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AMERICA’S MELTING POT
RECONSIDERED

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America is God’s Crucible, the great Melting Pot where all the races of Europe are melting
and re-forming! Here you stand, good folk, think I, when I see them at Ellis Island, here you
stand in your fifty groups, with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood
hatreds and rivalries. But you won’t be long like that, brothers, for these are the fires of God
you’ve come to—these are fires of God. A fig for your feuds and vendettas! Germans and
Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians—into the Crucible with you all!
God is making the American.

Zangwill (1914:33)

INTRODUCTION

These powerful words are spoken by David, the young, idealistic Jewish
immigrant in Zangwill’s pre–World War I play, The Melting Pot. In spite of the
horror of experiencing a pogrom in his native Russia, and the reality of
discrimination in the United States, David believes that the divisions of
nationality and ethnicity will soon disappear in the promised land of America.
And to clinch the point, the play ends with David falling in love with a Russian
Christian immigrant who just happens to be the daughter of the man who led the
massacre of David’s family. Only in America!

This romantic vision of American society will strike most modern observers
as both naïve and rather patronizing—because of the implicit assumption that
most immigrants and their descendants are anxious to shed their social and
cultural heritage. But it is easy to forget how radical was the melting pot view of
America’s future. It was a direct challenge to orthodoxy. Zangwill was not
oblivious to the pervasive bigotry of his times; in fact, his play was a calculated
effort to expose these popular attitudes. There was nothing subtle about racism

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and intolerance in America for most of us the first half of this century. Perhaps a few examples will illustrate the tenor of ethnic divisions during this period.

In response to a letter of mild criticism, Mayor Fiorella La Guardia of New York received the following response from the then President, Herbert Hoover (cited in Baltzell 1964:30):

It seems to me, a Republican, that you are a little out of your class, in presuming to criticize the President. It strikes me as impudence. You should go back to where you belong and advise Mussolini on how to make good honest citizens in Italy. The Italians are predominately our murderers and boot-leggers. . . . Like a lot of other foreign spawn, you do not appreciate the country which supports and tolerates you.

And consider the candor of Havard President Lowell in publicly announcing in 1922 a ceiling on the proportion of Jewish students at Havard. While other elite universities also had Jewish quotas, they did so quietly, without the rationalization that their aim was to minimize anti-Semitism (Steinberg 1974:21–30; Synnott 1979). Of course legal barriers including the denial of the opportunity to vote and many other essential rights of citizenship, put black Americans into a unique situation of powerlessness (Lieberson 1980:Ch. 3–5).

In spite of these realities, or perhaps because of them, the melting pot became the symbol of the liberal and radical vision of American society. In a sense, it was a political symbol used to strengthen and legitimate the ideology of America as a land of opportunity where race, religion, and national origin should not be barriers to social mobility. There is another interpretation of the melting pot symbol, which represents the emphasis on “Americanization” of immigrants around the turn of the century. While the melting pot image suggests a blending of cultures, the process was essentially one of “anglo-conformity” (Gordon 1964:Ch. 4). Immigrants were encouraged to learn English and to discard their “foreign ways” (ethnic culture). Ethnic spokesmen resisted this interpretation of the melting pot as an attack on ethnic diversity (Kallen 1915; see Gleason 1979, for a summary of the varied meanings of the melting pot concept).

The melting pot was also a central element in the development of the assimilation school of race and ethnic studies in American sociology. The progressive social views of some scholars coincided with the theory positing that race/ethnic divisions would eventually disappear, or at least be minimized, in industrial society. More than ideology, this was an attempt to develop a scientific thesis that would guide empirical research. The coincidence of the effort to reject the ideological hegemony of social Darwinism and the early emphasis on the empirical study of assimilation was not accidental, but it would be a mistake to judge the origins of assimilation theory as a simple product of liberal sentiment.

In this essay, I first review the origins and development of the assimilation
perspective in American sociology, in terms of both its theoretical and empiric-
al foundations. Then I review the evidence on whether there has been a trend
towards ethnic assimilation in the United States. Various dimensions of assi-
milation are included in the review, such as socioeconomic inequality, residential
segregation, intermarriage, and popular attitudes. The intent is not to
provide a survey of race and ethnic relations as a whole (Williams 1975, 1980)
or to review the field from a comparative perspective (Wilson 1980b; van den
Berghe 1981) but rather to assess the state of the assimilation paradigm from
within its own frame of reference. Accordingly, the review of the empirical
literature is purposely limited to studies of ethnic and racial inequality in the
United States. While the assimilation model has been the dominant perspective
in sociological studies of ethnic relations, it has been the subject of much debate
as well as theoretical challenge. In the final part of the paper, I review some of
the major alternative theoretical frameworks and their implications for the
position of the assimilation perspective in guiding sociological research.

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGICAL
ASSIMILATION THEORY

Robert Park and the “Chicago School” of sociology (Faris 1967) were the
founders of modern sociological theory and research on race and ethnic rela-
tions in the early decades of the 20th century. Park and his colleagues at
Chicago encouraged students to study all aspects of the local environment,
including race and ethnic relations. At the time, Chicago was a polyglot city,
full of ethnic neighborhoods populated by recent immigrants from Europe and
black migrants from the South. Park had a rather unique background for an
academic, first working as a newspaper reporter and later spending a number of
years as the personal secretary and aide of Booker T. Washington, President of
Tuskegee Institute (for more background on Park, see Park 1950: v–ix;
Raushenbush 1979). From these experiences and their early studies, Park and
his students formulated what became the dominant sociological theory of race
and ethnic change.

One of the first expressions of Park’s views was presented in the famous Park
& Burgess textbook (first published in 1921), the primary authority in the field
for almost 20 years (Park & Burgess 1969:xiii). Park & Burgess defined the
central terms of accommodation and assimilation:

Accommodation. . . . a process of adjustment, that is, an organization of social relations and
attitudes to present or to reduce conflict, to control competition, and to maintain a basis of
security in the social order for persons and groups of divergent interests and types to carry on
together their varied life activities.

