohibitions could make their way to America (Wilensky-Lanford, 2015).

Although Protestant Americans often stereotyped Catholics as a single group, Catholic immigrants differed, primarily by their home country. For example, the Catholicism that people practiced in Ireland differed significantly from the Catholicism practiced in Italy, Poland, and other countries (Inglis, 2007). Therefore, Catholic immigrant groups often established their own parishes, with priests who could speak their native language. These cultural and national differences often separated Catholic groups, despite their common faith (Herberg, 1960).

### NARRATIVE PORTRAIT: THE LOST BOYS OF SUDAN

*The “Lost Boys of Sudan” “ escaped the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983–2005), which killed more than two million people and injured and displaced many more (The Lost Boys of Sudan, IRC). To survive, between 20,000–25,000 of them, most 8 to 18 years old, walked nearly 1,000 miles from South Sudan to Ethiopia. They suffered from exhaustion, starvation, dehydration, exposure to the elements, and threats to their lives from animals and people. They occasionally crossed into war zones where some were captured, threatened, beaten, or conscripted into the army as “child soldiers.” They stayed in Ethiopia for about five years until war drove them out (personal communication with author). They walked to Kenya and resettled in the Kakuma Refugee Camp where they lived for years. Only about half of the original group made it. Of those, about 3,000 were girls (Jack, 2010, p. 22).*

*Gender affects people’s experiences, including experiences of war. “Lost boys” could escape the war because they were tending cows away from their villages making it easier to run or hide. Some girls escaped, but when they arrived in Ethiopia, gender conventions influenced the decision to segregate them*



Children in a refugee camp in Kakuma, Kenya.

SOPA Images/Contributor/Getty Images

from the boys, usually by placing them in foster families. Thus, they typically could not take advantage of education, counseling, or sports programs in the camp. When the U.S. government decided to accept some of these refugees, they stipulated that they be orphans. Because the girls had been living with families for several years, they did not meet that requirement. Hence, of the 2,000 South Sudanese refugees to settle in the United States, only 89 were girls (Jack, 2010, p. 22).

As new immigrants, the Lost Boys faced many challenges of adapting to American culture while trying to maintain their cultural identities as Dinka and Nuer. The following excerpt describes John Bul Dau's arrival to the United States.

The airport hummed with so much activity, so many people moving so fast in so many directions. My first look at Americans in America, I thought. What do they look like? So many of them were short by Dinka standards, and they walked like crazy, almost as if they were running. They seem to all be in a hurry. The woman behind the immigration desk asked for papers by saying, "Next." That was all she said. "Next. Next. Next." I gave her my precious, sealed envelope. She opened it and looked it over. She signed my name to some documents and gave me more papers. Then she motioned me through, very fast. "Next," she said.

I had questions about how to find the waiting area. Sometimes, busy Americans don't even speak to answer. They just pointed... we were hungry and tired, and I felt sick from the malaria medicine . . . I walked into the men's room at LaGuardia and saw the toilets and fancy sinks. I had seen pictures of them at orientation, but they still seemed strange. I have watched a lesson on how to work a toilet, and I used it without incident. But the sink was another matter. It had no faucets. I needed to wash my hands... without warning, when I moved my hands... the water came on by itself. This is a magic country, I thought, and white people—that's how I thought of Americans—are so cunning. They make things easy for themselves; they make things work for them. I wondered if that made it tempting to be lazy.

. . . I had no bags . . . I stepped into a brightly lit room and spotted three Lost Boys, now Sudanese Americans, who had come to greet me. There were some white people, including a woman and her son . . . "Welcome," said the woman who first greeted me, and everyone joined in.

Welcome to Syracuse. Welcome to America. Welcome.

### Questions to Consider

1. What concepts from Chapters 1 and 2 are most applicable to this passage? Why?
2. What are the most significant challenges the Lost Boys—or other refugees—will face in the United States?

3. The “Lost Boys” are what some people call “deserving immigrants” who presumably differ from “undeserving immigrants” who enter the country illegally (Aptekar, 2015, p. 112). What do you make of this distinction? What are the most important factors to consider when deciding which immigrants to let in. How important are “merits” such as English fluency, education, and religion? Can “merit” be balanced against human needs (e.g., safety, work)? How?
4. Most of the Sudanese refugeeed worked extremely hard to assimilate—working, taking classes, and adopting American norms. Yet, many struggled to find good jobs and attain financial security, especially in the years after their arrival. Discuss this situation considering human capital theory.

### Anti-Semitism

Biased sentiments and negative stereotypes of Jews have, unfortunately, been common for centuries. For example, Christians chastised and persecuted European Jews as the “killers of Christ” and stereotyped them as materialistic moneylenders and crafty business owners (Cohen, 1982; Dollinger, 2005; Rozenblit, 2010).

Europeans brought these stereotypes with them to the new world. For example, in 1654, 23 Jews sought asylum in the New Netherland (present-day New York). The Dutch government gave them permission to enter. However, the local director general hoped to expel them, saying they were a “deceitful race . . . [who should] be not allowed to further infect and trouble this new colony” (Jacobson, 1999, p. 171).

Before the mass immigration of Eastern European Jews began in the 1880s, **anti-Semitism** in the United States was relatively mild, perhaps because the group was so small. However, it intensified when large numbers of Jewish immigrants began arriving from Russia and Eastern Europe. These Jews experienced forced migration, fueled in part by violent anti-Jewish pogroms. In Russian, *pogrom* means “to wreak havoc, to demolish violently.” Pogroms involved the theft and destruction of Jewish-owned property as well as the physical and emotional assault of Jewish people. One of the first pogroms occurred in 1821. Between 1881–1884, pogroms had become widespread in Russia and Ukraine. Between 1918–1920 another wave happened in Belarus and Poland. Overall, perpetrators of the pogroms killed tens of thousands of Jews (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.).

The most well-known pogrom, *Kristallnacht* (*The Night of Broken Glass*), took place in 1938 throughout Germany, Austria, and the Sudetenland (now part of Czechoslovakia). In just two days, attacks orchestrated by Nazi leaders, left a path of destruction: 7,500 Jewish-owned businesses were plundered or destroyed, 267 synagogues were destroyed (usually by being burned down), and Jewish cemeteries were desecrated. Thousands of Jews *were* terrified, physically attacked, or forced to perform humiliating acts. Approximately 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps. After *Kristallnacht*, the Nazis passed many anti-Jewish laws and required Jews to pay an “atonement tax” of 1 billion Reichsmark, equivalent to 2.49 billion dollars (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.). In 2020, after being adjusted for inflation, Jews would have been taxed the equivalent of \$46, 496, 370 (Friedman, n.d.).

As Jews entered the United States in record numbers, many Americans held on to their biases. For example, in the late 19th century, white Americans began banning Jews from social clubs, summer resorts, hotels, and other organizations (Anonymous, 1924; Kennedy, 2001; Meenes, 1941; Shevitz, 2005). Some businesses posted notices such as, “We prefer not to entertain Hebrews” (Goren, 1980, p. 585) and “Patronage of Jews is Declined” (Bernheimer, 1908, p. 1106). Such language attempted to mask white resistance to Jewish integration as a matter of preference. This prejudice and blatant discrimination hinted at forms of modern racism to come.

By the 1920s and 1930s, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and other extreme racist groups espoused anti-Semitism. Because many of the political radicals and labor leaders of the time were Jewish immigrants, anti-Semitism seemingly merged with a fear of Communism and became prominent among American prejudices (Muller, 2010).

Some well-known Americans championed anti-Semitic views. For example, Henry Ford, the founder of Ford Motor Company and one of the most famous men of his time, believed “the Jews” were responsible for WWI and a host of other things. In 1919, he bought a newspaper to communicate his views, most notably in a 91-week series called “The International Jew, the World’s Foremost Problem,” that he published later as a book. According to Logsdon (n.d.), it was “the largest and most damaging campaign against Jews ever waged in the United States.” Additionally, it had tremendous influence on Hitler and, by extension, the Nazis. Similarly, Father Charles Coughlin, a Catholic priest, reached millions of people through his radio program (Selzer, 1972) and through a newsletter for an organization he started, the National Union for Social Justice (NUSJ). The NUSJ had millions of members who pledged to “restore America to the Americans” (Carpenter, 1998, p. 71). A federal investigation declared him pro-Nazi and guilty of restating enemy propaganda (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.).

Anti-Semitism peaked before World War II, then decreased before reemerging after the war (Norwood, 2013). Social norms at the time made it easy for people to express anti-Semitic views or to discriminate against Jews. Unfortunately, anti-Semitism didn’t stop with greater knowledge of the Holocaust at World War II’s end. Research based on a sample of 53,100 people in 100 countries suggests that more than one billion people worldwide have anti-Semitic beliefs (Anti-Defamation League, 2017). However, attitudes vary by country and change over time. A 2015 poll of 10,000 people in 18 of the countries originally surveyed in 1964 and in subsequent years showed increases in anti-Semitism in Italy, the Netherlands, and Romania. Decreases occurred in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine. The 2019 survey showed increases in Argentina, Brazil, Poland, Russia, South Africa, and Ukraine. Austria, Canada, and Italy showed decreased anti-Semitic attitudes while attitudes remained consistent in several countries. In America, anti-Semitic attitudes decreased significantly since the 1960s. However, it increased in recent years though it wasn’t included in the 2019 survey (Anti-Defamation League, 2017, 2019).

