Chapter 8

Whither Ethnic America? Assimilation into American Life

THE MASSIVE FLOW of immigrants after the 1840s bewildered old-stock Americans. They could not agree on how newcomers could best be absorbed into the mainstream of American life. Proponents of the melting pot had one theory, Americanizers had another, and advocates of pluralism had yet a third point of view. Americans eventually agreed on one thing: immigration had to be controlled both in social composition and in numbers. Although they were willing to allow more immigrants after World War II and do away with the national origins systems in 1965, general restrictions remained.

But what of the immigrants themselves? Did they and their descendants maintain separate subcultures, blend with old Americans to form a new type, or assimilate into the larger society? As we have seen, people who arrived in the colonial era eventually lost their distinct national heritages and became part of the common American culture. There were exceptions, of course, such as the Amish, who still live apart from the rest of society in their religious communities. But the Amish number only about 130,000 today. Little remains of the original Scots-Irish, Welsh, German, or Huguenot societies of early America. Immigrants coming in large numbers between 1840 and 1890 from northern and western Europe have largely assimilated. Immigrants coming after 1880 and now producing a fourth generation have assimilated, although some Jews, Italians, Poles, Chinese, Japanese, and others still retain aspects of their traditional heritages. In fact, in the wake of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, there was a renewal of ethnic self-consciousness, which was subsequently reinforced by waves of immigrant Italians, Irish, Greeks, Portuguese, Croatians, and Russian Jews from Europe; Hispanics from the Western Hemisphere; and Asians. The most recent newcomers are of course still largely unassimilated. The U.S. Supreme Court's 1974 ruling in *Lau v. Nichols*, which requires public schools to teach children in a language that they can understand, may inhibit the pace of future assimilation—or, paradoxically, it may hasten change by educating those who had been turned off by English-only schools. Bilingualism remains one of the most hotly debated topics about ethnicity in the 1990s, and it is not clear whether it has hindered or helped the process of assimilation.

Over the years, for some groups external events have forced wrenching and radical change. German Americans, for example, opposed American involvement on the side of the Allied powers against Germany after World War I broke out in Europe in 1914. When the United States finally entered the conflagration on the Allied side in 1917, German Americans were torn. Issues were not clear-cut in spite of the shrill cries about German militarism, stories of atrocities, and alleged threats to American interests. Moreover, when the United States entered the war against Germany, German Americans were faced with the reality of fighting a nation in which many of their relatives and friends lived. Despite the acute agony caused by their situation, German American soldiers fought as valorously as other Americans.

Yet American entry into the war forced all dissidents into an untenable position. The slightest indication of doubt or disagreement about the righteousness of the cause led to accusations of disloyalty and traitorous behavior. Superpatriots were especially critical of German Americans, the Irish, pacifists, and radicals. Some German Americans and some radicals, such as Socialist Party leader Eugene Debs, continued to oppose the war once the United States joined in. Two sons of a prominent German Philadelphia brewing family, Erwin R. and Grover Cleveland Bergdoll, refused to serve in the military because "we do not fight our own kind." One of the two was apprehended and sentenced to a federal prison; the other fled to Germany. Upon his return to the United States he too was imprisoned.

After the war some German Americans were bitter, but most accepted the outcome. When Hitler's armies marched in the 1930s, few German Americans had supported them. American Nazi organizations in the 1930s, with small memberships, had a few German immigrant members, but second and third generations turned their backs on Nazism. Antiwar sentiments were voiced in German areas of the Midwest in the 1930s, but when World War II came, descendants of German immigrants supported the United States without reservation. About 30 percent of American soldiers fighting in Western Europe in 1944–1945 were German in origin.

The American Irish were also reluctant belligerents during World War I. Why, Irish American leaders asked, should the Irish fight on the side of Great Britain when she had refused to free Ireland? It was a valid question, especially for President Woodrow Wilson, who professed to make the war a crusade for democracy and the self-determination of nations. But the answer was relatively simple: as in the past, soldiers fought for their own country no matter what their personal preferences might be. Only a handful of Irish in America resisted the war effort, although others grumbled about Allied powers. The omission of Irish independence from the peace treaty irked the Irish

and caused some to desert the Democratic Party; but this was a political matter, hardly an issue of citizenship or disloyalty. Ireland achieved independence in 1922. Thus the Irish question was largely dead by World War II, although some Irish were not overly sympathetic to Great Britain at any time.

The crisis for Italian Americans, a newer immigrant group, came later. They had reservations about American foreign policy during the 1930s because of the growing friction between the United States and Italy. During the 1920s and 1930s, many of them, as well as many other Americans, admired Mussolini, but some bitterly opposed him and the advent of fascism in Italy. The difficulty for antifascists was that they seemed to be "un-Italian" if they attacked *Il Duce*. An Italian American said: "Whatever you fellows may think of Mussolini, you've got to admit one thing: he has done more to get respect for the Italian people than anybody else. The Italians get a lot more respect now than when I started going to school. And you can thank Mussolini for that." The Italian attack on Ethiopia in 1935 aggravated divisions. Some Italian Americans turned away from the Democratic Party of Franklin Roosevelt because he condemned Italy's actions, as some of the Irish had done when another Democratic president, Woodrow Wilson, did not insist on Irish independence.