Assimilation is a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire
the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their
experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life (Park & Burgess 1969:360).

They also suggested a sophisticated version of what later became labelled the “contact hypothesis”:

As social contact initiates interaction, assimilation is its final perfect product. The nature of the social contacts is decisive in the process. Assimilation naturally takes place most rapidly where contacts are primary, that is, where they are the most intimate and intense, as in the area of touch relationship, in the family circle and in intimate congenial groups. Secondary contacts facilitate accommodations, but do not greatly promote assimilation. The contacts here are external and too remote (Park & Burgess 1969:361–2).

These ideas represent an early formulation of what later became Park’s thesis of the race-relations cycle of “contact, competition, accommodation and eventual assimilation” (Park 1950:150). Park believed that forces of change in modern societies would tend to eradicate divisions based upon irrelevant criteria of language, culture, and race. Park’s many ideas on race and ethnic relations were never tied together in a formal theory of change. However, there appear to be two essential elements in his perspective. First, ethnic antagonism and divisions arose naturally—from ethnocentrism and the competitive processes of modern society—after contact had been established. Second, there was the inevitable process of assimilation—which could be slowed down, but not reversed, in modern societies. The motors of change are the democratic political institutions and the industrial organization of modern society that recruits and promotes individuals on the basis of merit, not ethnic origin. For a more detailed elaboration of Park’s ideas, see Geschwender (1978:19–26).

These ideas have continued to be the hallmark of assimilation theory until the present day. Gunnar Myrdal (1964) emphasized the moral dilemma in the contrast between American ideals of equality and the practice of racial discrimination. He suggested that the democratic political process would eventually override the forces of prejudice and discrimination. The associated hypothesis that the economic organization of modern society is incompatible with discrimination is part of the broader thesis of industrialism (Kerr et al 1964). If efficiency and productivity are the primary objectives of modern business, then hiring and promotion decisions based upon kinship or other ascriptive criteria will erode the competitive position of any firm. Modern society also brings widespread urbanization and universal education, which facilitate bureaucratic decision making on the basis of credentials and skills, not race or ethnicity. These ideas underpin the most recent comprehensive empirical analysis of change in racial and ethnic stratification in the United States (Featherman & Hauser 1978:Ch. 6 & 8).

There has been considerable refinement and redirection of the dominant paradigm of assimilation that began with Park. Frazier (1957) agreed that the
eventual outcome would be one of assimilation, but he emphasized the colonial expansion of European peoples as the major factor that gave rise to the "race problem." He noted that the economic interests that occasioned exploitation would have to be curbed before tolerance based upon scientific knowledge could triumph over prejudice and discrimination (Frazier 1957:Ch. 18). Lieberson (1961a) elaborates upon the natural history approach with a typology based upon the relative power of populations and their migration status at contact. Van den Berghe (1967) suggests an alternative model of change that begins with a paternalistic and exploitative system of race relations rooted in the traditional agrarian order. This system then shifts with industrialization to a competitive system with a heightened degree of racial antagonism in modern societies. Van den Berghe's (1981) most recent theoretical work begins with a sociobiological framework but then turns to an exceedingly insightful review of comparative ethnic relations. [For other broad theoretical perspectives, see Shibutani & Kwan (1965), Newman (1973), and Schermerhorn (1970).]

Several critics have questioned the logic and content of Park's thesis, and of any assimilation model. Lyman (1968) faulted Park's theory as an untestable thesis that does not specify when changes in the race relations cycle will occur. Since the theory could not be negated (assimilation has not yet occurred, though it might in the future) it does not provide an adequate model for research. Blumer (1965) directly challenged the argument that industrialization will lead to a diminution of racial discrimination. He pointed out that the costs associated with upsetting the racial order might be far greater for employers than any gains received from meritocratic hiring and promotion. He concluded that industrial organization will more likely adapt to existing racial/ethnic mores rather than change them. Other critics of assimilation theory have pointed to its ideological blinders (Metzger 1971), its deterministic logic, and the assumption that all societies will follow a unilinear path of change (Barth & Noel 1972).

In spite of these many weaknesses, the assimilation perspective, broadly defined, continues to be the primary theoretical framework for sociological research on race and ethnic inequality. This results partially from a lack of convincing theoretical alternatives. [For a sampling of recent general essays, see Simpson (1968), Gordon (1975), Parsons (1975), Abramson (1980), and Yinger (1981).] For all its inadequacies, the assimilation perspective has served to organize the field and to stimulate a broad range of empirical studies. Its role as a general paradigm has been strengthened by several major studies, although it continues to be plagued by controversy.

Gordon's (1964) landmark statement provided the long-needed clarification of concepts that has guided much of the subsequent empirical research in the field. He identified seven types of assimilation: cultural (acculturation), structural, marital (amalgamation), identificational, attitude receptional (abs-
ence of prejudice), behavioral receptional (absence of discrimination), and civic (absence of value and power conflict). Although these types of assimilation are obviously interrelated, Gordon's classification settled much of the confusion by noting that the several dimensions of assimilation need not always coincide. Gordon's own assessment of American ethnicity was that cultural assimilation had largely been achieved, but that structural assimilation (especially within primary groups) had only been achieved in a few settings (e.g. among intellectuals). Much of the recent empirical literature on structural assimilation (reviewed below) has a direct or indirect link to Gordon's conceptual outline.

The latest reaction to the assimilation paradigm has come from the "revival of ethnicity" school. In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, many scholars and social observers argued that ethnicity remained an important, perhaps the most important, source of social and political consciousness (Novak 1972). Glazer & Moynihan (1970) have demonstrated the vitality of ethnic politics in New York. Additionally, religion and nationality remain strong predictors of political behavior and attitudes (Hamilton 1972:194–211). One of the most influential proponents of the "ethnicity does matter" thesis is Andrew Greeley (1974). He has documented that national origins groups in the United States continue to exhibit important cultural differences. Before assessing these claims and the criticisms of them (Steinberg 1981; Gans 1979), I review the empirical evidence on the extent of assimilation in several domains of American society.