Starting in the 1960s, people began expressing anti-Semitism in subtler forms (Benowitz, 2017; Borstelmann, 2009; Nirenberg, 2014). One notable exception to this is anti-Semitism within many extremist groups, which remains significant, overt, and hostile. In the past few years, the number of such groups has increased, as have anti-Semitic incidents. Though some groups’ names are recognizable (e.g., Aryan Nations, KKK), others mask the groups’ beliefs (e.g., Creativity Movement, Vanguard America, Vinlanders Social Club). Not all groups share the same exact ideology; for example, white nationalists, “skinheads,” and KKK-related organizations are slightly different. However, many came together in August 2017 for a “Unite the [Alt] Right” rally in Charlottesville, VA, which made their anti-Semitism clear. For example, some shouted “Jews will not replace us” and “blood and soil”—the latter is a reference to Nazi ideology (Swaney, 2004).

Some targeting of Jews increases during economic recession and may be related to the stereotypical view of Jewish Americans as extremely prosperous and materialistic, as often depicted in media such as film and television (Cohen, 1982). The type of prejudice that occurs under these conditions is called “envious prejudice” (Cuddy et al., 2008).

Recent years have seen a sharp increase in anti-Semitic attacks. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reports that there were 2,100 Anti-Semitic attacks in 2019, the highest number the group has recorded since 1979 and 2020, a year in which most Americans stayed home because of the pandemic, saw the third highest number of attacks (Harris & Shammas, 2021). We’ll discuss hate crimes against Jewish Americans a bit more in Chapter 3.

### A Successful Exclusion

The prejudice and racism directed against the immigrants also found expression in organized, widespread efforts to stop the flow of immigration. Various anti-immigrant organizations appeared almost as soon as the mass European immigration started in the 1820s. The strength of these campaigns waxed and waned, largely in harmony with the strength of the economy and the size of the job supply. Anti-immigrant sentiment intensified, and the strength of its organized expressions increased during hard times and depressions and tended to soften when the economy improved.

The campaign ultimately triumphed with the passage of the National Origins Act in 1924, which established a quota system limiting the number of immigrants that America would accept each year from each sending nation. This system was openly racist. For example, the quota for European nations was based on the proportional representation of each nationality in America as of 1890. Legislators chose this year because it predated the bulk of the New Immigration and, therefore, gave nearly 70% of the available immigration slots to the nations of Northern and Western Europe, despite the fact that immigration from those areas had largely ended by the 1920s.

Moreover, the National Origins Act banned immigration from Asian nations altogether. At this time, various European nations still colonized most of Africa, which received no separate quotas. (Specifically, the quota for African immigrants was zero.) The National Origins Act drastically reduced the number of immigrants that would be admitted into the United States each year. Figure 2.2 shows the effectiveness of the numerical restrictions. By the time the Great Depression took hold of the American economy in the 1930s, immigration had dropped to the lowest level in a century. The National Origins Act remained in effect until 1965.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

6. What caused people to leave Europe and come to North America? How did these reasons change from time to time and from place to place?
7. What influenced resistance and discrimination in the United States? How did the exclusionists triumph? What role did class play in these processes?

## PATTERNS OF ASSIMILATION

In this section, we'll explore common patterns of assimilation European immigrants and their descendants followed: assimilation by generation, ethnic succession, and structural mobility. These patterns are consistent with Gordon's model of assimilation.

### The Importance of Generations

People today—social scientists, politicians, and ordinary citizens—often do not recognize the time and effort it takes for a group to become completely Americanized. For most European immigrant groups, the process took generations. It was the immigrant's grandchildren or the great-grandchildren (or even great-great-grandchildren) who completed acculturation and integration. Mass immigration from Europe ended in the 1920s. However, the assimilation of some European ethnic groups wasn't completed until late in the 20th century.

Here's a summary of how assimilation proceeded for European immigrants: The first generation, the actual immigrants, settled into ethnic neighborhoods, such as Little Italy in New York City. They made limited movement toward acculturation and integration. They focused their energies on social relationships within their own groups, especially family networks. Many of them—usually men—had to leave their neighborhoods for work and other reasons, and this required some familiarity with the society. The people had to learn some English and taking a job outside the neighborhood is, almost by definition, a form of integration. Nonetheless, this first generation of immigrants primarily lived within a version of the old country, which they recreated within the new.

The second generation—the immigrants' children—were psychologically or socially marginalized because they were partly ethnic and partly American but not full members of either group. They were born in America but in households and neighborhoods that were ethnic, not American. They learned the old language first and were socialized in the old ways. As they entered childhood, however, they entered the public schools and became socialized into the Anglo-American culture.

Often, what they learned at school conflicted with their home lives. For example, old country family values included expectations for children to put family interests before self-interests. Parents arranged marriages, or at least heavily influenced them; marriages were subject to parents' approval.

These customs conflicted sharply with American ideas about individualism and romantic love. Cultural differences like these often created painful conflict between the ethnic first generation and their Americanized children.

As the second generation progressed toward adulthood, they tended to move away from the old neighborhoods, often motivated by desires for social mobility. They were much more acculturated than their parents, spoke English fluently, and enjoyed a wider range of opportunities, including occupational choices. Discriminatory policies in education, housing, and the job market sometimes limited them. However, they were upwardly mobile, and in pursuit of their careers, they left behind their ethnic communities and many of their parents' customs.

The third generation—the immigrants' grandchildren—were typically born and raised in non-ethnic settings. English was their first (and often only) language, and their beliefs and values were thoroughly American. Family and kinship ties with grandparents and the old neighborhood often remained strong and weekend and holiday visits along with family rituals revolving around the cycles of birth, marriage, and death connected the third generation to the world of their ancestors. However, they were American; their ethnicity was a relatively minor part of this generation's identities and daily life.

The pattern of assimilation by generation progressed as follows:

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

Table 2.2 illustrates Italian American's patterns of structural assimilation. As the generations change, this group's educational and occupational characteristics converge with those of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs). 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. However, third- and fourth-generation Italians are virtually identical to WASPs on this measure of integration in the secondary sector of society. Likewise, the other differences between Italians and WASPs shrink from generation to generation.

**TABLE 2.2** ■ Some Comparisons Between WASPs and Italian Americans

Indicators	WASPs*	Generation		
		First	Second	Third and Fourth
Percentage with some college	42.4%	19.0%	19.4%	41.7%
Average years of education	12.6	9.0	11.1	13.4
Percentage with white-collar jobs	34.7%	20.0%	22.5%	28.8%
Percentage with blue-collar jobs	37.9%	65.0%	53.9%	39.0%
Average occupational prestige	42.5	34.3	36.8	42.5
Percentage of "unmixed" Italian men marrying non-Italian women	N/A	21.9%	51.4%	67.3%

\*Note: White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs) weren't separated by generation, and some of the differences between groups may be the result of factors such as age. That is, older WASPs may have levels of education more comparable to first-generation Italian Americans than to those of WASPs as a whole.

Source: Adapted from Alba (1985, Tab. 5-3, 5-4, 6-2). Data are originally from the NORC General Social Surveys (1975-1980) and the Current Population Survey (1979). Copyright © 1985 Richard D. Alba.



Table 2.2 shows the first five measures of educational and occupational attainment the generational pattern of integration (or structural assimilation). The sixth measures marital assimilation, or intermarriage. It displays the percentage of men of “unmixed” (100% Italian) heritage who married women outside the Italian community. Note once more the tendency for integration, now at the primary level, to increase across the generations. Most first-generation men married within their group—only 21.9% married non-Italians. By the third generation, 67.3% of the men married non-Italians.

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 for the Irish) were generally more similar, culturally, to the dominant group in America. They tended to be more educated and skilled. Thus, they were accepted more quickly than other immigrant groups, which helped them complete the assimilation process in three generations or less.

In contrast, immigrants from Ireland and from Southern and Eastern Europe were mostly uneducated, unskilled people who were more likely to join the huge groups of industrial laborers who ran the factories, mines, and mills. These immigrants were more likely to remain at the bottom of the American class structure for generations; indeed, they only attained middle-class prosperity in the second half of the 20th century. As mentioned earlier, Eastern European Jews followed a distinctly different pathway to assimilation. Although widespread anti-Semitic attitudes and policies limited them, they formed an enclave that served as a springboard to launch the second and third generations into the society.