The menace of fascism and the coming of the war in Europe doomed such sentiment, however. Although some Italian Americans were uneasy about going to war against Italy, they supported the United States once it was involved. Owners of bars that had pictures of Mussolini hanging quickly took them down and put up portraits of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Even those segments of the Italian American press that had praised Mussolini and fascism in Italy proclaimed their loyalty to America, and Columbus Day celebrations became rallies to support the war and buy government war bonds. A half million Italian Americans served in the military during the war. To be sure, some in the federal government distrusted the Italy-born generation, which numbered about 600,000, and they were put under travel restrictions. These were lifted on Columbus Day, 1942. Ten thousand German, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian, and Czech aliens were interned, along with several hundred Italian immigrants, even though there was no evidence that Italians were connected with espionage and sabotage.

The most excruciating test of loyalty faced by an ethnic group was that of Japanese Americans during World War II, discussed in chapter 4. When the government interned West Coast Japanese in 1942, it did not distinguish between those who were citizens (*Nisei*) and their parents (*Issei*), who were born in Japan and ineligible for American citizenship. At first the army re-

fused to draft Nisei and did not allow them to enlist. The government insisted upon testing their patriotism further by making them answer a series of questions. The camp experience and the questionnaire divided many; a few Japanese were classified as disloyal to the United States and segregated at the Tule Lake, California center. Several thousand of the "disloyal" asked to be returned to Japan after the war, and some even renounced their American citizenship. Yet it was the familiar story. Most of the 110,000 interned Japanese Americans professed their allegiance to the United States, and when given the opportunity, the Nisei joined the army. About 33,000 Japanese Americans served, roughly half from the Hawaiian Islands and half from the mainland.

Japanese Americans fighting during World War II as members of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team became the most highly decorated soldiers of the war. In addition to thousands of medals for heroism, they received 9,486 Purple Hearts for their battle wounds. In the 1980s some of the unit's veterans wanted more recognition for their service. The president of the unit's veterans' association told the *Los Angeles Times* in 1986, "Our mission today is to get our story retold. . . . We don't want our children and our grandchildren, or the rest of the world to forget what we fought for." Another veteran summed up the unit's patriotism, "All we've ever wanted is for people to know that we are Americans first and foremost and nothing else."

Since World War II there have been no major wars to divide ethnic attachments in America. Groups like the Irish and Italians have strong loyalties to Eire or Italy, but most of the immigrants' descendants have become too thoroughly Americanized to be as troubled as their forebears were during World War I. (The exception of the Jews and Israel will be discussed later.)

The longer groups have lived in the United States, the more they have relinquished their Old World cultures. Immigrants retained their native languages or became bilingual. Their children and grandchildren gradually lost the old languages and spoke only English. Typically, when the government searched among second-generation Japanese Americans in the camps during World War II for possible interpreters, it found that not many Nisei could speak and understand Japanese well, and fewer still could read and write it. In 1974 a middle-aged Czech woman had this to say about a declining Czech community in New Jersey.

> The old Czechs are dying and moving away. Our parents are the ones who were very active. The people of my age still had their parents around. They remember the customs, and that is something you can't forget. But you can't pass memories on to your children. The younger generation marry people who are not Czech and don't keep up the lan-

guage with their children. I go to see a friend of mine who's 83, and I talk Czech with her. If I didn't I'd forget the language.

Institutions depending on foreign languages began to disappear as the immigrants' descendants could not use them. The German-language press was thriving on the eve of World War I and was the most important of the foreign-language presses, accounting for about 40 percent of their circulation. The war shattered the German-language press and hurt the standing of the language generally; it was driven off the newsstands and out of the schools. In 1910 there were 70 German dailies in America; in 1960 only 6 remained. Other major foreign-language newspapers also declined, especially Yiddish, Italian, and Scandinavian ones. Italian dailies decreased in number from 12 earlier in the century to 5 in 1960; French dailies decreased in number from 9 to 1 during the same period. From a high of 142 daily newspapers in 1910, the foreign-language press has less than half that quantity today, and the number and circulation of weeklies have also dropped. A 1940 census counted 1,092 ethnic periodicals in 39 languages; the 1996 *Editor and Publisher Yearbook* counted fewer than 500, and many of these were read by the post-World War II newcomers.

The changes in one of the most famous foreign-language papers illustrate the decline. In 1997 the *Jewish Forward* observed its hundredth birthday. At its peak in the 1920s this Yiddish daily newspaper had a circulation of 250,000. By the time its centennial came, it was a weekly of only 40,000, published in three languages. The Yiddish edition numbered 10,000 and catered mainly to an elderly audience. The Russian edition printed 4,000 copies. But the largest, the English edition, begun in 1990, had a circulation of 25,000.

The new immigrants from Asia, Europe, and Latin America began to publish new foreign-language newspapers to serve their growing populations. Hence Korean newspapers appeared in Los Angeles and circulation of Spanish newspapers increased greatly as the Mexican American population of that city grew. In New York City, no fewer than four Chinese and three Spanish daily newspapers were being published after 1990. No doubt if the present immigration trends continue, new foreign-language papers will appear, and some of the older ones catering to the latest newcomers will expand. But in general, the older foreign-language press is on a steep decline in this country.

The loss of Old World culture can also be seen in the declining use of foreign languages in one of the most important immigrant institutions, the church. The Danish Lutheran churches are a case in point. As the young learned English, churches began to abandon Danish, first in the Sunday

schools in the 1920s, then in youth work, and finally in the services a decade later. Most of the books and periodicals published by Danish Lutherans in the late nineteenth century were in Danish, and as late as 1940 the annual reports for the United Evangelical Lutheran Church were about half in Danish, but the use of the language was discontinued after that.