EVIDENCE ON TRENDS TOWARD ASSIMILATION IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

As with many other general social science theories, the assimilation perspective has gradually come to be understood as multidimensional and probabilistic. Although for many critics any instance of negative evidence invalidates the entire approach, it is likely that there will be wide variations in the degree of assimilation, depending upon the dimension of assimilation and the ethnic groups being examined (Gordon 1964). For instance, a trend toward equality of schooling may not necessarily imply equality of occupational attainment. Nor is it necessary to assume that patterns of assimilation are invariant over time—e.g. for early 20th century European ethnic groups and for recent immigrants. Since patterns change over time as group composition varies and new structural conditions emerge, a timeless universal trend is not to be expected. These variations insure that basic studies will be replicated, thus providing the base for cumulative empirical inquiry and theoretical revision.

In this section, I provide a selective overview of the evidence on the extent and degree of ethnic assimilation in American society, ordered by four key
indicators: socioeconomic inequality, segregation in housing and schools, intermarriage, and prejudice. Since the periods, populations, methods of analysis, and theoretical perspectives that guided the studies are diverse, it is not possible to resolve conflicting findings or interpretations. However, some general patterns are evident.

**Socioeconomic Assimilation**

Education is a key indicator of achievement in the socioeconomic hierarchy and is also a resource (investment) that influences subsequent social and economic mobility. For minorities and immigrants, schooling is seen as the primary step toward full participation in American society. Since compulsory schooling, at least through the secondary level, is provided free by the state, equality would seem more likely here than in other institutions. Yet important barriers to equal schooling exist—barriers institutionalized in the structure and content of the schooling available to different populations. Moreover, differential family resources and support have probably shaped educational opportunities and goals across ethnic communities.

Until recent decades, black youth were particularly disadvantaged because of the limited (and inferior) education offered in segregated schools in the South, where the majority of blacks lived (Lieberson 1980:Ch. 6). In the latter part of the 19th and early years of the 20th century, black migrants to the North and their children had approximately equal (more in some cases) schooling than first and second generation populations from South, East, and Central (SEC) Europe (Lieberson 1980:Ch. 6 & 7). Lieberson argues, with considerable evidence, that family structure and cultural orientations were not the reasons why European ethnics were able to make faster educational gains than blacks in the North. He suggests instead that prejudice hardened towards blacks in the North during the second quarter of the 20th century (as black migration to Northern cities continued) while discrimination against European immigrants and their descendants declined. The interpretation of differential treatment is consistent with the evidence from the Philadelphia Social History Project, which reveals much greater discrimination against blacks than against white immigrants, although racial socioeconomic gaps appear to be far wider in 19th century Philadelphia than Lieberson observes in other Northern cities at the same time (Hershberg et al 1979).

While educational differentials by race and ethnicity have not disappeared, many recent studies point to a marked reduction in recent years (Duncan 1965:Ch. 4; Hauser & Featherman 1976; Featherman & Hauser 1978:329–34). Yet there remain significant differences between the proportions of white and minority youth (a) retained below their modal grade level (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1978:Table 2.1) and (b) progressing from high school to college (Mare 1981:Chart 4/1A). These exceptions notwithstanding, the general trend
is toward convergence in the quantity of schooling received. We know much less about equality in the quality of schooling. This issue has been subject to more speculative thought than careful study.

There is a considerable body of literature on trends and patterns of ethnic and racial inequality in occupational attainment and incomes. Most of this research focuses on the last two decades; but detailed historical studies are also available (Wilson 1980a; Lieberson 1980; Bonacich & Modell 1980), which caution against broad-sweeping generalizations about trends toward socioeconomic assimilation. Patterns vary considerably for different populations, defined by country of origin and race, and for different periods. The post–World War II period, which witnessed renewed economic expansion and an expanded governmental role, created a major break with the past, especially for racial minorities (Wilson 1980a).

The popular saga of immigrant success, rising from poverty to the economic mainstream, is not without foundation (Handlin 1951; Sowell 1981). Hutchinson (1956) observes a distinct shift toward more skilled occupations from 1910 to 1950 among the foreign-born and their children. Not only were the new European immigrants highly motivated and anxious to improve opportunities for their children, but the expansion of employment in the industrial cities of the East and Midwest greatly facilitated their economic progress. Regardless of the exact mix of reasons, European ethnic populations have made considerable socioeconomic progress during the 20th century (Greeley 1974; Lieberson 1980). Recent studies of socioeconomic inequality by religion and ethnicity show relatively minor differences (Goldstein 1969; Greeley 1978; Roof 1979a).

This general pattern of economic mobility is also evident in studies of recent white immigrants to the United States (Chiswick 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980; Massey 1981a:72–76). Not all old and new immigrants and their descendents have made it in American society; most are not affluent, and a nontrivial fraction remain at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. However, ethnicity and religion do not appear to be major predictors of an individual’s education, occupation, or earnings. Nor is there any sign of direct economic discrimination in recent years (Duncan & Duncan 1968). However, a long legacy of social bigotry towards those of Southern and Eastern European origins—identified as Catholics and Jews—has only slowly receded (Pavalko 1980). Baltzell (1964) documents the pervasive anti-Semitism of the American elite that bars Jews from private clubs and from the upper echelons of many corporate social circles. See Auerbach (1976) for a well-documented study of intolerance and exclusionary practices in the legal profession.