It’s important to keep generational patterns in mind when examining current immigration to the United States. It’s common for people to criticize contemporary newcomers (especially Hispanics) for their slow pace of assimilation. But this process should be considered in the light of the generational time frame for assimilation followed by European immigrants. Modern forms of transportation allow immigration to happen quickly. Assimilation, however, is slow.

### Ethnic Succession

A second factor that shaped the assimilation experience is captured in the concept of **ethnic succession**, or the ways European ethnic groups unintentionally affected one another’s positions in the society’s class structure. The overall pattern was that each European immigrant group tended to be pushed to higher social class levels and more favorable economic situations by the groups that arrived after it. As more experienced groups became upwardly mobile and moved from the neighborhoods that served as their ports of entry, new groups of immigrants replaced them and began the process anew. Some cities in the Northeast served as ethnic neighborhoods—the first haven in the new society—for various successive groups. Some places, such as the Lower East Side of New York City, continue to fill this role today.

This process of ethnic succession can be understood in terms of the second stage of Gordon’s model: integration at the secondary level (see Table 2.1), or entry into the public institutions and organizations of the larger society. Three pathways of integration tended to be most important for European immigrants: politics, labor unions, and the church. We’ll discuss each in turn, illustrating with the Irish, the first immigrant laborers to arrive in large numbers; but the general patterns apply to all white ethnic groups.

### Politics

The Irish tended to follow the Northern and Western Europeans in the job market and social class structure and were, in turn, followed by the wave of new immigrants. In many urban areas of the Northeast, they moved into the neighborhoods and took jobs left behind by German laborers. After a period of acculturation and adjustment, the Irish began creating their own connections to mainstream American society to improve their economic and social positions. They were replaced in their neighborhoods and at the bottom of the occupational structure by Italians, Poles, and other immigrant groups arriving after them.

As the years passed and the Irish gained more experience, they forged more links to society. Specifically, they aligned with the Democratic Party and helped construct the political machines that

dominated many city governments in the 19th and 20th centuries, including Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago (Erie & Kogan, 2016). Machine politicians were often corrupt and even criminal, regularly subverting the election process, bribing city and state officials, using city budgets to fill the pockets of the political bosses and their followers, and giving city jobs to people who provided favors and faithful service. Nevertheless, the political machines gave their constituents and loyal followers valuable social services. Machine politicians, such as Boss Tweed of Tammany Hall in New York City, found jobs, provided food and clothing for the destitute, aided victims of fires and other calamities, and intervened in the criminal and civil courts (Golway, 2014; Warren, 2008).

Much of the urban political machines' power resulted from their control of city budgets. The machines' leaders used municipal jobs and city budgets as part of a "spoils" or patronage system that granted rewards to their supporters and allies. To represent diverse workers' as a single social class, union leaders had to coordinate and mobilize the efforts of many people and connected Irish Americans to a central and important institution of the dominant society. Using the resources controlled by local governments as a power base, the Irish (and other immigrant groups after them) began integrating into American society (Menes, 2001).

### Labor Unions

The labor movement provided another connection among the Irish, other European immigrant groups, and American society. Although virtually all white ethnic groups had a hand in the creation and eventual success of the movement, many of the founders and early leaders were Irish. For example, Terence Powderly, an Irish Catholic, founded one of the first American labor unions. In the early 20th century, about one third of union leaders were Irish and more than 50 national unions had Irish presidents (Bodnar, 1985; Brody, 1980).

As the labor movement grew in strength and acquired legitimacy, its leaders gained status, power, and other resources, and the rank-and-file membership gained job security, increased wages, and better benefits. In short, the labor movement provided another channel through which resources, power, status, and jobs flowed to the white ethnic groups.

Because of how Union work typically required communication and cooperation across ethnic lines. The American workforce at the turn of the 20th century was multiethnic and multilingual. To represent diverse workers' as a single social class, union leaders had to coordinate and mobilize the efforts of many different cultural groups. Thus, labor union leaders became important intermediaries between society and European immigrant groups.

European immigrant women were heavily involved in labor movement and some filled leadership roles, including top positions, such as union president (although usually in women-dominated unions). One of the most important union activists was Mother Jones, an Irish immigrant who worked tirelessly to organize miners:

*Until she was nearly one hundred years old, Mother Jones was where the danger was greatest—crossing militia lines, spending weeks in damp prisons, incurring the wrath of governors, presidents, and coal operators—she helped to organize the United Mine Workers with the only tools she felt she needed: “convictions and a voice.” (Forner, 1980, p. 281)*

Women workers often faced opposition from men workers and from employers. The major unions weren't only racially discriminatory but also hostile to organizing women. For example, in the early 20th century, companies required women laundry workers in San Francisco to live in dormitories and work from 6 a.m. until midnight. When they applied to the international laundry workers union for a charter, men union members blocked them from joining. The women eventually went on strike and won the right to an eight-hour workday in 1912 (Amott & Matthaei, 1991). Women in other protest movements have had to deal with similar opposition from men, as you'll see in future chapters.

Women led some of the labor movement's most significant events. For example, one of its first victories was the Uprising of 20,000 (also known as the New York Shirtwaist Strike of 1909). Thousands of mostly Jewish and Italian girls and women (many in their teens) staged a strike opposing the garment industry's abusive working conditions (Kheel Center, 2017). Despite factory owners and machine bosses hiring people to attack the strikers and the local police unlawfully assaulting the participants,

the strike lasted four months. The strikers eventually won union recognition from many employers, a reversal of a wage decrease, and a reduction in the 56- to 59-hour workweek (Goren, 1980).

Despite their efforts, European immigrant women were among the most exploited segments of the labor force, often relegated to the lowest paying jobs in difficult or unsafe working conditions. (Today, we'd call them *sweatshops*.) For example, they were the primary victims of one of the greatest tragedies in U.S. labor history. In 1911, a fire swept through the Triangle Shirtwaist Company, a garment industry shop on the 10th floor of a building in New York City. The fire spread rapidly, fueled by paper and fabric scraps. Because of concerns that workers would take breaks or steal fabric, management locked and guarded the doors (von Drehle, 2004). Overcrowding and a lack of exits (including a collapsed fire escape) made escape nearly impossible. Many workers leaped to their deaths to avoid being killed by fire. One hundred forty-six people were killed, 120 of them were young immigrant women, the youngest only 14 years old. The disaster outraged the public, and more than a quarter of a million people attended the victims' funerals. The incident fueled a drive for reform and improvement of work conditions and safety regulations (Amott & Matthaei, 1991; see also Kheel Center, 2017).



Women striking for a 40-hour work week.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

## Religion

Religious institutions provided a third avenue of mobility for the Irish and other white ethnic groups. The Irish were the first large group of Catholic immigrants to come to the United States and therefore were in a favorable position to dominate the church's administrative structure. The Catholic priesthood became largely Irish and, as these priests were promoted through the Church hierarchy, they eventually became bishops and cardinals. The Catholic faith was practiced in different ways in different nations. As other Catholic immigrant groups began arriving, conflict within the Irish-dominated church increased. Italian and Polish Catholic immigrants demanded their own parishes in which they could speak their own languages and celebrate their own customs and festivals. Dissatisfaction was so intense that some Polish Catholics broke with Rome and formed a separate Polish National Catholic Church (Lopata, 1976).

The other Catholic immigrant groups eventually began supplying priests and other religious functionaries and to occupy Church leadership positions. Although the Irish continued to disproportionately influence the Church, it served as a power base for other white ethnic groups to gain acceptance and become integrated into mainstream American society (McCook, 2011).

### Other Pathways

Besides party politics, the union movement, and religion, European immigrant groups forged other not-so-legitimate pathways of upward mobility. One alternative to legitimate success was offered by crime, a pathway that has been used by every ethnic group to some extent. Crime became particularly lucrative and attractive when Prohibition, the attempt to eliminate alcohol use in the United States, went into effect in the 1920s. The criminalization of liquor didn't lower the demand, and Prohibition created an economic opportunity for those willing to take the risks involved in manufacturing and supplying alcohol to the American public.

Italian Americans headed many of the criminal organizations that took advantage of Prohibition. Criminal leaders and organizations with roots in Sicily, a region with a long history of secret antiestablishment societies, were especially important (Alba, 1985). The connection among organized crime, Prohibition, and Italian Americans is well known, but it isn't widely recognized that ethnic succession operated in organized crime as it did in the legitimate opportunity structures. The Irish and Germans had been involved in organized crime for decades before the 1920s. The Italians competed with these established gangsters and with Jewish crime syndicates for control of bootlegging and other criminal enterprises. The patterns of ethnic succession continued after the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, and members of groups newer to urban areas, including African Americans, Jamaicans, and Hispanic Americans, have recently challenged the Italian-dominated criminal families.

You can see ethnic succession in sports, too. Since the beginning of the 20th century, sports have offered a pathway to success and affluence that has attracted millions of young people. Success in many sports requires little in the way of formal credentials, education, or English fluency; historically, sports have been particularly appealing to the young men in minority groups who've had limited opportunities or resources (Eitle & Eitle, 2002).