The decline of foreign languages in churches was indicative of the growing Americanization and loss of ethnicity in American religion in the twentieth century. Lutheranism, which was originally divided mainly along ethnic or nationality lines such as Swedish, Danish, German, and Norwegian, is a good example of this process. In 1967 the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, of Danish background, merged with two other synods, one German and the other Norwegian in origin, and became the American Lutheran Church. Two years later another Danish Lutheran church, the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, joined with German, Swedish, and Finnish synods to become the Lutheran Church in America. These various Lutheran groups were no longer using their old languages or recruiting ministers from the Old World, and since they already were cooperating in religious activities, they reached the inevitable conclusion: merge into an American Lutheranism. Mergers went a step further in 1987 when the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America joined with the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, originally of German origin, to become the 5.3 million-member Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The same Americanization process happened in Catholicism. In the late nineteenth century a burning issue in American Catholicism was the nationality parish supported ardently by, among others, German, French Canadian, and Polish Catholics. The Church disapproved of nationality parishes in principle although it continued to allow them in practice. In the twentieth century, however, the nationality issue gradually became less important and so did the issue of national parishes.

The Germans illustrate this change. In the 1890s German Catholics were most insistent upon having their own priests and organizations and fostered the slogan "Language Saves Faith." The largest of these organizations was the *Central Verein*, founded in 1855. It reached a peak membership of 125,000 on the eve of World War I and was especially strong in New York, Pennsylvania, and the Midwest. Second-generation German Catholics, however, were already losing interest in an ethnic church when the war began. Twenty-three German Catholic publications were discontinued between 1917 and 1923; and in those that remained, English became prevalent during the 1920s. Membership in the Central Verein declined to 86,000 in 1930 and less than half that a decade later. The journal of the Verein, *Central Blatt and Social Justice*, printed more of its material in English (it discontinued

German sections entirely in 1946) and changed its name to *Social Justice* in 1940 but continued to lose readers; by the late 1960s, circulation barely reached 2,000.

As churches lost their national identities, so too did many of the other immigrant organizations. Social clubs, benefit societies, welfare organizations, and the like lost much of their membership and vitality as old immigrant neighborhoods decayed. They are strongest today among Poles and Italians. The largest of the nationality organizations was the *Deutsch-Amerikanische National Bund* or National German American Alliance, which was organized in 1901 to promote German culture in America and the political interests of German Americans. At its peak before World War I it claimed a membership of about two million. In addition to promoting German language and culture, it was an agent of assimilation, for it urged German immigrants to become citizens and insisted its primary loyalty was to the United States, not Germany. The Alliance opposed American entry on the side of England in World War I, came under attack during the war, and had to disband in 1918. It was not only the war that killed it, however. Third-generation German Americans were not as interested in German culture as their parents and grandparents had been. In common with members of other minority groups they were moving out of ethnic neighborhoods, especially after World War I, and joining assimilationist organizations. Another example of organizational decline is the fate of Japanese American groups which, without substantial immigration, were losing membership in the 1990s. The major support unit for the Nisei was the Japanese American Citizens League. It played an important role in winning an apology from the United States government for the internment camps of World War II and a small monetary compensation for those interned. But in 1995 the League claimed only 25,000 members, mostly elderly, down from 31,719 in 1977.

Parents attempted to maintain old ways by sending their children to ethnic or religious schools. This was true of Scandinavians, Germans, East European Jews, Greeks, and Chinese. Yet many of these schools have gradually dropped language teaching and have had difficulty attracting students. During the school crises of the 1960s and early 1970s, many parents removed their children from public schools to prevent racial integration, and as a result enrollments in some ethnic schools—Jewish day schools, for example—rose. These schools continue to thrive; however, the main reason for their growth is a commitment on the part of the children's parents to revive traditional values and commit themselves to perpetuating Jewish heritage.

The largest parochial school system in the United States is run by the Catholic Church. Only a minority of Catholics attend these institutions despite the growth spurt in the 1950s and early 1960s. Financial troubles have

beset parochial schools, however, and since the late 1960s a number have had to close. Those remaining in cities often cater to new immigrants and African Americans, some of whom are not Catholic.

As the descendants of immigrants improved their incomes, jobs, and education, they moved to new neighborhoods in cities and to mushrooming suburbs. There they absorbed the values of the mass culture preached by the media and in the schools and came into social contact with a broad range of other people. These contacts led to intermarriage among nationality and religious groups. The importance of this cannot be overstated. The family is the primary social unit in our society, and as families mix, so do other institutions. In other words, intermarriage is the ultimate form of assimilation.

For the first generation, on the contrary, marriage outside the ethnic group was rare. Many of the immigrants, who were disproportionately male, even returned to the motherland to find spouses. Marriage within the group provided security and acceptance; outside of it, disgrace and ostracism. When the children of orthodox Jews chose Gentile mates, for example, their parents sometimes mourned their children as though they had died. Roman Catholics were considered to be living in sin when they chose Protestant spouses and married outside the Catholic Church. Many states barred Asians from marrying Caucasians. When individuals ventured outside their nationality groups, they usually stayed within the same religious group, so that Irish Catholics married English or German Catholics (but rarely Italian Catholics) and German Jews married East European Jews.

Data on intermarriage is not plentiful, but studies indicate that rates of intermarriage have increased. One important analysis of trends in New Haven, Connecticut, from 1870 to 1940 revealed that 91 percent married within the nationality group in 1870, 65 percent in 1930, and 63 percent in 1940. Thus the investigator found a decreasing tendency to marry within national groups but still a high tendency to marry within religions; in effect, national background faded while religion remained important. Eighty percent of Protestants, 84 percent of Catholics, and 94 percent of Jews married within their respective faiths in 1940. The author drew the conclusion that instead of a single melting pot developing in American society, there was a triple melting pot—Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish groups—and intermarriage occurred within these religious groups. Other scholars confirmed this as the direction of assimilation in America.