The economic problems faced by European ethnics pale in comparison to those encountered by racial minorities and Hispanics. There was little trend towards socioeconomic assimilation of these minorities prior to World War II,
which van den Berghe labeled as a period of *Herrenvolk* democracy (1967:77). Although blacks left the rural South to migrate to cities in the South and North, their economic opportunities were restricted to the bottom of the urban hierarchy (Wilson 1980a:Ch. 4; Geschwender 1978:Ch. 9). Lieberson (1980) notes the hostility of organized labor, which limited mobility of blacks into skilled manual occupations, as a factor fundamentally different from anything experienced by SEC European ethnics. At the same time, widespread prejudice on the West Coast, by elites and unions alike, froze Asians out of most sectors of the general economy (McWilliams 1945; Daniels 1977). Perhaps most significant was the acquiescence, and even the support, of the state in the maintenance of a caste-like system in the racial division of labor during this era.

The system began to change towards the end of the New Deal era. After receiving some protective legislation in the 1930s, labor unions, particularly the CIO, began to organize blacks and whites on a common basis (Bonacich 1976; Geschwender 1977). After World War II the federal government was slowly but firmly directed toward an anti-discriminatory policy. Yet minority economic gains were slow. The studies of Siegel (1965) and Duncan (1967, 1968, 1969) established societal discrimination as the major cause of black-white economic inequality. Recent studies (Featherman & Hauser 1976; Farley 1977a; Hirschman & Wong 1982) show moderate gains in the socioeconomic position of blacks and a reduction in the effect of discrimination, especially for younger workers. However, blacks and to a lesser extent Hispanics [for an excellent overview, see Tienda (1981)] remain in socioeconomic positions far below those of European ethnic groups.

One of the most significant debates in recent years has been over William Wilson's thesis of greater differentiation within the black population (1980b: especially Ch. 8). Wilson argues that the moderation of societal discrimination has improved the chances for social mobility of well-educated black youth but that the plight of poorly educated black youth in central cities has worsened. This pattern is not due to racial discrimination, Wilson contends, but rather to structural changes in the economy that offers minimal employment (or none at all) for the urban black "underclass".

On the other hand, Asian-Americans, especially those of Chinese and Japanese origin, have made significant strides toward socioeconomic equality with the majority population (Hirschman & Wong 1981, 1982). These gains are more evident in education and occupational levels than in earnings. A significant economic disadvantage for Chinese-Americans appears not to be explained by the usual background variables (Wong 1982). [For more detailed studies of Asian-American stratification, see Kuo & Lin (1977); Hurh et al (1978); Montero & Tsukashima (1977); Montero (1981); and Woodrum (1981).]

This reading of the evidence on trends in socioeconomic inequality provides
general support for the melting pot thesis for European ethnics, but not for black Americans. Even during the growth era after World War II, and with government opposing discrimination, progress has been hesitant; it may also have favored blacks with the resources to take advantage of the new opportunities (Wilson 1980a).

**Segregation**

If racial and ethnic populations are separated by an uncrossable social gulf (as where slavery is practiced), physical relations are often close and intimate. But once the alternative of egalitarian social relationships is possible, physical segregation is frequently used to maintain distance in all other spheres. Segregation arises not only from the authority of the dominant population, but also from a tendency among new immigrants to desire neighborhoods and local institutions that reinforce their cultural orientations. An additional explanation for segregation between ethnic populations may be an independent factor such as social class or the availability of housing at the time of arrival. In this section, I explore the evidence on these explanations as I review the literature on race and ethnic segregation in American cities.

Studies of selected southern cities in the 19th and 20th centuries reveal that there was considerably less black-white segregation than now (Taeuber & Taeuber 1965:45–53; Spain 1979). The “backyard pattern” reflected the necessity for blacks who worked in domestic and personal service to live close to the homes of their employers. However, such proximity did not confer any locational advantages. The homes of blacks were most often shacks in nearby alleys, and Jim Crow laws strictly regulated behavior and limited opportunities. Evidence from Northern cities during the first part of the 20th century also shows less pervasive (than the present) but slowly increasing black-white segregation (Taeuber & Taeuber 1965:53–55).

In 19th century Philadelphia, place of work was the primary determinant of residential location, and this was the primary reason for ethnic segregation—except for blacks, who were concentrated in black neighborhoods regardless of employment (Hershberg et al 1979). Using a measure of isolation that taps the potential for interaction, Lieberson finds that blacks in Northern cities were less segregated from whites than were the new SEC European immigrants in the early years of the 20th century (Lieberson 1980: Ch. 9). To Lieberson these patterns reflect the greater cultural gap between SEC immigrants and native whites than between blacks and whites and also a higher degree of voluntary clustering by the new immigrants. But after 1910, ethnic segregation between European immigrant groups and native whites steadily declined while black-white segregation increased (Lieberson 1980:270–77).

This general pattern of declining white ethnic segregation and a widening or maintenance of high black-white segregation is found in a wide variety of
empirical studies [for an overview, see Roof (1979b); for studies of ethnic segregation, see Lieberson (1963); Guest & Weed (1976); for studies of racial segregation, see Taeuber & Taeuber (1965); Van Valey et al (1977); Schnare 1980; for a dissenting interpretation, see Kantrowitz (1979, 1981)]. Regardless of the definition of a neighborhood (blocks, census tracts) or the universe of places (central cities, suburbs, or urbanized areas), there appears to have been little or no decline in the level of residential segregation between blacks and whites in urban areas of the United States through 1970. Moreover, there is little systematic variation in segregation associated with city size, the proportion of the minority population, or any other city characteristic. Racial segregation is a constant throughout the country.

With the exception of the Puerto Rican population (Rosenberg & Lake 1976; Massey 1981b), Hispanic populations seem to follow the pattern of European ethnics more than the black population. Levels of Hispanic-Anglo segregation are generally lower than black-white levels and seem to have moderated over time (Massey 1979a, 1981a; Lopez 1981). Most significant is the fact that increasing Hispanic socioeconomic status is associated with a lessening of residential segregation (Massey 1979b), a pattern not found for blacks (Taeuber & Taeuber 1964; Taeuber 1968; Farley 1977b).