For example, at the turn of the 20th century, the Irish dominated boxing, but boxers from the Italian American community and other new immigrant groups eventually replaced them. Each successive wave of boxers reflected the concentration of a particular ethnic group at the bottom of the class structure. The succession of minority groups continues today, with boxing now dominated by Black and Latino fighters (Rader, 1983). We can see a similar progression, or "layering," of ethnic and racial groups in other sports.

The institutions of American society, whether legitimate or illegal, reflect the relative positions of minority groups at a moment in time. Just a few generations ago, European immigrant groups dominated crime and sports because they were blocked from legitimate opportunities. Now, it's racial minority groups, still excluded from the mainstream job market and mired in the urban underclass, which supply disproportionate numbers of people for these alternative opportunity structures.

### Continuing Industrialization and Structural Mobility

We've already mentioned that dominant–minority relations typically change with changes in subsistence technology. The history of European immigrant groups throughout the 20th century illustrates this relationship. Industrialization is a continuous process. As it proceeded, work in America evolved and changed and created opportunities for upward mobility for the white ethnic groups. One important form of upward mobility throughout the 20th century, called **structural mobility**, resulted more from changes in the structure of the economy and the labor market than from any individual effort or desire to get ahead.

Structural mobility is the result of the continuing mechanization and automation of the workplace. As machines replaced people in the workforce, the supply of manual, blue-collar jobs that had provided employment for so many first- and second-generation European immigrant laborers dwindled. At the same time, the supply of white-collar jobs increased, but access to the better jobs depended heavily on

educational credentials. For white ethnic groups, a high school education became much more available in the 1930s, and college and university programs expanded rapidly in the late 1940s, spurred in large part by the educational benefits made available to World War II veterans. Each generation of white ethnics, especially those born after 1925, was significantly more educated than the previous generation, and many were able to translate their increased human capital into upward mobility in the mainstream job market (Morawska, 1990).

The descendants of European immigrants became upwardly mobile not only because of their individual ambitions and efforts but also because of the changing location of jobs and the progressively greater opportunities for education. Of course, the pace and timing of this upward movement was highly variable from group to group and from place to place. Ethnic succession continued to operate, and the descendants of the most recent European immigrants (Italians and Poles, for example) tended to be the last to benefit from the general upgrading in education and the job market.

Still, structural mobility is key to the eventual successful integration of all ethnic groups. In Table 2.3, you'll see differing levels of educational attainment and income for white ethnic groups. During these same years, racial minority groups, particularly Black Americans, were excluded from the dominant group's educational system and from the opportunity to compete for better jobs. We'll discuss these patterns of exclusion more in Parts 2 and 3.

## VARIATIONS IN ASSIMILATION

In the previous section, we discussed patterns common to European immigrants and their descendants. Now we address some of the sources of variation and diversity in assimilation, a complex process that's never identical for any two groups. Sociologists have paid particular attention to how similarity, religion, social class, and gender shaped the overall assimilation of the descendants of the mass European immigration. They've also investigated how immigrants' reasons for coming to the United States have affected different groups' experiences.

### Degree of Similarity

Since the dominant group consisted largely of Protestants with ethnic origins in Northern and Western Europe and especially in England, it isn't surprising to learn that the degree of resistance, prejudice, and discrimination encountered by the different European immigrant groups varied, in part by how much they differed from these dominant groups. The most significant differences included religion, language, cultural values, and, for some groups, physical characteristics (often viewed as "racial"). Thus, Protestant immigrants from Northern and Western Europe experienced less resistance than the English-speaking Catholic Irish, who in turn were accepted more readily than the new immigrants, who were non-English speaking and overwhelmingly non-Protestant.

The dominant group's preferences correspond roughly to the arrival times of the immigrants. The most similar groups immigrated earliest, and the least similar tended to be the last to arrive. Because of this coincidence, resistance to any one group of immigrants tended to fade as new groups arrived. For example, anti-German prejudice and discrimination never became particularly vicious or widespread (except during the heat of the World Wars) because the Irish began arriving in large numbers at about the same time. Concerns about the German immigrants were swamped by the fear that the Catholic Irish could never be assimilated. Then, as the 19th century drew to a close, immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe—even more different from the dominant group—began arriving and made concerns about the Irish seem trivial.

Additionally, the New Immigration was far larger than the Old Immigration (see Figure 2.2). Southern and Eastern Europeans arrived in record numbers in the early 20th century. The sheer volume of the immigration raised fears that American cities and institutions would be swamped by hordes of what were seen as racially inferior, unassimilable immigrants, a fear that resonates today in our debates about modern immigrants.

Thus, a preference hierarchy was formed in American culture that privileged Northern and Western Europeans over Southern and Eastern Europeans, and Protestants over Catholics and Jews. These rankings reflect the ease with which the groups assimilated and have made their way into society. To further illustrate the hierarchy of ethnic preference and prejudice, see the social distance scores in Table 3.3 in Chapter 3. The anti-ethnic prejudices illustrated in the table are much more muted today than at the peak of immigration.

## Religion

Gordon and other scholars of American assimilation recognized that religion was a major factor that differentiated the experiences of European immigrant groups. Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish immigrants lived in different neighborhoods, occupied different niches in the workforce, formed separate groups and networks of affiliation, and chose their marriage partners from different groups.

Sociologist Ruby Jo Kennedy's research (1944) documented the importance of religion for European immigrants and their descendants. Specifically, she studied intermarriage among Catholics, Protestants, and Jews in New Haven, Connecticut from 1870 to 1940. She found that immigrants generally chose marriage partners from certain ethnic and religious groups. For example, Irish Catholics married other Irish Catholics, Italian Catholics married Italian Catholics, Irish Protestants married Irish Protestants, and so forth for all the ethnic and religious groups that she studied.

However, later generations showed a different pattern: The immigrants' children and grandchildren continued to select marriage partners from groups bounded by religion, but not much by ethnicity. For example, later generations of Irish Catholics continued to marry other Catholics (religion) but were less likely to marry other Irish (ethnicity). As assimilation proceeded, the ethnic group boundaries faded (or "melted"), but religious boundaries didn't. Kennedy (1944) described this phenomenon as a **triple melting pot**: a pattern of structural assimilation within each of the three denominations (Catholics, Jews, Protestants).

Will Herberg (1960), another important scholar of American assimilation, also explored the connection between religion and ethnicity. He noted that the pressures of acculturation didn't equally affect all aspects of ethnicity. European immigrants and their descendants were strongly encouraged to learn English. However, they weren't as pressured to change their beliefs, and religion was often the strongest connection between later generations of immigrants and their immigrant ancestors. The American tradition of religious tolerance allowed the European immigrants' descendants to preserve this connection to their ethnic heritage without others seeing them as un-American. Therefore, the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish faiths eventually came to occupy roughly equal degrees of legitimacy in American society.

Thus, for the descendants of the European immigrants, religion became a way to express their ethnicity. For many members of this group, religion and ethnicity were fused, and ethnic traditions and identities came to have a religious expression.

## Social Class

Social class is a central feature of social structure, and it isn't surprising that it affected the European immigrant groups in several ways. First, social class combined with religion to shape the social world of the descendants of the European immigrants. Gordon (1964) concluded that United States in the 1960s incorporated four melting pots (one for each of the major ethnic or religious groups and one for Black Americans), each internally subdivided by social class. In his view, the most significant structural unit within American society was the **ethclass**, defined by the intersection of the religious, ethnic, and social class boundaries (e.g., working-class Catholic, upper class Protestant). Thus, people weren't "simply American" but tended to identify with, associate with, and choose their spouses from within their ethclass.

Second, social class affected structural integration. The vast majority of the post-1880s European immigrants were working class. They "entered U.S. society at the bottom of the economic ladder, and . . . stayed close to that level for the next half century;" thus "ethnic history has been essentially

working-class history” (Morawska, 1990, p. 215; see also Bodnar, 1985). For generations, many groups of Eastern and Southern European immigrants didn’t acculturate to middle-class American culture but to an urban working-class, blue-collar one. Even today, ethnicity for many groups remains interconnected with social class factors.

## Gender

Historically, scholars didn’t study women’s lives. They either didn’t consider it important, or they assumed that women’s lives were the same as men’s lives. At the time, societal norms encouraged women to focus on home and family and discouraged women from interacting with men they didn’t know. Women were discouraged from having a public life, which resulted in them having much less access to education, fewer leadership roles in the community, and less outside employment, especially in prestigious or high-paying occupations. Immigrant women may have felt these prohibitions most strongly and they, like others, may have been wary of researchers. This made it harder to gain access to immigrant women for the few researchers who were interested in women’s lives. Due to lack of education and interaction in the greater society, immigrant women had fewer opportunities to learn English. So, in cases where access was possible, language barriers could complicate matters. Thus, although a huge body of research about immigration exists, the bulk of it focuses on immigrant men. As with women of virtually all minority groups, researchers documented immigrant women’s experiences far less often (Gabaccia, 1991; Weinberg et al., 1992). However, the research that has been done shows that immigrant women played multiple roles during immigration and the assimilation process. The roles of wife and mother were central, but they were involved in many other activities.

