



Research Article

GROWING U.S. CULTURAL DIVERSITY IMPELLING APPRECIATION OF DIFFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

There are higher birth-rates among the mostly young Third World arrivals, demographers are predicting that the U.S. before long will have to define just who its minorities are. Immigrants though different and more problematic than those who have come before, as normally tolerant American complain about the newcomers' contributions to crime and disease, about the burdens on schools and welfare rolls, the latest immigrants are helping form a new society, a variation and intensification of the great American experiment.

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INTRODUCTION

Today the world scrutinizes Americans more than ever before. People worldwide wonder what the superpower is like. In the last 3 decades “transnationalism” – the latest move has radically altered an interdisciplinary field of American Studies under the multicultural challenge. The face of America has been dramatically changed in the final years of the 20th century, it's not just about physiognomy, or even color, it's about the very complexion of the country, the endless and fascinating profusion of people, cultures, languages and attitudes that make up the great national pool (Robert A. Gross, 2000). The end of the 20th century has seen the greatest rise in immigration since the great wave of 1900-s. In 1940 70% of immigrants came from Europe. In 1992 15% came from Europe, 37% from Asia and 44% from Latin America and the Caribbean. The impact of these new immigrants is remaking America. Today about 20 million Americans were born in another country.

There are higher birth-rates among the mostly young Third World arrivals, demographers are predicting that the U.S. before long will have to define just who its minorities are. Immigrants though different and more problematic than those who have come before, as normally tolerant American complain about the newcomers' contributions to crime and disease, about the burdens on schools and welfare rolls, the latest immigrants are helping form a new society, a variation and intensification of the great American experiment.

Too complicated to be described as a melting pot, or even a “stew”, or a “mosaic”, as the society is a collection of intertwining subcultures, each contributing its own character

to the nation's life – from food to fashion, from art to politics – while retaining its distinctiveness. As participants in that movement, prominent scholars among them from diverse ethnic communities, they have an insider's view of life. Others develop their ideas from outside the United States fascinated by an expansive American culture, including American Studies professors.

Integration of diverse ethnic groups into the American mainstream has always been the topic of hot discussion as this process was not homogenous; it has been changing according geography, political situation, diverse cultural specificities of diverse groups, economic situation, social issues. It's a process lively, especially today when the world is facing extreme turbulent times of terrorism and the immigration issue has become challenging and vulnerable for the most part of the world. In this article we will try to follow the dynamics of zigzag of the integration of ethnic groups into the Mainstream American culture.

What is Mainstream American Culture?

The mainstream, or dominant culture WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) is Anglo-American from the point of view of socio-economic and political power, accepted norms of behavior, values, beliefs and ways of thinking (Schwarz, 1995, pp. 471-479).

Construction years of America were not like those of European states. There was no evolving aspect during which the nation-state and nationalism emerged from a feudal stage, developing from villages and city-states. The American nation originated with the immigration of northern Europeans from the Old World who left their homes, extended families, cities and cultures behind to enter the New World.

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During this period they were isolated from the rest of the world by two oceans. This was not just a matter of geography. Settlers preferred to be removed from the strict, unpermissive class system, political and religious oppression, corruption, and violence of the Old World.

At the early stage in the national psyche the habit of not checking the American culture was the accepted practice. There was predominantly a one way flow from the Old to the New World. As immigrant children entered the public education system, with the encouragement of their parents, they gave up the culture of the Old World including its languages, class assumptions, perception, and ways of dealing with social and physical environment (Mead, 1970, p. 361). The scholars later started interpreting American "Melting pot", the metaphor for the American society used at the early stage of formation, as cultureless self-image, as it described a process of assimilation and an assumption of a truly pluralistic society by which immigrants threw their respective cultures into a pot. The mixture was stirred and heated until it melted down into a harmonious blend of cultures from all over the world with no distinct or dominant culture. When we speak about the assimilation, we have to differentiate it from acculturation. According the traditional approach, acculturation is a process of learning or acquiring another culture, while assimilation is a matter of being accepted as a member of another culture.

There is no official national language in the U.S. and yet English usage has predominated. The face of America is changing. Today there is a hostile reaction against bilingual education and the use of Spanish. In 1980, voters in Dade County, Florida, passed a referendum outlawing the use of Spanish on street signs. However, the reversal backlash started in 1980s when seven states had voted to make English their official language and there was strong movement in progress to legislate English the official language of the nation.

According Gary R. Weaver Why in the 1980s was this an issue, if people believed in melting pot? (Weaver, 1998) This melting did not truly happen though and over the years the metaphor of the stew pot replaced the melting pot. In the stew pot, there is the part of the stew that is the same and ties everything together. Although, within the stew the different parts both melt into the whole stew and retain their own identity as well. Part of the potato, for example, remains the potato and part melts into the stew. For some people, however the stew pot became unfavorable and was replaced by the idea of the salad bowl, where everything is mixed together, yet preserves its separate identity. Some refer to the salad bowl as a mosaic (Stevenson, 1998, p. 13). "Melting Pot" refers to assimilation – a process of consistent integration when member of ethno cultural group are "absorbed" into an established generally larger community, and it presupposes a loss of all or many characteristics which make the newcomer different.