The current cause of black-white residential segregation is not minority choice; most blacks desire to live in integrated neighborhoods, although white and black perceptions of the optimal racial mix vary considerably (Farley et al 1979). The attitudes of whites toward integration have become more liberal, which should have led to a decline in the level of black-white segregation (Pettigrew 1973; Taylor et al 1978). However, the housing market is a product of structural factors that impede integration. While there is little evidence for the "white flight" hypothesis that integration causes whites to leave their neighborhoods, whites stop moving into newly integrated areas almost completely (Molotch 1969a; Guest & Zucbes 1969; Frey 1979). Not surprisingly, this soon creates all-black neighborhoods. For many years the institutional environment of lending agencies, federal agencies, and real estate brokers worked to maintain segregation. Even with a change in government policy, the reward structure of the real estate market encourages the steering of whites away from integrated neighborhoods (Lake 1981:Ch. 9).

Under some circumstances, a ghetto or segregated neighborhood could function as a refuge from societal discrimination, assuming that the ethnic economy is large enough to absorb potential workers (Semyonov & Tyree 1981; Winsberg 1979). Generally, however, segregation means less access to opportunities in the broader society: poorer housing and neighborhoods, inferior schools, and greater distance to jobs (Hawley 1944; Roof 1979b). Residential segregation is a major hindrance to progress in other aspects of ethnic assimilation (Duncan & Lieberson 1959; Lieberson 1961b; Marston &
Van Valey (1979). Presumably people who inhabit the same geographical area will interact and eventually participate together in secondary and primary groups. In transitional neighborhoods, these patterns may not occur spontaneously (Molotch 1969b), but social integration is likely to follow physical integration in the long run.

The educational system has also been the subject of integration studies. Most of this literature has focused upon racial rather than ethnic divisions. Several studies report that integrated schools have positive effects on the educational and occupational attainment of black youth and no adverse effect on whites (Crain 1970; Wilson 1979). Other studies report mixed effects upon aspirations, attitudes, and subsequent attainments (Hunt 1977; Braddock 1980; Rosenfield et al. 1981). Integration may have both short- and long-term effects that are difficult to sort out in the conventional cross-sectional survey. The context in which integration is achieved may also affect the nature of its effects.

Historically, most black and white students have attended racially isolated schools. Significant change came in the late 1960s when federal courts and the federal government began to require desegregation of school systems that had a history of de jure segregation. Major strides were made toward integration during this period, largely in Southern school districts (Farley & Taeuber 1973; Farley 1975a; Wurdock & Farley 1979). There is conflicting evidence on whether school systems that experience desegregation are more likely to lose white enrollment than those without desegregation (Giles 1978; Wurdock 1979; Farley et al. 1980).

The links between residential and school segregation are complex. While residential segregation provides a major constraint on efforts to integrate schools, it is clear that the historical segregation of schools has been an important cause of residential segregation (Farley 1975b; Wilson & Taeuber 1978; Taeuber 1979). Much of the research on the impact of desegregation policy on “white flight” from schools and cities has ignored the broader dynamics of residential mobility and the decline in the numbers of the school-age white population, which are independent of changes in school desegregation. Several studies have brought a wider demographic perspective to bear on this vital public policy question (Farley 1976; Sly & Pol 1978; Taeuber et al. 1981) and point the way for future research.

We know little about the level of segregation in other social institutions, including places of work (Becker 1980), and even less about the consequences for inter-ethnic relations. Such research must rely upon nonconventional data sources. Yet their importance cannot be underestimated.

**Interrmarriage**

More than any other indicator, intermarriage represents the final outcome of assimilation. If the melting pot symbol suggests a mixture of the varied ethnic,
religion, and racial groups in the United States, the children of unions across these boundaries should be the ultimate product of this vision of American society. Yet because of the very intimacy of family relationships, it is likely that amalgamation will be the final step after residential integration, socioeconomic parity, and inter-ethnic tolerance have been achieved.

One of the most widely cited studies in social science has been Ruby Jo Reeves Kennedy's analysis of intermarriage in New Haven (Kennedy 1944, 1952). On the basis of her interpretation and evocative phrase, "the triple melting pot," most of the academic community accepted her thesis that ethnic divisions within the three major religious groups were not barriers to intermarriage. This interpretation also reached the general public through Herberg's well-known book, Protestant, Catholic, Jew (1960). Yet a careful reanalysis of Kennedy's data has raised important questions about the validity of the conclusions (Peach 1980a). It seems that a common intermarrying population of Catholics is not evident in the data. Catholics from Northwestern Europe were more likely to intermarry with Protestants from the same national origins, and Catholics from Eastern and Southern Europe were much less likely to intermarry with this group. In further reanalysis of the New Haven data, Peach (1980b) argues that residential segregation is the primary explanation for patterns of marital homogamy.

Studies of intermarriage are plagued with a variety of methodological problems. Standard census and survey data sources generally report only the prevalence of intermarriage among the currently married population. If intermarriages are more likely to be disrupted (by separation or divorce), then cross-sectional data will underestimate the extent of intermarriage (and give a biased measure of the trend). Data based upon marriage certificates (vital statistics) are usually limited to the few states or areas that record and compile such basic statistics (usually with little other information on the characteristics of brides and grooms). Similarly, both sources of data are likely to contain interviewer bias that assumes marriage partners are of similar racial/ethnic origins [see Heer (1974) for a review of these issues]. Another central methodological issue when comparing rates of intermarriage between populations or across time is the standardization of the relative availability of potential spouses. For instance, by chance alone, one would expect a higher degree of intermarriage for Catholics than Protestants because of the smaller pool of Catholics (potential mates). This problem, while obvious when stated, has proven to be a major obstacle to studies of intermarriage.