More recent data suggests that the triple-melting-pot thesis is outdated. In Iowa, the only state that kept religious records in the 1950s, over 40 percent of Jewish marriages were interfaith. A study of Jewish marriages in Washington, D.C. in the 1960s indicated that only one percent of the first, 10 percent of the second, and 18 percent of the third generation married Gentiles.

Alarmed by the growing rate of outmarriages among Jews, the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds conducted a national survey of the period 1966–1972. Findings indicated that 31 percent of all Jews who married during that period chose non-Jewish mates. In the middle of the 1980s rabbis estimated that perhaps 20 to 35 percent of Jews in the East, but well over 50 percent of those in parts of the West, were doing so. And in the 1990s some estimated that the interfaith marriage rate in cities like Phoenix and Denver exceeded 70 percent. Sectional discrepancies may be accounted for by noting that in more traditional and heavily populated areas, Jewish roots ran deep, there were greater opportunities to meet others of a similar background, and perhaps family and community pressures existed, while in the western cities many Jews were newcomers with fewer ties to tradition or to coreligionists.

The Jewish outmarriage rate causes considerable alarm among those Jews who worry about "continuity"—the current buzzword. Even though there has been a resurgence of Orthodoxy among Jews since the early 1970s, the Orthodox constitute less than 10 percent of the Jewish population. In 1974 Atlanta rabbis organized Jewish Compu-Date, a computer dating service for the city's widely dispersed Jewish singles. One rabbi explained its purpose: "We started Compu-Date . . . to preserve Judaism and our heritage; it is important that Jews meet and marry one another." In 1995 the Connecticut *Jewish Ledger* announced that it would continue its practice of not mentioning Jewish-non-Jewish marriages in its pages.

Among Catholics in the 1960s about one in three married someone raised as a non-Catholic. Irish and Germans were more apt to marry outside their nationality and religious group than French Canadians, Poles, or Italians. Only about 40 percent of Irish and Germans married other Irish or Germans during the 1960s, while the rate for Italians, Poles, and French Canadians was about 60 percent. Among the newest Catholic Americans from Mexico and Puerto Rico, early studies indicate little intermarriage with non-Catholics. Data for recent decades, though, show an uptrend.

Recognizing this increase, the Roman Catholic Church modified some of its teachings in the mid-1960s. No longer were those who married outside the faith excommunicated. Non-Catholic clergy were also permitted to be present at ceremonies involving interfaith marriages and to give blessings after the exchanges of vows. In 1973 an Eastern Rite Catholic professor of religious studies and pastor of a Ukrainian Catholic church gave a statement more sympathetic to the drift of public opinion: "The danger from increasing interfaith marriages is not that Catholics will join some other churches or religions—which would not be bad at all—but that they will become indifferent and estranged from religion in general."

Among Protestants, despite variations, the trend has also been toward increased incidence and acceptance of intermarriage. Among Scandinavians, for example, the Swedes, like others, originally opposed marriage outside the group but were more inclined to them than the Norwegians. Most of the outmarriages among Swedes occurred first with other Scandinavians or with Germans, but those of the fourth generation have chosen partners from a wide assortment of faiths and nationalities.

Mixed marriages among those of Asian and European ancestries have also been common, especially marriages between Europeans and Japanese Americans. But first the law had to change. States began to abolish bans on interracial marriages during the 1950s and 1960s, and in the Supreme Court decision in *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), the justices declared that such bans were unconstitutional. In the 1990s most Japanese American women married non-Japanese partners. How the children of such marriages will identify themselves is not clear. In 1993 one young boy put it, "I'm half Italian, half Japanese and all American." His mother was born in Italy, the niece of a monsignor in the Roman Catholic Church, and his father was born in Japan of a Buddhist family. Similar trends are taking place among other Asians and Latino Americans. But there is a crucial difference. The constant stream of new immigrants reinforces existing communities even as assimilation happens.

The twentieth-century development of a public school system has been another key factor in breaking down ethnicity. Immigrants' descendants were, and are, being instructed in Anglo-American values. After World War II most Americans attended, and roughly three quarters graduated from, the nation's high schools. In the post-World War II era colleges and universities expanded rapidly, and by the 1990s nearly half the college-age population could be found in institutions of higher learning. If elementary and high schools are often homogeneous, institutions of higher education are less so and expose students to diverse ideologies and ethnic strains. Away from the watchful eyes of parents, youth seem more willing to learn about different people. No wonder ethnic leaders are concerned about intermarriage on college campuses!

Along with the expansion of education came the development of mass media in American culture. The printed word was important before World War I in the form of newspapers and journals, but after 1920 came radio and movies and then, after World War II, television. Of course, many minorities operated presses and ran radio and TV stations, but they could not compete with the dominant corporations. Major networks had huge advertising budgets, and national programs beamed identical messages into most American homes. Regardless of ethnic background, children are exposed to this mass culture of nationally available products, common heroes, and similar values.

By and large, descendants of immigrants have absorbed this common culture. The core values of American society—like beliefs in success and individual achievement—have been accepted. National standards in dress and taste have also been observed. Musicians, movie stars, and athletes are almost universally acknowledged heroes and models. Even certain observances of religious holidays are becoming part of the national culture. In New York City, for example, public schools and many businesses close on some Jewish holidays, not just on Christmas Day. This is true in other cities as well. And on the holiest days of the Jewish New Year, stock markets throughout the world have fewer trades than on other business days.