The idea of multiculturalism is put forward as an alternative to assimilation. This theory is contradictory to the melting pot principle and is described as the salad bowl theory, or the cultural mosaic. In the multicultural approach, each ingredient retains its integrity and flavor, while contributing to a successful final product. In recent years, this approach has officially been promoted in the traditional melting pot

societies, such as Australia, Canada and Britain. However, it is difficult to estimate the degree, to which a government can influence the way and extent of integration of immigrants.

Immigration communities in the United States display the impact of both multicultural and "Melting Pot" approaches. The issue whether to support a "Melting Pot" or multicultural approach has become debatable. Many multiculturalists debate that the melting pot theory is a mechanism of the unforbearing segment to abdicate their cultures in order to be accepted into the mainstream society. Nativists (proponents of the, melting pot theory) on the other hand declare that multiculturalism will destroy the structure of society due to the ethnic divisions and economic trouble, that multiculturalism polices generate.

The greatest number of Americans can track their ancestry back to the British followed by Germans and Irish.

What was the dimension of their assimilation? Was it rapid, or difficult and lingering?

According to historic facts, immigrant groups were in no sense homogeneous; they varied according to regional origin, dialect, class, politics, religion. The emerging ethnic groups were inventing traditions to provide symbols and slogans for the unification of the groups notwithstanding differences. The symbolic umbrella of the ethnic culture had to be extensive and adaptable to benefit several often conflicting purposes: provide the solidarity among the members of the group; stimulate the group to defend its cultural values and to foster its demands to power and resources; at the same time to reduce the hostility of the mainstream ethno-culture by representing the compatibility of the side-stream, ethno-culture with American principles.

The Scots and English in 1840-1850s were welcome by the native white American Protestants into their ranks on the basis of common standards of living, skills, levels of education, language, religions, and habits of daily life. They had no organized group life except two voluntary associations, the Scottish St. Andrew's and the English St George's societies, both involving some informal charity, but existed mainly to finance annual dinners to celebrate the birthdays of the patron saints of their corresponding homelands in the British Isles. Contrary to the classic large ethnic historic groups of American immigration, which covered paths between arrival and the achievement of assimilation, these groups had absurdity shortened historians. Within a short period of time in their American careers, they had entered just a peripheral phase of ethnicity, especially in the case of Scots with episodically revealed symbolic characteristics.

The Scots on their saint's day and the English on theirs, at the celebratory banquets became Scots and English, but when the day was over, they were again typical Americans.

The Irish were much larger in number, lower in social status and swamped in poverty, but they achieved greater solidarity and a high degree of institutional accomplishment and in their American career. Icelandic Americans remain a successfully assimilated yet ethnically conscious group.

Between 1860 and 1800 German Jewish group succeeded to an extent, that Jewish business elite appeared, whose leaders were the investment bankers, department-store innovators,

clothing manufacturers, and metals, shoe-manufacturing, and meat-processing entrepreneurs. The German Jewish aristocrat class in New York – closely bound by ethnic, social and family bonds and business dealing – was especially impressive. For them all that remained was to achieve an acceptance in society, corresponding in scale with their economic and cultural success. But the appearance of impoverished, Yiddish-speaking immigrants from Eastern Europe – about 30,000 of them between 1870 and 1880, and much greater numbers soon after – endangered the standing, the American Jews had attained. According to the nativist views combined with racist and anti-Semitic theories imposed from Europe, clannishness, vulgarity, greed, physical inferiority, parasitism, and intellectualism were inherited traits that the Jews were incapable of losing. The identification of the Russian Jews with the Americanized Jews as one racial group threatened the naturalized Jewish community.

We very often hear the same in different parts of the world concerning the Jewish appreciation community in the U.S. as being exceptional among the rest of the ethnic groups in terms of solidarity and great protectiveness towards each other especially in bad times and good times. I think these traits were originated in 1881-1924s, when notwithstanding the repugnance of the Americanized Jews to the Russian immigrants and the social and cultural distance between them, the older settlers took upon themselves the obligation for the physical welfare and social accommodation of the newcomers. Partially their reaction served their own interests \: facilitating the integration of the new arrivals would obliterate dishonor the immigrants put on all of them. On the other hand, American Jews also felt sympathy for victims of oppression and acknowledged their common identity. While they groused of the continued flow of immigration, they opened their philanthropic institutions to the Russian Jews and raised funds to meet their needs.