There appears to have been a significant trend toward intermarriage across religious boundaries in recent decades (Locke et al 1957; Yinger 1968; Bumpass 1970; Korbin & Goldscheider 1978). Perhaps most dramatic has been the trend towards interfaith marriage among Catholics (Alba 1976; Alba & Kessler 1979). Evidence on the trend of intermarriage among Jewish Americans is less
clear-cut, but it is substantial enough to spark concern among ethnic spokesmen (Himmelfarb 1979; Sklare 1971:Ch. 6). Studies of intermarriage among Asian Americans (Parkman & Sawyer 1967; Tinker 1973; Kikumura & Kitano 1973; Montero 1980) and Hispanics (Mittelbach & Moore 1968; Murguia & Frisbie 1977; Schoen et al 1978; Fitzpatrick & Gurak 1979; Gurak & Fitzpatrick 1982) also show secular or generational increases in the extent of marriage across ethnic boundaries [also see the broad census-based studies of Gurak & Kritz (1978); Carter & Glick (1970):Ch. 5]. Levels of intra-ethnic marriage are still much higher than would be expected by chance, but in general there is a strong trend toward intermarriage [an exception is the Puerto Rican community in New York—see Gurak & Fitzpatrick (1982)]. The impact of this trend on the maintenance of ethnic boundaries and identity remains to be seen.

As in so many other areas, the patterns of black-white intermarriage differ from those between other ethnic and racial minorities. The few studies based upon marriage registration data (Heer 1966) or upon census data (Carter & Glick 1970; Heer 1974; Gurak & Kritz 1978) show very low levels of black-white intermarriage. For instance, according to 1970 census data about 1.2% of currently married black men (with spouse present) had a white wife and the corresponding figure for black married women was 0.7% (Heer 1974). For men, but not for women, these data reveal an upward trend from 1960, but the trend is much smaller than that for any other ethnic minority. Estimates of black-white intermarriage are probably biased because a substantial number of persons of partial African heritage are assumed to be white. This potential bias may be lessened by the fact that if the race of one spouse is not reported on the census schedule it is assumed to be the same as that of the other spouse (see Heer 1974:248).

Attitudes

The study of race and ethnic prejudice is one of the central areas of research within sociology and psychology. The classic texts on race and ethnicity in sociology have focused primary attention on the nature and immediate determinants of prejudice (Williams 1964; Simpson & Yinger 1972). Most of the research on racial and ethnic attitudes arises out of social psychological framework that focuses upon personality correlates of prejudice and the situational environments that support or discourage racist beliefs and behavior. The link between attitudes (prejudice) and behavior (discrimination) is complex and depends on the context and many other variables [see Merton (1949) for a classic statement].

A significant problem in the study of prejudice is the multidimensional character of beliefs about racial and ethnic minorities. Although a common research strategy is to construct a composite scale of intolerance based upon a variety of beliefs and predispositions, there are likely to be important differ-
ences in the behavioral correlates and determinants of generalized stereotypes and more specific orientations toward minorities.

There appears to have been a dramatic reduction in all dimensions of racial intolerance over the past few decades (Campbell 1971:Ch. 7; Greeley & Sheatsley 1971; Taylor et al. 1978; Condran 1979; Smith 1982), although Tuch (1981) found little change during the 1970s. This trend spans a number of issues from beliefs about racial inferiority to a willingness to accept integration in housing and other institutions. This acceptance of "liberal" race attitudes is evident among the white respondents in the 1980 NORC General Social Survey (percentages are of those giving a response): 77% would not object at all if a member of the family brought a black friend home for dinner; 89% think white and Negro students should go to the same schools (Davis 1980:95, 98). However, such general sentiments should not be accepted at face value. Respondents are likely to qualify their acceptance of integration if it implies some governmental intervention or if the integration is beyond a token level. Farley and his colleagues (1978, 1979) found that whites in Detroit were willing to accept a few blacks in the neighborhood, but a majority of whites would not like to live in a neighborhood that was more than one third black.

The sources of white attitudes toward minorities is a topic of much theoretical and public debate. The variables with the most consistent association with race attitudes are age and education, with the young and most highly educated being the most tolerant (Campbell 1971). Middleton (1976) finds those living in the South to be more prejudiced against blacks, but only slight regional differences exist in anti-Semitism and in prejudice towards Catholics and immigrants. The social mechanisms that create and sustain prejudice are less clear. Education is generally considered to be a liberalizing force, and its impact is often interpreted as part of broader social class differences in prejudice. This is in contrast, however, with the historic base of anti-Semitism among the better-educated middle class (Williams 1964:53–56). Hamilton (1972:Ch. 11) questions the hypothesis of greater working-class intolerance on both theoretical and empirical grounds. There is, however, evidence that white workers who are in greater competition with blacks for employment are more likely to be intolerant (Cummings 1980). Social class differences in patterns of response to interviewer questioning may confound research on this relationship (Jackman 1973).

Government efforts to eliminate the effects of past discrimination have met with mixed response from the majority population. In general, most whites appear to be unsympathetic with affirmative action programs to increase minority opportunities. This reluctance to support government intervention is linked to the tendency among most Americans to interpret personal success or failure as due to individual causes (Klugel & Smith 1982). However, it seems that government policies have often had a liberalizing effect on the attitudes of
whites (Jacobson 1978). Even after hostile attitudes and strong prejudice are reduced, stereotypes of ethnic and racial groups are likely to persist (McCauley & Stitt 1980, Lieberson 1982) and to have important consequences for social interaction even if socioeconomic equality and integration are achieved.