Well-educated members of mobile ethnic groups tend to lose their ethnicity. Business and professional people, especially the more highly educated, have joined organizations with mixed memberships. Upward mobility has also been accompanied by horizontal mobility, with large numbers of descendants of immigrants moving out of old neighborhoods and into the growing suburbs. In suburbia, where social divisions commonly follow class and racial lines, it has been more difficult to maintain ethnicity. Common interests, such as education and zoning, bring people together.

One minority, the Franco-Americans, long known for retention of their culture, illustrates many of the pressures for assimilation. As noted, French Canadian communities in New England since the nineteenth century have been kept vital by sustained migration and contact with Canada. In recent decades that migration has decreased. But as long as French Canadians lived and worked in textile and shoe factories in isolated New England towns, they could easily maintain the values of family, church, and local community. Since 1960, as they have moved from mills to better-paying jobs in service industries, their attachment to the old culture has lessened. English has been a necessity in these new jobs and French strictly a secondary language.

The religious revival that was said to have followed World War II, especially in the suburbs, was in part an attempt to create a bulwark of security and ethnicity in new surroundings. Church suppers and youth programs provided social entry for families until they could put down new roots. But also important was the development of contacts among religious groups. This led to increased toleration, which in turn opened new paths for social mobility and assimilation. Moreover, modern Judaism, Protestantism, and Catholicism have grown together ritually and theologically, thus further reducing differences and conflicts. The modernization movement, especially in American Catholicism, brought changes in practices and beliefs, and a decline in church attendance after 1970. In 1978, with polls revealing that 80 percent of Roman Catholics approved of intermarriages with Protestants, it was not surprising to find that liberal beliefs about controversial matters such as birth control

and abortion were shared by Catholics, Protestants, and Jews of the same social and economic backgrounds. At the same time, however, Roman Catholics were still prominent in groups opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment and to women's right to choose abortion. There they were joined by conservative Protestants and Orthodox Jews.

In the late 1960s, just when European minorities seemed well on the way toward assimilation, ethnicity became chic in American life and politics. Whereas folk customs and costumes used to be an embarrassment to ethnic children, except on festival days, suddenly there were cries for ethnic studies programs on college campuses, proclamations of ethnic heritage days in cities, formations of new ethnic organizations, and political assertions that the melting pot would and should not work. Michael Novak, author of *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* (1972), national columnist, and editor of several newsletters devoted to ethnic affairs, was a particularly eloquent spokesman for the descendants of southern and eastern European Catholic immigrants; so too was Roman Catholic priest, novelist, and sociologist Andrew Greeley.

Many communities and colleges responded with special events and programs. Czechs in Nebraska started the tradition of a two-day Czech festival in Wilbur every August. A Sheridan, Wyoming radio station began airing a weekly two-hour "Polka Party" to honor the Polish heritage of many of its residents; this reputedly became one of the station's most popular shows. A host of people from Wisconsin's "Little Norway" began putting on an annual production of *Song of Norway*, a former Broadway musical based on the works of Edvard Grieg. In 1975 it was done in Norwegian for members of the State Historical Society meeting in Oshkosh. The performers took pride in the fact that they had memorized all the foreign words for the show. In Kearney, New Jersey, which began to attract many Scottish workers in the late nineteenth century, town residents celebrated Scottish poet Robert Burns's birthday for one week each year.

College campuses around the nation also developed ethnic programs, among them Puerto Rican studies, Jewish studies, African American studies, Basque studies, and Mexican American studies. At Louisiana State University the foreign language department introduced a new course in the Cajun language. The Louisiana Cajuns, descendants of several thousand Acadians who came to southern Louisiana from Canada in the 1750s, had traditionally maintained their French-derivative language and culture by the spoken word; now they have not only a course but also a textbook, first published in 1977.

Not to be outdone by communities and campuses, politicians, who have usually been aware of ethnic differences only when counting votes, began to take notice. In 1972 the U.S. Congress, as part of the Elementary and Sec-

ondary Education Act, established and allocated funds for an Ethnic Heritage Program and a National Advisory Council on Ethnic Heritage Studies.To some degree, politicians responded in this fashion because of the renewed assertiveness of individual ethnics who found the spirit of the times conducive to new crusades. Meir Kahane's Jewish Defense League (1968), although representing only a small minority of Jews, made headlines because of its demonstrations. Kahane lashed out against assimilation and preached a militant brand of Jewish nationalism. Arrested for his activities in the United States, he went to Israel, where his militancy also brought him into confrontation with the law.

Some Italians also showed a renewed concern with ethnicity. Joseph Columbo's Italian American Civil Rights League, founded in 1970, countered alleged insults to Italian Americans and staged marches in New York City. Italian Americans vehemently protested the alleged prejudicial treatment that the media and law enforcement officials displayed. They resented, for example, television programs in which the underworld figure's name always ended with a vowel. They also railed against alleged discrimination by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which they claimed unfairly portrayed Italian Americans as criminals. During the summer of 1971, groups of Italian Americans paraded in front of FBI headquarters in New York City chanting

Hi-di-hi
Hi-di-ho
The FBI
Has got to go!