One of the most vivid examples of constant negotiation within the ethnic group is the Italian ethnic identity. Once in America Italians maintained solidarity through the cult of the saints organizing feast day celebrations that was challenged by the new military patriotic form of Italian nationalism. A colonial elite of businessmen and professionals fostered this nationalist version of ethnicity to secure dominance over laboring immigrants. Both of the above-mentioned Italian immigrant identity were opposed by socialists and anarchists being anti-religious, anti-nationalist, and anti-capitalist, who forced class concourses as members of the international proletariat among Italian workers. In the following decades of these types of self-concepts and collective representations were proposed by immigrants. As Italian immigrants became inveterate in America, the necessity of creating an Italian-American identity assumed primacy, e.g. formation of Sons of Italy in 1905, Columbus Day symbolic expression of the dual identity. In the 1920s Benito Mussolini's Fascist regime added to the discord within Italian Americans by trying to win over immigrants and their offspring. Though World War II resolved the question of Fascism. The fact, that by the 1960s, the third and fourth generation Italian Americans unexpectedly began to assert their distinctiveness as part of an ethnic revival process and expanded Italian-American organizations together with upwardly mobile and socially climbing individuals tried to create a more positive image by concentrating on the glories of Old-Country high culture,

connecting Italian-Americans with the accomplishments of Dante, DaVinci, and other famous Italians and other Americans attempted to cash in on the mark of distinction of contemporary Italian design and style by consuming Gucci, Pucci, Ferrari, etc., it raises question of the host society one-sidedly dictated the terms of assimilation, linear advancement from “foreignness” to Americanization, instead ethnicization is a dynamic process, ethnic groups are constantly recreating and reinventing themselves in response to changing realities.

Georgia became more discernable in the U.S. from the 20th century through waves of emigration, each of them having its own cause. The number of Georgian immigrants of 1860-1880 period wasn't big and it represented the low social strata. Mainly these groups were represented by workers from Racha (a region of Western Georgia) who worked on the Seattle railroad construction and horsemen from Guria (another region of Western Georgia) who became circus actors and their gender composition was mainly male. The majority entered intermarriage and got absolutely assimilated. After the occupation of Georgia by Russians and its sovietization into the USSR in 1921 mostly political refugees made up the immigrant groups. They represented Georgian nobility and anti-Bolsheviks. They are seen as the first wave immigrants, coming to the U.S. via Europe. Many of them came with their families to the U.S., some mixed families also emerged, and their assimilation with the mainstream happened quickly and smoothly. However, during the second wave – after the end of World War II the number of Georgians didn't increase. They were the immigrants of the first wave living in Europe, who later emigrated from Europe to America to enhance economic conditions. Majority of them were men, who formed mixed families. But their number was very low, not exceeding 300 (Daushvili, 2002, p. 13).

Their second and third generations are already naturalized. Most of them got well-established and contributed to the culture of the new homeland (Nishnianidze, 2008, p. 572). By the 1960s immigrants of both waves became notable intellectual force. Following some of the prestigious professions they entered the high level of the society. Though their success contributed to the popularization of the Georgian culture, their number was not big enough.

The most weighty number of Georgians arrived in the U.S. with the third wave. This is the period after regaining the independence of Georgia in 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century. Besides open border, the severe political, social and economic conditions of the country became the causes of the most substantial wave of emigration in the history of Georgia. The only official primary source about Georgian immigrants in the U.S., is the annual statistics of the Commerce Department, the U.S. Economics and Statistics Administration (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2000, p. 10).

Between 1991-1998 the number of Georgian immigrants who received U.S. citizenship, was 1834, in 1997-425, in 1997-425, in 1998-100.

The numbers are pretty compared to the immigrant numbers from South America and Asia. According to the statistics of recent years, the numbers has dropped, due to the lack of the numbers of illegal immigrants, who arrive in the U.S. for different reasons (studies, seasonal or temporary jobs, private

or official visas, exchange programs, etc. (Huntington, 2008, p. 182) .

Instead of smooth assimilation process, individual immigrant group naturalization, integration with the dominant ethnoculture in dynamic and diverse and entails mainly political, as well as socio-economic and cultural changes: We should be careful with negative stereotyping of cultures and accept their differences, moreover we have to be aware of differences within a culture, and of personal peculiarities and preferences.

According Gary R. Weaver differences between mainstream Americans and ethnic groups are culturally based more than politically or economically and influx discrepancy (Gary R. Weaver, 1998, p. 359). To my mind it differs according the degree of traditional differences between them the degree of group socio-economic needs, or strive for the political power. So each group demonstrates different dimensions and inclinations towards integration.

The new assimilationist approach is introduced by Richard Alba and Victor Nee proposing a complex vision of assimilation, one led by individual choice, not Anglo-American forced conformity (Alba & Nee, 2003, p. 11).

To me common cultural heritage on the one hand and socio-economic needs predestine the degree and specificities of integration. Here, we shouldn't forget about the negative stereotyping, or ignoring differences. Real and relevant differences exist, not only between the cultures, but differences within a culture and of personal idiosyncrasies and preferences.

The dominant American culture sees public praise as the best reward for a job well done. But in some cultures, where the emphasis is on group harmony and integrity, selecting someone would menace the group and cause individual to loose the face. This could happen to Native Americans, or Hispanics, however some representatives of those cultures might be frustrated if not praised publicly, whereas a California girl might prefer private recognition, who may happen to be shy. In addition to discussing cultural differences, the opposite may happen, when someone from a minority group displays behavior common to many cultures but is negatively scrutinized by his/her own cultural representatives transnationally. I had a Nigerian student, who lived in the U.S. for some time undergoing educational programs. Upon arrival to his country he revealed western traits, he was treated with skepticism and refused to offer a job in a company, appropriate to his educational level.

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