BEYOND ASSIMILATION THEORY

Most of the empirical studies reviewed in the preceding section do not draw formally upon assimilation theory, especially the expectation of the melting pot, for their justification (the melting pot image is typically only used as a straw man). Yet there is a clear link between the original ideas of Park and much of the contemporary research on ethnic stratification, segregation, inter-marriage, and prejudice. There is almost always an implicit, if not always precisely stated, hypothesis that trends will show a moderation of differences between ethnic populations. In the analysis of relationships between variables, elements of "modernity"—higher education, large cities, young age, social mobility, more information—are expected to be associated with a lessening of ethnic divisions and frictions. Even though many of the empirical studies have yielded negative evidence, this has not led to a different theoretical orientation. In fact, the frequent findings that racism remains strong and that cultural preferences are still associated with ethnicity lead to the conclusion that more time or other structural changes are needed before "assimilation" will be achieved.

An alternative interpretation of the development of the field would be that the dependent variable—inter-ethnic differences—has remained the same, but that the general theory of social change has been superceded by a broad range of specific hypotheses tied to sets of causal (independent) variables. Consider, for example, the following questions from the field of ethnic stratification:

Does the percent minority in a city, or other characteristics of the city, explain variation in ethnic socioeconomic inequality (Blalock 1957; Frisbie & Neidert 1977; Stolzenberg & D’Amico 1977; Parcel 1979)?

What is the effect of inter-regional migration on income attainment among black men and on the black-white income gap in the North (Long & Heltman 1975; Lieberson 1978; Hogan & Pazul 1982)?

Do cultural differences in ambition or work orientations explain ethnic differences in socioeconomic attainment (Rosen 1959; Featherman 1971; Stryker 1981)?

A reasonable case could be made that these streams of research and many others are focused on hypotheses far removed from the general and unspecific theoretical framework of the assimilation perspective (indeed, I have so argued myself upon occasion). Yet, none of the more concrete research directions comprise a theory of change, nor does any of them challenge the general
assumptions and expectations of the assimilation framework (except to say that it is too general to guide empirical research). Other streams of research, however, do challenge the conventional assimilation paradigm or its basic premises.

Recall that the central elements of Park’s original thesis were that inequality/conflict arose naturally after contact—from ethnocentrism and differential power—and that “leveling influences” in modern society gradually led to accommodation and assimilation. Both of these premises ignore (or at least minimize) the role of “interests” in the creation and maintenance of racial/ethnic divisions. What motivates prejudice and discrimination, and why are they institutionalized (with sanctions) in social organization? These issues are addressed in a group of ideas and hypotheses that might be called “class approaches to ethnicity and race” (Bonacich 1980). The central theme of these diverse alternatives is that the social processes that divide people by social class are closely intertwined with the causal mechanisms that create and sustain ethnic divisions. Essentially, class theories provide an interpretation for the maintenance of ethnicity (both as a subjective identity and in objective differences) based on reasons other than initial differences and cultural persistence. These accounts range from the general description of important class differences (Geer 1974) to complex theoretical formulations [see Bonacich (1980) for a survey].

As noted earlier, E. Franklin Frazier (1957), a leading student of Park, believed the expansion of European colonialism to be the cause of modern racial inequality. Cox (1948) went further in this interpretation to posit that the development of capitalism in Europe led to the ideology of racism that was used to justify the labor exploitation of nonwhites throughout the world [see Miles (1980) for a critique of Cox’s theory]. Other authors have presented compelling interpretations of the impact of social structure, including industrial employment and class position, on the development of ethnicity in the United States (Yancey et al 1976, Steinberg 1981). This is in contrast to interpretations that emphasize the effects of the cultural traditions immigrants bring with them (Schueler 1976).

Once ethnic divisions are created, what structural forces tend to reinforce them? The classic Marxist framework suggests that race and ethnicity are used by employers and other elites to divide the working class (Reich 1981; also see Tabb 1970). According to this interpretation the division created between minorities and the majority population should weaken the relative position of the majority (white) working class in the larger society [Szymanski (1976); for counter evidence see Villemmez (1978); Beck (1980); also see Glenn (1963, 1966)].

A quite different class theory is offered by Bonacich (1972, 1979) in her split labor market theory. She locates the key dynamic of ethnic antagonism in the
struggle between the established working class and the class of new entrants, defined by race or ethnicity, who are put into competition for the same jobs. Employers try to use the new workers, immigrants or disadvantaged minorities, to lower the price of labor. The established working class sees the new workers as a threat to their hard-earned gains in the class struggle and attempts to exclude them through expulsion, immigration bars, and strict caste barriers in employment. Racism is the ideological fuel used to fire the social movement. Bonacich has demonstrated the utility of her theory in historical studies of black-white relations in the United States (1975, 1976) and for the case of South Africa (1981a; also see Burawoy 1981; Bonacich 1981b).

A theoretically troublesome element in studies of race and ethnicity has been the case of successful minorities, such as Jews and Asians in the United States. Despite prejudice and hostility from the larger society, these “middleman minorities” display both above-average economic success and an unusual degree of ethnic solidarity. Since economic success is supposed to bring assimilation according to the conventional theory, these groups are anomalous. Bonacich (1973) presents a class-based interpretation of middleman minorities that emphasizes the use of kinship ties to build an ethnic economy that both serves the ethnic minority and competes effectively with firms in the general economy. Hostility from the majority population can strengthen ethnic solidarity, which allows the mobilization at low wages of workers with high motivation (Light 1972). However, once societal prejudice diminishes and good opportunities become available in the general economy, ethnic solidarity and the entrepreneurial economy tend to fade (Bonacich & Modell 1980). Wilson & Portes (1980; also see Portes 1981) extend these ideas in their interpretation of the immigrant enclave of Cubans in Miami [for a general statement, see Hechter (1978)].

One of the commonest features of modern societies is the regional concentration of ethnic populations, accompanied by highly unequal regional rates of economic growth. While the assumption is that interregional migration and the “spread effects” of industrialization will reduce such differences, the experiences of the Celtic fringe in Great Britain and of Quebec in Canada raise another interpretation. Following the logic of Hechter (1975), the uneven spatial growth of modern capitalism tends to reinforce national ethnic divisions in both economic and political dimensions. This framework has also been applied to the United States in various analyses of internal colonialism (Geschwender 1978:Ch. 4; Blauner 1972).