New manifestations of ethnicity were sharp reminders that Americanization was taking generations to achieve. Old groups like the Amish and new groups like the Hasidic Jews, who chose to remain in secluded enclaves, were at the far end of the spectrum of ethnicity in America. The Amish live as farmers, apart from other Americans. They do not allow carriers of modern culture, such as television or radios, in their homes, and their children drop out of school as soon as state laws permits them to do so. Unlike the Amish, Hasidic Jews of New York City, numbering 100,000 or so, are an urban group; they live close together in several neighborhoods. There they can control social activities and their children's education. They own their own stores, employing other Hasidic Jews, and sell computers, cameras, and a variety of electric appliances.

At the other end were older groups that had thoroughly blended into Anglo-American culture; in between stood the progeny of the millions who came after 1880. Descendants of these immigrants had lost much of the Old

World culture but still had some common bonds of religion, customs, political interest, and family and group life that held them together.

To understand ethnicity it is important to remember that each ethnic group brought with it a unique lifestyle. Roles of family members, expectations of spouses and children, and attitudes toward education and religion often determined how quickly and how well various minorities were absorbed into American society. Members of groups whose economic and educational aspirations were low, and who therefore lacked mobility, were least likely to be assimilated. Many Slavs, Italians, and Hispanics fell into this category. Unfortunately, for most people in the immigrant generation the promises of American life remained unfulfilled. Their offspring, though, did have greater opportunities. By the 1960s militant members of still-depressed minorities demanded that the benefits of American life become theirs—and quickly.

For this and other reasons there was a resurgence of ethnicity in the 1960s. The black civil rights and black nationalist movements emphasized a quest for identity, and some ethnic groups sought to emulate their pressure-group tactics. Mexican Americans, American Indians, and Italians were among the most prominent of the groups that demonstrated for greater opportunities and respect in American society. They did not feel part of WASP America, and they wanted both recognition and celebration of their own backgrounds. The editor of a Polish American weekly in New Jersey, for example, announced in 1970 the formation of I'm-Proud-to-Be-Polish clubs. Seven years later a Polish American woman marketed a Polish coloring book. About culture she said, "You have to start with the young. It can't be done later in life."

Social scientists are quick to remind us that ethnic voting behavior was and is important in American politics and often transcends class or regional lines. Politicians are clearly aware of ethnic trends in voting and regularly appear at the appropriate parades or events to eat pizza, bagels, or chop suey. Orville Freeman, who served as governor of Minnesota and then as Secretary of Agriculture during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, attributed his defeat for reelection as governor in 1960 to the fact that his grandfather had changed the family name from Johnson, a name that strikes a responsive chord among Scandinavians in Minnesota.

Ethnic politics is usually most intense at the city level, where political parties strive for ethnically balanced tickets. In New York City the three major elective posts—mayor, president of the city council, and comptroller—usually went to people of Irish, Italian, and Jewish backgrounds when their votes were most influential. An Irish name is no longer politically significant, and the city's Italians seem to have moved toward the Republican

and Conservative parties. Blacks, Asians, and Latinos are now the ethnic groups, besides the Jews, to whom New York City Democrats make appeals. In Buffalo a Polish name is an asset; in Milwaukee a German name is favored; and in parts of the Southwest a Hispanic name attracts votes. In Baltimore Barbara Mikulski, now a U.S. Senator, came to prominence in the 1960s as a spokeswoman for the Slavs of her city.

National political parties are also aware of the relationship between ethnic factors and voting. Democrats had a temporary nationalities division in 1936 and made it permanent in 1948. As blacks, Poles, Italians, and Jews became more important, the party courted their votes aggressively. John F. Kennedy brought Cleveland's Mayor Anthony Celebreze into his cabinet as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1962, and political pundits surmised that the president did so with one eye on the Italian vote. A year later the Democratic Party made its newly named All American Council a more elaborate organization.

The Republican Party responded more slowly to the new immigrant minorities, but in 1968 Richard Nixon made an attempt to capture votes from some of the white ethnic groups with promises and appeals to these people and appointments of their members to office. His final choice for a vice-presidential running mate was reputedly between John Volpe, of Italian background, and Spiro Agnew, of Greek ancestry. He chose Agnew, but placed Volpe in his cabinet as Secretary of Transportation. Republicans also set up a nationalities division under the direction of Laszlo Pasztor, a Hungarian freedom fighter from the 1956 uprising. In 1971 the division, now called the National Republican Heritage Groups (Nationalities) Council, became a permanent part of the Republican Party. Its goals were "to attract the more than 40 million Americans of ethnic background to all levels of GOP activity; and to formalize the already substantial support among ethnic Americans for President Nixon's domestic and foreign policies." In 1997 and 1998, alarmed by Latino leaders' accusations that Republicans were hostile to newcomers from south of the border, Republican leaders softened their attacks on immigrants.

The largest celebration of ethnicity occurred in the summer of 1986 when the Statue of Liberty was rededicated. Amid a huge extravaganza in New York City's harbor, the nation heard numerous speeches about the blessings of immigration. Politicians were quick to identify with the nation's immigrant history and to join with organizations giving out medals to representatives of America's many ethnic groups.