Generally, men immigrants preceded women, and sent for the women (and children) in their lives only after securing lodging, jobs, and some stability. However, women immigrants’ experiences were quite varied, often depending on the economic situation and cultural traditions of their home societies. In some cases, women were prominent among the “first wave” of immigrants who began the process of acculturation and integration. For example, during the latter part of the 19th century, more than one million Irish people sought refuge elsewhere, in large part due to the Great Famine, sometimes called the *Great Hunger* or the *Irish Potato Famine*, which killed more than one million of them.

The famine led to changes in rules of land ownership, marriage, and inheritance, which made it hard for single women to marry and to find work (Flanagan, 2015; Jackson, 1984). Interestingly, Kennedy (1973, p. 66) notes that more Irish women (55,690) than men (55,215) emigrated between 1871 and 1891; a high percentage of Irish immigrants were young, single women. They came to America seeking opportunities for work. Typically, they worked as domestics, doing cooking, cleaning, and childcare (Maurer, 2017), a role that permitted them to live “respectably” in a family setting. In 1850, about 75% of all employed Irish immigrant women in New York City worked as servants. The second most common form of employment was in textile mills and factories (Blessing, 1980; see also Steinberg, 1981). This pattern continued, and as late as 1920, 81% of employed Irish-born immigrant women worked as domestics.

Due to the economic situation of immigrant families, other immigrant women typically worked outside of their homes, too, though the type and location of the work varied. For example, Italian women rarely worked outside the home because of strong patriarchal norms in Italian culture, including a strong prohibition against contact between women and men they didn’t know (Alba, 1985). Thus, Italian women primarily worked from home: taking in laundry or boarders or doing piecework for the garment industry. Those employed outside the home tended to work in single-gender settings among other immigrant women. Thus, Italian women tended to be far less acculturated and integrated than Irish women.

Eastern European Jewish women experienced another pattern of assimilation. Most came with their husbands and children as refugees from religious persecution. Therefore, few were breadwinners. They “worked in small shops with other family members” while others worked in the garment industry (Steinberg, 1981, p. 161).

Generally, social norms dictated that immigrant women, like other working-class women, should quit working after they married, while their husbands were expected to support them and their

children. However, many immigrant men couldn't earn enough to support their families, and their wives and children were required by necessity to contribute to the family budget. Immigrant wives sometimes continued to work outside the home, or they found other ways to make money. They took in boarders, did laundry or sewing, tended gardens, and participated in many other activities that permitted them to contribute to the family income while staying home attending to family responsibilities.

A 1911 report on Southern and Eastern European households found that about half kept lodgers. The income from this activity amounted to about 25% of the husbands' wages. Children contributed to the family income by taking after-school and summer jobs (Morawska, 1990, pp. 211–212). Compared

with immigrant men, immigrant women spent much more time at their homes and in their neighborhoods. Thus, they were less likely to learn to read or speak English or otherwise acculturate. However, this made them significantly more influential in preserving the heritage of their groups.

When they sought employment outside the home, they found opportunities in the industrial sector and in clerical and sales work, occupations that quickly became stereotyped as “women's work.” Employers saw working women as wanting only to supplement family finances, and they used that assumption to justify lower wages for women. In the late 1800s, “whether in factories, offices, or private homes . . . women's wages were about half of those of men” (Evans, 1980, p. 135). This assumption hurt all immigrant women but single and widowed women the most because they didn't have husbands who could bring in most of the necessary income.

Finally, in addition to their other responsibilities, women were the primary keepers of “old country” traditions. Husbands were often more involved in the society, giving them greater familiarity with Anglo culture and the English language. Women, even when employed, tended to spend more time at home and in the neighborhood. They tended to be more culturally conservative and more resistant to Anglo values and practices than immigrant men. Therefore, immigrant women were more likely to practice traditional foodways and dress, speak to their children in the old language, and observe the time-honored holidays and religious practices. Thus, they per-

formed crucial cultural and socialization functions. This pattern remains among many immigrant groups today in the United States and in Western Europe.

### Sojourners

Some versions of the traditional perspective and the taken-for-granted views of many Americans assume that assimilation is desirable and therefore desired by immigrants. However, European immigrant groups varied widely in their interest in Americanization; this attitude greatly shaped their experiences.

Some groups were very committed to Americanization. For example, Eastern European Jews came to America because of religious persecution. They came fearing for their lives. They planned to make America their home because they couldn't return and had nowhere else to go. (Israel wasn't founded until 1948.) They committed to learning English, becoming citizens, and familiarizing themselves with their new society as quickly as possible, although, as we have noted, it was their children who Americanized most readily.

Other immigrants had no intention of becoming American citizens and, therefore, had little interest in becoming Americanized. These sojourners, or “birds of passage,” intended to return to the old country once they accumulated enough capital to be successful. Because immigration records aren't very detailed, it's hard to know the exact numbers of immigrants who returned to the old country (see Wyman, 1993), but we know, for example, that a significant percentage of Italian immigrants were



Woman worker at a textile mill, early 20th century.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division



sojourners. Although 3.8 million Italians landed in the United States between 1899 and 1924, around 2.1 million departed during that same time (Nelli, 1980, p. 547).

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

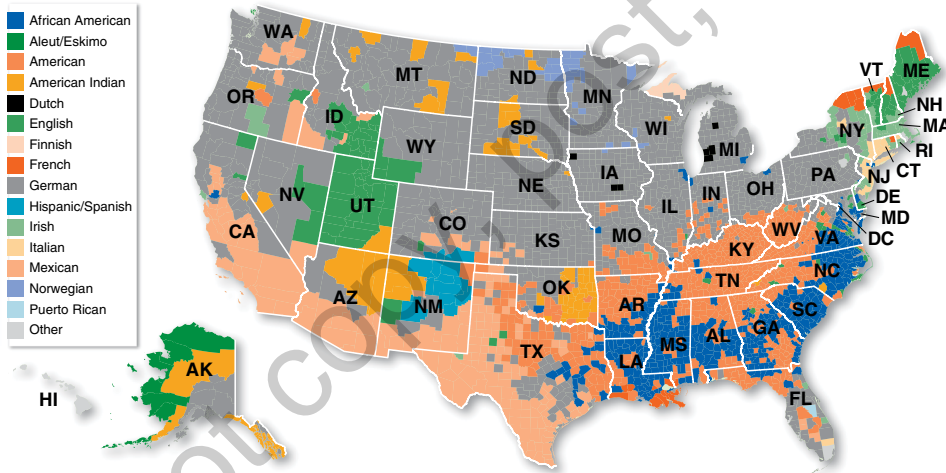
8. To understand the process of assimilation, why do we need to consider generation(s)?
9. What were the major institutional pathways through which European immigrants adapted to American society? Can you cite evidence from your home community of similar patterns for immigrant groups today?
10. What are some important variations how European immigrants adjusted to the United States?
11. What was the triple melting pot, and how did it function?
12. What important gender differences existed in European immigrant groups?

## THE DESCENDANTS OF THE IMMIGRANTS TODAY

### Geographical Distribution

Figure 2.3 shows the geographical distribution of 20 racial and ethnic groups across the United States in 2010 (the most recent year available). The map displays the single largest group in each county and

**FIGURE 2.3** ■ Ancestry with Largest Population in Each County, 2000



offers great detail. However, we'll focus on some of the groups mentioned in this chapter, including Norwegian, German, Irish, and Italian Americans. (The Jewish population is too small to appear on this map.)

As noted in Figure 2.3, Germans are the single largest ancestry group in America (see the predominance of gray from Pennsylvania to the West Coast). Also note how the map reflects this group's original settlement areas, especially in the Midwest. Norwegian Americans are numerically dominant in some sections of the upper Midwest (e.g., northwestern Minnesota, northern North Dakota). Irish Americans and Italian Americans are concentrated in their original areas of settlement—the Irish in Massachusetts and the Italians concentrated more around New York City.

Thus, almost a century after the end of mass immigration from Europe, many of the immigrants' descendants haven't gone far from where their ancestors settled. The map also shows that the same point could be made for other groups, including Blacks (concentrated in the "black belt" across the

states of the old Confederacy), and Mexican Americans (concentrated along the southern border from Texas to California).

Given all that has changed in American society over the past century—industrialization, population growth, urbanization, and massive mobility—the stable location of white ethnics (and other ethnic and racial groups) seems remarkable. Why aren't people distributed more randomly across the nation's landscape?

That stability is easier to explain for some groups than others. African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans were limited in their geographic and social mobility by institutionalized discrimination, racism, and limited resources. We'll examine the power of these constraints in later chapters.