Many of the ideas from these class perspectives specify conditions under which ethnic divisions and sentiments are likely to be reinforced through the organization and structure of society. As such, they represent hypotheses that can be joined with the body of ideas, methods, and data sources used in the general assimilation framework. A major obstacle to this type of interpretation
has been the use in the past of different analytical strategies. This seems to be less of a problem at present (e.g. Wright 1978).

CONCLUSIONS

Reading the pace of social change from newspaper headlines or even from the number of citations by sociologists may be misleading. The public and academic focus on ethnicity and race in the last two decades might suggest that ethnic divisions and ethnic identity are more salient than ever. Yet evidence that ethnicity remains an important point of differentiation does not imply that its influence is greater than it once was. We must separate, both conceptually and empirically, the cultural and structural dimensions of ethnicity. Tendencies to mistake parts for the whole and to lump short- and long-term trends together have caused much confusion.

Gans (1979) and Alba (1981) have sharply questioned the depth of the resurgence of ethnicity among white ethnics in the last decade. As Alba put it, "During the 1970s, ethnicity could be celebrated precisely because assimilation had proceeded far enough that ethnicity seemed so threatening and divisive" (1981:96). If ethnicity is no longer a barrier to participation in secondary or primary groups and in institutions, it does not have to be hidden in the closet. Even if ethnicity has a lessening impact on socioeconomic roles, it does not necessarily mean that its cultural and political roles, which are often tied to religious institutions and rooted in certain geographic areas, will diminish at the same pace. In fact, it is possible that certain aspects of ethnic culture, such as cuisine, will spread to the general population. In such cases, it is necessary to state clearly what is meant by the resurgence of ethnicity.

In his provocative, but very insightful, reanalysis of the role of ethnicity in American society, Steinberg (1981:253–62) questions the logic of the advocates of ethnic pluralism who reject the goal of assimilation in American society. The problem, as Steinberg sees it, is how to achieve full social and economic equality for ethnic groups who seek to maintain exclusive social and cultural organizations. Ethnic spokesmen have always resisted the melting pot image as a threat to the cultural survival of the ethnic community and have proclaimed the virtues of ethnic pluralism. Yet most members of the disadvantaged minorities see the melting pot (or the American dream) as a promise of their right to get ahead, both economically and socially. Ethnic culture does not disappear during the process of mobility, yet is often seen as an obstacle, especially if elites are prejudiced. Steinberg sees much of the current emphasis on ethnic pluralism as an effort of the fairly established populations to resist integration and participation with the currently disadvantaged minorities, much in the way that the WASP establishment rejected the melting pot goals of new immigrants earlier in the century.
According to this interpretation of the bases for the resurgence of ethnicity and the general conclusions of the empirical studies reviewed earlier, I conclude that the character of ethnicity has shifted over the last fifty years. It was once a primary axis of socioeconomic stratification and institutional segregation; it is now a symbol of cultural and political differentiation. However, for some minorities, especially blacks and Puerto Ricans, most of the barriers to achievement are still in place. Briefly, the evidence in support of this thesis is as follows:

1. There are relatively modest socioeconomic differentials among various white ethnic populations and little evidence of direct economic discrimination. In spite of significant differences, the trend among Asian Americans and Hispanics is toward socioeconomic parity with the majority population. There is some improvement in the relative position of blacks, but the gap remains wide.

2. White ethnic residential integration has been declining for most of the century. Although still high, Hispanic (except Puerto Rican) residential segregation is also declining and seems to be partially a function of socioeconomic position. Black-white segregation is extraordinarily high throughout the country and is not explained by social class differences.

3. Segregation in housing is closely intertwined with segregation in other institutions, particularly schools. Significant gains in the integration of black and white school children were made in the last decade, but future progress is much in doubt.

4. Recent studies consistently point to an upturn in religious and ethnic intermarriage, particularly for Catholics. This trend is also evident for Hispanics (except Puerto Ricans) and Asians. Black-white intermarriage remains at very low levels.

5. Attitudes toward racial minorities have become much more liberal in the post World War II era. Most of this is expressed in support of equal opportunity and support for integrated institutions.

All of this is not to suggest that the United States has become an ethically blind society. The number of Catholics, Jews, and blacks on the Supreme Court and in the Cabinet continues to be a newsworthy topic. There are undoubtedly many sectors of the society, including neighborhoods, clubs, and even some firms, where one's presumed ethnic pedigree remains an important criterion for admission. Yet the wide-ranging studies reviewed here suggest a declining role for ethnicity in American society. The process seems generally to be progressive, each step toward ethnic integration or intermarriage narrowing the future range for differentiation on the basis of ethnicity. For black Americans, the evidence is far less conclusive. The declines in prejudice and modest socioeconomic gains contrast with lack of any change in residential integration. Perhaps the 1980 Census will reveal that change in this dimension occurred during the
1970s. In conclusion, however, Americans of African descent have been and continue to be subjected to constraints quite different from those upon other ethnic minorities.

Future research on race and ethnicity should not simply test the hypothesis of assimilation, though continual “social indicators” reporting of change is necessary. Instead it must begin to specify and measure the impact of causal forces and intervening mechanisms on the various dimensions of ethnic change (and the pace of ethnic change) in different contexts. The forces of change in industrial society identified by Park and other sociologists in the assimilation school are clearly important, especially over the long run. Yet there are other causal factors, some of which are suggested by studies emphasizing class interests. While prejudice and ethnic antagonism can persist through sheer cultural inertia, certain interests are served through the maintenance of ethnic divisions. The major task is to identify the contexts (political, regional, industrial) in which these forces of resistance can retard or even negate the integrative mechanisms of complex societies—i.e. to advance beyond the debate over whether ethnicity matters, to learn how and why ethnicity matters.

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