The ethnic revival movements seemed to appeal most to those who believed that intellectuals, the government, and white elite groups (usually of old stock) were giving favors to blacks at their expense. Such supporters did

not share in the bounties of upper middle-class America, but they had respect for the institutions of society and the traditional values of family solidarity, hard work, and patriotism. The inflation of ethnic awareness that began in the late 1960s aggravated their frustrations with ethnic as well as youthful protest groups of almost every variety, and they vented their anger against the most downtrodden minorities in society, especially Hispanics and blacks. They wanted politicians to be tough with criminals, demonstrators, and rioters. They were especially concerned about busing their children into different neighborhoods to promote integrated schools. The anti-integration movement sponsored by Alabama's Governor George Wallace's bid for the presidency in the 1960s appealed to this resentment, as did Frank Rizzo's law-and-order campaign for mayor of Philadelphia in 1971. Rizzo concentrated his efforts in white working-class neighborhoods. A police officer by occupation, he said that if elected he would not permit riots, marches, and demonstrations. He was elected, and his tenure in office was characterized by conflicts with Philadelphia's black population over affirmative action programs, charges of police brutality, and other racial issues.

After 1970 confrontations occurred not only in politics but also in the courts. Controversies arose over busing as well as quotas, affirmative action programs, and bilingualism, pitting white ethnic groups against blacks and Hispanics over jobs and coveted places in law and medical schools. The Bakke case in California in the late 1970s was one example. Alan Bakke, of Norwegian descent, sued for admission to University of California's medical school at the Davis campus on grounds that he had been denied admission even though he was more qualified than some blacks who had been admitted. His case, which he eventually won, was supported by some Jewish groups that had traditionally backed the civil rights movement. In 1980 Puerto Ricans and blacks found themselves opposed by Jewish, Italian, and Irish police—both men and women—in a court fight over hiring procedures in the New York City police department. In the 1990s in Texas several whites brought court cases against the state's law school alleging discrimination. California abolished its affirmative action program in higher education in 1996 and attempted to cut its bilingual programs in schools in 1998.

Not all ethnic political and legal fights were manifestations of white backlash. The Calumet Community Congress of Indiana, formed in 1970, tried to bring white ethnic groups and blacks together to deal with common problems. In Detroit, where many blacks and descendants of Poles lived, leaders of both groups organized the Black-Polish Conference in 1968 to work for their common interests. In 1971 the American Jewish Committee formed the National Project on Ethnic America to bridge the gap between whites and blacks. Its director said:

> We have a black problem and we have a white reaction to it. You can't solve the one without solving the other. Civil rights gains have been stalemated in many parts of the North and Midwest because the groups who are resisting have been left out. . . . The task is to push whites off a strictly negative anti-black agenda. We have to make them conscious of their own realities. A new breed of ethnic leaders has to be developed who are as visible as the demagogues trying to exploit ethnic fears.

It was not the black movement alone that heightened awareness of ethnicity. The question of values after the 1960s also raised issues. Many descendants of the post-1880 European immigrants had been ardent proponents of American nationalism as professions of their loyalty. They were especially hostile to the Soviet Union and its policies of oppression in eastern Europe. They were perplexed and confused by the war in Vietnam and the divisiveness that it prompted. Appeals to loyalty touched them and their conception of America, and when they came under attack, they were somewhat bitter about the privileges accorded sons and daughters of the affluent, such as exemption from the draft for college students. In the confusion of the 1960s they, like so many other Americans, looked for security and a source of identity, and many found it in ethnicity. Ethnic identity was an answer for much of the alienation of the times.

The persistence of prejudice also serves to reinforce ethnicity. Although ethnic and racial prejudice declined after the 1940s, it has not been eradicated and probably never will be. Perhaps the outstanding reminder is its strength in the WASP country clubs and social clubs, which continue to be the bastions of corporate and economic power. Although Jews, Japanese, and other minorities find opportunities practically equal elsewhere, they cannot gain access to some private clubs. In the late 1980s civil rights laws and court decisions begin to challenge the restrictions of private clubs. The existence of prejudice reflects the frustrations of the descendants of earlier immigrants who are unwilling to tolerate differences in others.

On occasion prejudice becomes blatant. In 1979, letters to "Dear Abby," a syndicated columnist in newspapers from coast to coast, ran 200:1 against admitting into this country the Asian boat people, who were adrift at sea. Three correspondents exhibited the vilest character and the most incredible misunderstanding. A West Virginian asked, "Are we going to let overbreeding Asiatics take over our country? We should help them only if they agreed to be sterilized!" A waiter from El Paso wrote, "Let the Chinese go where they can get raw fish, rice, ride bicycles, live 20 in a room and smoke opium!" An Indiana resident expressed the belief that the Vietnamese "are bringing more diseases with them than we have cures for. I think it's a Com-

munist plot to destroy this country!" These letter writers were especially vicious but not entirely unrepresentative of public opinion. Surveys indicated that most Americans were opposed to taking in refugees from Indochina. When Cubans began arriving in the spring of 1980, polls again revealed that substantial majorities of the population were opposed to letting them in. In May 1980 the Gallup organization reported that almost 35 percent of those questioned thought Cubans should be allowed to resettle in this country; 56 percent opposed the idea.

In 1980, reflecting a conservative and dangerous trend, both Republicans (in Michigan) and Democrats (in California) nominated avowed members of the Ku Klux Klan for seats in Congress. At the same time a right-wing group known as the Moral Majority claimed, without proof, that it had 60 million American followers. Its program called for the reintroduction of prayer in public schools, opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, and denial of women's individual rights to decide on abortion. The Moral Majority, which has evolved into the Christian Coalition in the 1990s, contends that the United States is a *Christian* country that should be run by and for those who professed fundamentalist Christian values.