For white ethnics, however, the power of exclusion and rejection waned as the generations passed and immigrants' descendants assimilated and integrated. Their current locations may suggest that the United States is a nation of groups and of individuals. Our group memberships, especially family and kin, exert a powerful influence on our decisions about where to live and work and, despite the transience and mobility of modern American life, can keep people connected to their relatives, the old neighborhood, their ethnic roots, and the sites of their ancestors' struggles.

### Integration and Equality

One crucial point about white ethnic groups (the descendants of the European immigrants) is that they are almost completely assimilated today. Even the groups that were the most despised in earlier

**TABLE 2.3** ■ Median Household Income, Percentage of Families Living in Poverty, and Educational Attainment for Selected White Ethnic Groups, 1990

	Median Household Income	Percentage of Families Living in Poverty	Percentage Who Completed High School or More	Percentage Who Received an Undergraduate Degree or More
All Americans	\$30,056	10%	75.2%	20.3%
Russian	\$45,778	3.6%	90.8%	49%
Italian	\$36,060	4.9%	77.3%	21%
Polish	\$34,763	4.3%	78.5%	23.1%
Ukrainian	\$34,474	4%	77.5%	28.3%
Swedish	\$33,881	4.5%	87.3%	27.4%
German	\$32,730	5.5%	82.7%	22%
Slovak	\$32,352	3.8%	78.2%	21.6%
Norwegian	\$32,207	5.1%	85.9%	26%
Irish	\$31,845	6.5%	79.6%	21.2%

years (e.g., the Irish) are now acculturated, integrated, and thoroughly intermarried. Consider Table 2.3, which shows the degree to which nine of the more than 60 white ethnic groups had become integrated as far back as 1990. The groups include the two largest white ethnic groups (German and Irish Americans) and seven others that represent a range of geographic origins and times of immigration.

The table shows that by 1990, the nine groups were at or above national norms ("all Americans") for all measures of equality. Variation exists among the groups, but all exceeded the national averages for high school and college education, and they had dramatically lower poverty rates, usually less than half the national average. All nine groups exceed the national median for household income—some by a considerable margin—Russians, for example, many of whom are also Jewish.

The evidence for assimilation and equality in other areas is persuasive. For example, the distinct ethnic neighborhoods that these groups created in American cities (e.g., Little Italy, Greektown, Little Warsaw) have faded away or been taken over by other groups. Additionally, the rate of intermarriage between members of different white ethnic groups is quite high. For example, data from the 1990 census showed that about 56% of all married whites have spouses with ethnic backgrounds different from their own (Alba, 1995, pp. 13–14).

### The Evolution of White Ethnicity

Integration into the American mainstream was neither linear nor continuous for the descendants of European immigrants. Over the generations, white ethnic identity sporadically reasserted itself in many ways; two are especially notable. First, later generations tended to be more interested in their ancestry and ethnicity than earlier generations. Hansen (1952) captured this phenomenon in his **principle of third-generation interest**: “What the second generation tries to forget, the third generation tries to remember” (p. 495). Hansen observed that the immigrants’ children tended to minimize or de-emphasize (“forget”) their ethnicity to avoid society’s prejudice and intolerance and compete on more favorable terms for jobs and other opportunities. As they became adults and started families of their own, the second generation (the immigrants’ children) tended to raise their children in nonethnic settings, with English as their first and only language.

By the time the third generation (the immigrants’ grandchildren) reached adulthood, American society had become more tolerant of white ethnicity and diversity (especially of New Immigrant groups that arrived last). Unlike earlier generations, the third generation had little to risk and, therefore, tried to reconnect with its grandparents and roots. These descendants wanted to understand the “old ways” and their ethnic heritage and they wanted to incorporate it into their personal identities, giving them a sense of who they were and where they belong.

Ironically, the immigrants’ grandchildren couldn’t recover much of the richness and detail of their heritage because their parents had tried to forget it. Nonetheless, the desire of the third generation to reconnect with its ancestry and recover its ethnicity shows that assimilation isn’t a simple, one-dimensional, or linear process.

In addition to this generational pattern, the strength of white ethnic identity also responded to the changing context of American society, including other groups. For example, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a notable increase in the visibility of and interest in white ethnic heritage, an upsurge sometimes called the **ethnic revival**. The revival manifested itself in many ways. Some people became more interested in their families’ genealogical roots, and others increased their participation in ethnic festivals, traditions, and organizations. The “white ethnic vote” became a factor in local, state, and national politics, and appearances at the churches, meeting halls, and neighborhoods associated with white ethnic groups became almost mandatory for candidates for office. People organized demonstrations and festivals celebrating white ethnic heritages, often sporting buttons and bumper stickers proclaiming their ancestry. Politicians, editorialists, and intellectuals endorsed, legitimized, and reinforced the ethnic revival (e.g., see Novak, 1973), which were partly fueled by the desire to reconnect with ancestral roots—although by the 1960s most groups were well beyond their third generations. More likely, ethnic revival was a reaction to the increase in pluralistic sentiment at the time, including the pluralistic, even separatist assertions of other groups. In the 1960s and 1970s, virtually every minority group generated a protest movement (e.g., Black Power, Red Power, Chicanismo) and proclaimed a recommitment to its own heritage and to the authenticity of its own culture and experiences. The visibility of these calls for cultural pluralism helped make it more acceptable for European Americans to express their own ethnic heritage.

The resurgence of white ethnicity also had some political and economic dimensions that relate to issues of inequality and competition for resources. In the 1960s, a white-ethnic urban working class made up mostly of Irish and Southern and Eastern European groups remained in the neighborhoods of the industrial Northeast and Midwest and they continued to breathe life into the old networks and traditions (see Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Greeley, 1974). While many Americans were beginning to view cultural pluralism as legitimate, this ethnic working class began feeling threatened by minority

groups of color (Blacks, Hispanics) who increasingly lived in adjoining neighborhoods, therefore in direct competition with white ethnics for housing, jobs, and other resources.

Many white ethnic working-class people saw racial minority groups as inferior and perceived the advances made by these groups as unfair, unjust, and threatening. Additionally, they reacted to what they saw as special treatment based on race, such as affirmative action. They had problems of their own (e.g., declining number of good, unionized jobs; inadequate schooling) and believed that their problems were being given lower priority and less legitimacy because they were white. The revived sense of ethnicity in the urban working-class neighborhoods was, in large part, a way of resisting racial reform and expressing resentment for the racial minority groups. Thus, competition for resources and opportunities also fueled the revival of white ethnicity that began in the 1960s. As you'll see throughout this book, such competition frequently leads to increased prejudice toward people who are perceived as different—while it simultaneously creates a sense of cohesion among people who see themselves as similar.

### The Twilight of White Ethnicity?²

As the conflicts of the 1960s and 1970s faded, white ethnic groups left their old neighborhoods and rose in the class structure. This contributed to the slow demise of white ethnic identity. Today, white ethnic identity has become increasingly nebulous and largely voluntary. Sociologists call this **symbolic ethnicity** or an aspect of self-identity that symbolizes one's roots in the old country but is otherwise insignificant. That is, these descendants of the European immigrants might feel vaguely connected to their ancestors, but this doesn't affect their lifestyles, circles of friends and neighbors, job prospects, eating habits, or other everyday routines (Gans, 1979; Lieberman & Waters, 1988). They may express this part of their identities only on occasion; for example, by joining ethnic or religious celebrations such as St. Patrick's Day (Irish Americans) or Columbus Day (Italian Americans). Because many people have ancestors from more than one ethnic group, they may change their sense of group affiliation over time, sometimes emphasizing one group's traditions and sometimes another's (Waters, 1990). In stark contrast to their ancestors, members of racial minority groups, and recent immigrants, the descendants of the European immigrants have choices: They can emphasize their ethnicity, celebrate it occasionally, or ignore it completely. In short, symbolic ethnicity is superficial, voluntary, and changeable.

White ethnic identity may be on the verge of disappearing. For example, based on a series of in-depth interviews with white Americans from various regions of the nation, Gallagher (2001) found a sense of ethnicity so weak that it didn't even rise to the level of "symbolic." His respondents were the products of ancestral lines so thoroughly intermixed and intermarried that any trace of a unique heritage from a particular group was completely lost. They had virtually no knowledge of their immigrant ancestors' experiences or the cultures of the ethnic communities they'd inhabited. For many, their ethnic ancestries were no more meaningful to them than their states of birth. Their lack of interest in and information about their ethnic heritage was so complete that it led Gallagher (2001) to propose an addendum to Hansen's principle: "What the grandson wished to remember, the great-granddaughter has never been told."

At the same time, as more specific white ethnic identities are disappearing, they're also evolving into new shapes and forms. In the view of many analysts, a new identity is developing that merges the various ethnic identities (e.g., German American, Polish American) into a single, generalized European American identity based on race and a common history of immigration and assimilation. This new identity reinforces the racial lines of separation that run through contemporary society, but it does more than simply mark group boundaries. Embedded in this emerging identity is an understanding, often deeply flawed, of how white immigrant groups succeeded and assimilated in the past and a view, often deeply ideological, of how the racial minority groups and many recent immigrants should behave today. These understandings are encapsulated in "immigrant tales"—legends that stress heroic individual effort and grim determination as key ingredients leading to success in the old days. These tales feature impoverished, victimized immigrant ancestors who survived and made a place for themselves and their children by working hard, saving their money, and otherwise exemplifying the virtues of the Protestant ethic and American individualism. They stress the idea that past generations became successful despite the brutal hostility of the dominant group and with no government intervention,

and they equate the historical difficulties faced by European immigrants with those suffered by racial minority groups (e.g., slavery, segregation, and attempted genocide). They strongly imply—and sometimes blatantly assert—that the latter groups could succeed in America by simply following the example set by the former (Alba, 1990; Gallagher, 2001).

These accounts mix versions of human capital theory and traditional views of assimilation with prejudice and racism. Without denying or trivializing the resolve and fortitude of European immigrants, equating their experiences and levels of disadvantage with those of African Americans, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans is widely off the mark, as you'll see in future chapters. These views support an attitude of disdain and lack of sympathy for the multiple dilemmas faced today by the racial minority groups and many contemporary immigrants. They permit a subtler expression of prejudice and racism and allow whites to use these highly distorted views of their immigrant ancestors as a rhetorical device to express a host of race-based grievances without appearing racist (Gallagher, 2001).

Alba (1990) concludes as follows:

*The thrust of the [emerging] European American identity is to defend the individualistic view of the American system, because it portrays the system as open to those who are willing to work hard and pull themselves out of poverty and discrimination. Recent research suggests that it is precisely this individualism that prevents many whites from sympathizing with the need for African Americans and other minorities to receive affirmative action in order to overcome institutional barriers to their advancement. (p. 317)*

What can we conclude? The generations-long journey from immigrant to white ethnics to European American seems to be ending. The separate ethnic identities are merging into a larger sense of whiteness that unites immigrants' descendants with the dominant group and provides a rhetorical device for expressing disdain for other groups, especially Black Americans and undocumented immigrants.

As attachment to specific white ethnic groups fades, the generalized white identity seems to be growing in importance in American politics and other areas of everyday life. While relatively few white Americans espouse the most virulent forms of racism or support the most extreme white racist groups like the Ku Klux Klan or the Proud Boys (see Chapter 3), many express strong attachments to their white racial identity (Jardina, 2019) and feel threatened by the increasing percentage of non-whites in the population (see Figure 1.1). These feelings of anxiety and racial resentment can be exploited and harnessed by political leaders, as displayed in the presidential campaigns of 2016 and 2020.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

13. Why do many people see European immigrants and their descendants as successful? What facilitated the success of the group?
14. What is Hansen's principle? Why is it significant? What is Gallagher's addendum to this principle? Why is it important?
15. Does white ethnic identity have a future? Why or why not?

### CONTEMPORARY IMMIGRANTS: DOES THE TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVE APPLY?

Does the traditional perspective—based on the experiences of European immigrants and their descendants—apply to more recent immigrants in the United States? Will contemporary immigrants duplicate the experiences of earlier groups? Will they acculturate before they integrate? Will religion, social class, and race be important forces in their lives? Will they take three generations to assimilate? More than three? Fewer? What will their patterns of intermarriage look like? Will they achieve socioeconomic parity with the dominant group? When? How?

Sociologists (policymakers and the public) differ in their answers to these questions. Some social scientists believe that the traditional perspective on assimilation doesn't apply and that the experiences of contemporary immigrant groups will differ greatly from those of European immigrants. They believe that assimilation today is fragmented (known as **segmented assimilation**) and will have several different outcomes: Some contemporary immigrant groups will integrate into the middle-class mainstream, but others will be permanently mired in the impoverished, alienated, and marginalized segments of racial and ethnic minority groups. Still others may form close-knit enclaves based on their traditional cultures and become successful in America by resisting the forces of acculturation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

In stark contrast, other theorists believe that the traditional perspective on assimilation remains relevant and that contemporary immigrant groups will follow the established pathways of mobility and assimilation. Of course, the process varies by group and location, but even the groups that are the most impoverished and marginalized today will, eventually, move into mainstream society.

Is the United States growing more tolerant of diversity, more open and equal? If so, this would seem to favor the traditionalist perspective. If not, this trend would clearly favor the segmented-assimilation hypothesis. Although we won't resolve this debate, we'll consider the traditional and segmented views on assimilation as a useful framework to understand the experiences of these groups (see Part 3).

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

16. What is segmented assimilation, and why is this an important concept? How would social class and gender relate to debates about whether contemporary assimilation is segmented?

### IMPLICATIONS FOR EXAMINING DOMINANT-MINORITY RELATIONS

Chapters 1 and 2 introduced many of the concepts and themes that form the foundation of this book. Although the connections between the concepts are complex, we can summarize the key points so far.

First, we discussed the five components of minority group status in Chapter 1. Being in a minority group has much more to do with lack of power and the distribution of resources than with the size of the group. Additionally, we addressed themes of inequality and differentials in status in our discussion of prejudice, racism, and discrimination. To understand minority relations, we must examine some basic realities of human society: inequalities in wealth, prestige, and the distribution of power. To discuss changes in minority group status, we must be prepared to discuss changes in how society does business, makes decisions, and distributes education, income, police protection, jobs, health care, and other opportunities.

Second, we've raised questions about how the United States could develop. We've discussed assimilation and pluralism, including their variations. For more than a century, social scientists have extensively studied both paths. Additionally, political leaders, decision-makers, and citizens have discussed them. Yet, in many ways, Americans seem more divided than ever about which path the country should take. We'll continue to analyze and evaluate both pathways throughout the book.

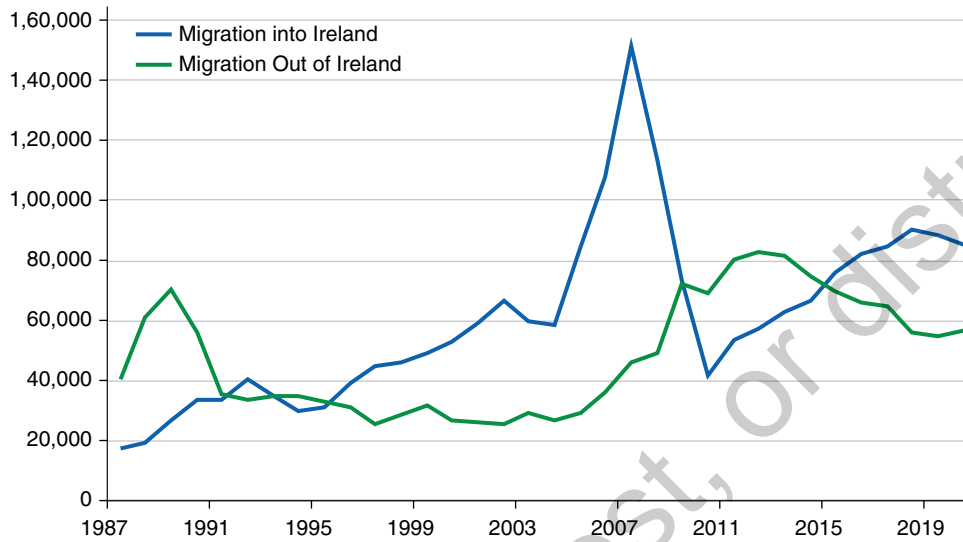
U.S. society currently faces a variety of crises, all of which are linked to patterns of assimilation, pluralism, and the distribution of power, equity, and injustice. Rising income inequality, access to health care during the COVID-19 pandemic, and police violence are just some of the "hot button" issues filling headlines, news broadcasts, and social media. How shall we approach these and similar issues? What policies are most likely to lead to a more just and fair society?

## COMPARATIVE FOCUS

### IMMIGRATION AND IRELAND

Just as the United States has been a major receiver of immigrants for the past 200 years, Ireland

**FIGURE 2.4** ■ Migration Into and Out of Ireland, 1987–2020



Source: Central Statistics Office (Ireland) (2020).

has been a major supplier. Mass migration 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. This mass out-migration—combined with the death toll of the famines—cut the 1840 Irish population of over eight million in half in a few decades. The population today is still only about 4.9 million.

History rarely runs in straight lines. In the 1990s and into the 21st century, after nearly 200 years of supplying immigrants, Ireland (along with other nations of Northern and Western Europe) became a receiver. As Figure 2.4 shows, the number of newcomers entering Ireland soared between 1987 and 2007, and the number of people leaving decreased. Around 2007, the trend reversed: The number of newcomers plummeted, and the historic pattern of out-migration reappeared. Then, in the most recent years, the pattern changed again as migration to Ireland increased and out-migration leveled off and began decreasing.