The bigotry and self-righteousness of some Americans also help to explain why a number of ethnic Americans still show great concern over occurrences overseas. Some believe that events in this country might force them to find havens elsewhere. Thus the civil war in Ireland from 1969 to 1998 was followed by many Irish Americans. American Greeks keep their eye on this country's policies toward Greece and Turkey, and Arabs are often deeply involved with the troubles in the Middle East because many of them are refugees who fled the constant fighting and violence there. Lebanese especially have tried to keep ties to their ravished land. In addition, like other ethnic groups, Arab Americans are sensitive to how they are portrayed in the media and American culture generally. They objected to, among other things, a record album that included a song, "Killing an Arab." Because they are divided into Christians and Muslims and come from several Middle Eastern countries, Arab Americans sometimes have different views. As a result they have not been effective in marshaling public opinion to support their concerns.

Following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Helen Haje, the daughter of Lebanese immigrants, helped organize the National Association of Arab Americans to bring them together and to work with other groups to improve the image of her fellow ethnics. One of the groups she reached out to was the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, which labored to convince the American public that Arabs were being blamed for all violence in the Middle East.

The director of the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee stated in 1986, "It is a time of anti-Arab hysteria. Every time there is a terrorist attack any place in the world, we feel the repercussions in our neighborhoods."

After the Gulf War in 1991, about 25,000 Iraqi refugees came to the United States. They became alarmed at American threats to bomb Iraq in 1998. Many claimed that, although they had no sympathy for the Saddam Hussein regime, they could see no good in bombing their native land. Even the U.S. economic sanctions, which they claimed were hurting the people and not the present regime, were too harsh. The casualties of a bombing, one man insisted, "will only be the children of Iraq."

American Jews are no less interested in Middle Eastern affairs. The overwhelming majority have favored a friendly American policy toward Israel ever since that nation was created in 1948. The succession of conflicts between Arabs and Jews in the Middle East, such as the Suez adventure in 1956, the Six-Day War in 1967, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, and the Gulf War in 1991 involving Iraq drew lavish financial and moral support for Israelis from Jews throughout the world. The emotional tie of American Jews to all other Jews, which is strengthened by the memory of pogroms and of genocide in World War II, cannot be exaggerated. Most Jews share a deep conviction that Israel must survive and that all efforts must be made to ensure that survival. In addition to financial and moral support, therefore, American Jews have communicated their views to their political representatives in Washington. One significant foreign policy accomplishment, in fact, to which President Jimmy Carter pointed with pride in 1980, was the Camp David accords, in which the Israeli and Egyptian presidents agreed to terms that all three of them hoped would lead to peace in the Middle East. But that accomplished little more than cessation of Egyptian-Israeli hostilities. Then, in 1993, at Oslo, Norway, there were further agreements designed to promote a speedy peace in the Middle East. President Bill Clinton brought the leaders of the Israelis and Palestinians together in 1998 and forced them to negotiate additional concessions.

These issues keep ethnicity alive and blunt the pressures for complete Americanization and assimilation. But what of the future? Will religion remain important or will the nation become increasingly secular? Will national origins be the key issue? Will new Asian arrivals significantly affect the direction of our country in the twenty-first century? Will Hispanics add a distinctive Latin flavor to our culture? Will all newcomers follow the path of immigrants before them and blend into a uniquely American culture?

The agonies contemporary immigrants endure during the Americanization process were poignantly discussed in a 1987 article by Fakhruddin Ahmed, a

Rhodes Scholar from Bangladesh living in New York City. Movement into the mainstream of life in the United States, which took previous immigrant groups perhaps two or three generations, has been accelerated by American occupational, educational, and cultural activities. Ahmed pointed out how his career opportunities in this country kept his family in America and how dreams of returning home faded as the years passed. Unlike in his homeland, where parents decided the course of family action, in America

> The children will decide the issue. They will not like to hear about returning to an impoverished country. To the consternation of the parents, the children, who will not have experienced a second country, will start growing up like American kids. At school they may be subjected to blatant and subtle forms of racism. This they will try to counter by aiming to be superachievers.
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> Parents will tell the kids they should not forget their heritage, stressing, for example, that they should speak Bengali at home and that if they are born to a Moslem family they should pray five times a day and refrain from eating pork or sipping alcoholic drinks. To that the children, who will probably understand Bengali but not speak it, may respond: "Spanish would be more relevant to us!"
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> The coup de grace will usually be delivered by the adolescent daughter wanting to go out on a date. Parents will explain in great detail why it is not allowed in their culture and will insist that she meet, under strict supervision, only with Bangladeshi boys. Sometimes the girl will relent, on condition that it is a Bangladeshi boy born and brought up in the United States. More often, after her 18th birthday, the daughter will politely but firmly inform her parents that according to U.S. law they cannot interfere in her personal life and that, to avoid further conflict over the boyfriend, she is going to move in with him.
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> The parents will be devastated. Doubts and questions flood in. The decision to stay begins to haunt them.

Many other immigrant parents have similar experiences today, or have had them in the past, and wonder whether the opportunities in America have been worth sacrificing traditional cultures. American society always seems to be, or to have been, too powerful a magnet for most people born in this country to resist. Fortunately or unfortunately, the goals of today's most vocal minority groups coincide with the demands of a majority of other Americans. Those who favor the retention of an ethnic way of life must ask what they can offer that would retard their children's absorption into the mainstream of American society. The forces undermining ethnicity—suburbanization, mass education, social mobility, growing tolerance, and an

American culture—are strong determinants that no large group in the past has been able to withstand indefinitely. It does not appear likely, therefore, that any minority culture, except for small and dedicated groups like the Amish in Pennsylvania and the Hutterites in the western part of the Dakotas and eastern Montana, can sustain its own cultural heritage for more than three or four generations.