What explains these patterns? Fortunately, answers aren't hard to find. The influx of immigrants starting in the late 1980s was largely a response to rapid economic growth. The Irish economy—the so-called Celtic Tiger—had entered a boom phase, spurred by investments from multinational corporations and the benefits of joining the European Economic Union. Irish nationals who had left to seek work abroad returned home in large numbers, and people from Europe and other parts of the world also began arriving. Ireland also began receiving refugees and people seeking asylum from Africa, the Middle East, and other troubled areas.

The changes from 2007 to about 2012 have an equally obvious cause. The global economy faltered badly in 2007, and the Irish economy followed suit. Banks failed, companies went bankrupt, the housing market collapsed, and jobs disappeared. The Irish returned to their historic role as a supplier of immigrants to other economies around the world. In recent years, the Irish economy recovered from the global Great Recession and migration patterns shifted accordingly. We should also note that recent immigration into Ireland is much more global and shares many characteristics with recent immigrants to the United States (O'Connell, 2016).

These migration patterns have created significant changes in Ireland. For example, the number of Irish of African and Asian descent has increased by a factor of 8 since 1996. (They are, respectively,

1% and 2% of the total population.) Over the centuries, many diverse groups (e.g., Vikings, Spanish, and Anglo-Normans) have become part of Ireland but for the first time, the Irish are considering issues of racial diversity.

### Questions to Consider

1. What similarities can you see between immigration to Ireland and immigration to the United States?
2. Do you suppose that immigrants to Ireland will assimilate in the same way as immigrants to the United States? If you could travel to Ireland, what would be helpful to know about the assimilation process?

## SUMMARY

We organize this summary to parallel the chapter's Learning Objectives.

- 2.1** Explain types of assimilation, including Anglo-conformity, the “melting pot,” and the “traditional” model of assimilation. How does human capital theory relate to each of these types?

Assimilation is one broad pathway of development for intergroup relations. In the United States, assimilation hasn't followed the melting pot model (where people from different groups contribute fairly equally to a new culture). Instead, Anglo-conformity (or Americanization) has been the dominant model. Gordon theorized that assimilation occurs in stages: acculturation, integration at the secondary and primary levels, and intermarriage. He saw integration as the most crucial. Human capital theory is a perspective on social mobility that stresses individual effort and is especially compatible with the traditional model of assimilation.

- 2.2** Explain types of pluralism, including cultural pluralism and structural pluralism.

Pluralism is a second broad pathway of development for group relations. Under pluralism, group differences remain over time. In cultural (or “full”) pluralism, groups differ both culturally and structurally. Under structural pluralism, groups share essentially the same culture but occupy different locations in the social structure.

- 2.3** Discuss and explain other group relationships such as separatism.

Group relations other than assimilation and pluralism include separatism, revolution, forced migration and expulsion, genocide, and continued subjugation.

- 2.4** Describe the timing, causes, and volume of European migration to the United States, and explain how those immigrants became “white ethnics.”

The period of mass European immigration stretched from the 1820s to the 1920s and included both “Old” (from Northern and Western Europe) and “New” (from Southern and Eastern Europe) phases. More than 30 million people made the journey from Europe to the United States during this time. People moved for many reasons, including the pursuit of religious and political freedom, but the underlying motive force was industrialization and urbanization. European immigrants were minority groups at first but, over a series of generations, assimilated, became upwardly mobile and integrated, and Americanized. Their experiences varied by religion, social class, gender, race, and the extent of sojourning. Generally, most groups followed the “traditional” model of assimilation (which was based on these groups).

- 2.5** Understand the European patterns of assimilation and major variations in those patterns by social class, gender, and religion.

Assimilation for European immigrant groups generally followed a three-generation pattern, with the grandchildren of the original immigrants completing the process. Ethnic succession occurred when newly arrived groups of immigrants pushed older groups up the occupational structure in the occupational structure. The three major pathways of integration were politics, labor unions, and religion, but others included organized crime and sports. Structural mobility



occurred as the American industrial economy matured and changed. Continuing mechanization and automation changed the sort of work, creating more opportunities in the middle-class, white-collar areas. The descendants of the immigrants were generally able to take advantage of expanding opportunities for education and move higher in the class structure than their parents and grandparents did. The experience of assimilation varied by the physical appearance of the group, its religion, social class, gender, and extent of sojourning.

**2.6** Describe the status of the descendants of European immigrants today, including the “twilight of white ethnicity.”

These groups are, on the average, at or above national norms for affluence and success. White ethnicity seems to be fading although it remains important for some. It also may be being absorbed into a broader sense of “whiteness” in racially divided America.

**2.7** Analyze contemporary immigration using sociological concepts in this chapter. Explain how the traditional model of assimilation does or does not apply to contemporary immigrants.

Research is ongoing but, at least for some immigrant groups, assimilation today may be segmented and may have outcomes other than equality and acceptance. (We’ll consider these possibilities in Part 3.)

### KEY TERMS

Acculturation	Middleman minority group
Americanization	Multiculturalism
Anti-Semitism	New Immigration
Assimilation	Old Immigration
birds of passage	Pluralism
Capital-intensive technology	Primary sector
Cultural pluralism	Protestant ethic
Culture	Race relations cycle
Enclave minority group	Revolution
Ethclass	Secondary sector
Ethnic succession	Segmented assimilation
Human capital theory	Separatism
Industrial Revolution	Social Structure
Integration	Structural mobility
Intermarriage	Structural pluralism
Labor-intensive production	Triple melting pot
Melting pot	

### APPLYING CONCEPTS

To practice using Gordon’s model of assimilation (see Table 2.1), we’ve written some questions about immigrant assimilation experiences to consider. Sociologists document social patterns. Yet each of you has a unique family history of one form or another. Therefore, we’ve provided you with some options based on what’s most appropriate for you:

1. If you’re a third- or fourth-generation immigrant whose family came from Europe, you may be able to interview your grandparents or great-grandparents about your family’s assimilation experiences, which would make this exercise particularly meaningful, interesting, and fun.
2. If your family immigrated from somewhere else and you have older family members that you can interview (e.g., grandparents, great-grandparents), ask them about their immigration experience.
3. Interview older people that you know, such as teachers or neighbors. Imagine what answers a third- or fourth-generation immigrant might say based on what you’ve learned.

Next, identify which part of Gordon’s model each question tests. If you think of other questions that would fit, consider them, too. Place the letter of each question in the appropriate row of the box.

- A. What language did you speak at home when you were growing up?
- B. What was your total household income last year?
- C. (If married/partnered) Does your spouse/partner share your religious faith?
- D. (If married/partnered) Does your spouse/partner share your ethnic background?
- E. Did your parents have the same ethnic background? How about your grandparents?
- F. Did you vote in the most recent presidential election?
- G. What percentage of your friends share your ethnic background?
- H. What percentage of your friends share your religious faith?
- I. What is the highest level of education you have achieved?
- J. Have family names changed or become Americanized? If so, what was the original name and what did it become? If you feel comfortable sharing, explain how and why that change occurred?

Stage	Items A–J
Acculturation	
Integration (secondary level)	
Integration (primary level)	
Marital assimilation	

See the answers after the Review Questions.

**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Summarize Gordon’s model of assimilation. Identify and explain each stage and how the stages are related. Use Gordo’s model to explain Table 2.2.
2. Explain this statement: “Human capital theory is not so much wrong as it is incomplete.” What are the strengths and weaknesses of human capital theory? Consider underlying assumptions in your answer.
3. Explain how and why people’s experience of assimilation can vary.
4. Define pluralism and explain how it differs from assimilation. Why has interest in pluralism increased? Explain the difference between structural and cultural pluralism and give examples of each. Describe enclave minority groups in terms of pluralism and in terms of Gordon’s model of assimilation. How have contemporary theorists added to the concept of pluralism?
5. Define and explain segmented assimilation. Then, explain how it differs from Gordon’s model. What evidence suggests that assimilation for recent immigrants isn’t segmented? What is the significance of this debate for the future of American society? For other minority groups (e.g., Black Americans)? For immigrants?
6. Do American theories and understandings of assimilation apply to Ireland? Do you think that immigrants to Ireland would assimilate similarly to immigrants to the United States? To answer, what questions would you ask about the assimilation process there?

## ANSWERS TO APPLYING CONCEPTS

Stage	Items
Acculturation	A, J
Integration (secondary level)	B, F, I
Integration (primary level)	G, H
Marital assimilation	C, D, E

## ENDNOTES

- 1 This name is a reference to Peter Pan and the “lost boys” who took care of one another in Never Never Land. The name is problematic because it linguistically erases girls. Interviews with the refugees suggest mixed appeal. A common negative response was like this one, “I don’t like the name because we are not lost. Being called lost means that you don’t know where you come from. If I were to change the name I would make it the ‘Young Generation of Sudan.’” (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002, p. 12).
- 2 This phrase comes from Alba (1990).

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