4

Assimilation

Historical Perspective
and Contemporary Reframing

The preceding section was concerned with *movement* across borders, exploring the development over time of increasingly complex accounts of the dynamics of migration and reviewing contemporary migratory flows with these accounts in mind. As noted earlier, this work has primarily been the focus of demographers and economic sociologists. This section is concerned with *settlement*. As will quickly become evident, the patterns or modes of settlement involve not only the immigrant generation, but also their generational offspring as well—the second and third generations and beyond. This section's three chapters represent an examination of what might be called the bread and butter of sociology from the earliest studies of immigration a century ago to the present, because it is clear that what sociology has been chiefly preoccupied with is a conceptual framework for explaining if and how new forms of inclusive solidarity manage to be achieved once immigrants establish roots in a new homeland. This is a remarkably contested field, far more so than the debates that preoccupy those concerned with accounting for immigration flows. At bedrock, the issue at stake concerns the dialectic between inclusion and exclusion.

Charles Taylor has pointed out that democratic societies are inclusive insofar as they promote popular sovereignty, but this paradoxically also contributes to exclusion. This is the case, he contends, because "of the need, in

self-governing societies, of a high degree of social cohesion. Democratic states need something like a common identity" (Taylor, 1998, p. 143). If current members define an outside group seeking entry as a threat to that common identity, they seek to effect closure rather than attempting to expand the bonds of solidarity. Groups can be excluded in a variety of ways, with such practices extending to three main groups: indigenous peoples, ethnonational minorities, and immigrants. In the case of immigrants, they can be denied entrance to a nation. If they are already present in the nation, they can be expelled. Or they can be allowed to remain, usually with the assumption that their presence is temporary, and that they are not in a position to acquire full societal membership. Moreover, they are not in a position to be involved in political decisions impacting their lives (Benhabib, 2008; Bosniak, 2006). The category of "guest workers"—a remarkable euphemism given that such migrants are permitted to enter a country solely because their labor is desired, but their presence in other respects is not valued—constitutes perhaps the best example of such border crossers.

Returning to the discussion in the preceding chapter about definitions, by some definitions guest workers would not be considered true immigrants since their intention is presumably not to settle permanently. While, as we've noted, such conclusions may be suspect insofar as they tend to convolute the intentions of movers with the state-defined terms of entry into a new nation, it is clear that being defined as temporary by the host society means that guest workers are not eligible to become fully integrated members of the society they have entered. A similar fate awaits undocumented migrants, who are forced to live their lives in the shadows, working and in many ways establishing stakes in the new society while also always being acutely aware of the fact that their legal circumstances make them both vulnerable and ineligible for full societal membership.

But what about those immigrants and their offspring who settle and sooner or later become included in some fashion into the new society? To begin to answer this question requires considering two underlying ones. First, what does inclusion mean, and second, how does inclusion occur? For much of the past century, inclusion was framed in terms of assimilation, a concept that took center stage in the work of Chicago School sociologists and continued as the hegemonic account of inclusion for a half century (Kivisto, 2005; Rumbaut, 1997). More recently, two concepts have emerged as challengers to assimilation: transnationalism and multiculturalism. This chapter takes up the history and recent reconsideration of assimilation, while Chapter 5 is devoted to exploring the development of transnationalist theory during the past two decades. Chapter 6 takes up the topic of multiculturalism, concluding with an attempt to tease out an account of inclusion

that views assimilation and multiculturalism as potentially connected rather than antithetical modes of incorporation.

To Be an Immigrant

What are the fundamental, recurring characteristics of the immigrant experience? This is a basic question sociologists of immigration have asked from the beginning of immigration research conducted by the members of the Chicago School up to the present. While the answers vary to some extent, there is a shared perspective that a movement beyond borders entails psychological, social, and cultural dislocations as one leaves the familiar and is forced to encounter that which is new, strange, sometimes enticing, and sometimes repugnant. This is clearly evident in what is generally regarded as the first major empirical research project on immigrant adjustment, W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918–1920). In their account, immigration is depicted as a three-stage process in which the organization that gave coherence to the lives of premigration individuals leads to disorganization brought about by the very act of migration. This, in turn, in the proper circumstances where the impediments are not too great, leads over time—and from the immigrant generation to the second and beyond— to reorganization as settlers and their offspring find ways to accommodate to and achieve incorporation into the new society. This is not a cost-free process, for disorganization entails psychological imbalances, cultural loss, and in many instances a variety of social problems.

Norbert Wiley (1986) points out that the authors of the book—a native-born American and an elite Polish émigré who was socially distant from peasant coethnics—were not always sympathetic to their subjects and moreover did not adequately connect their conceptual framework to their data (which consisted most significantly of a treasure trove of immigrant letters). Nonetheless, their emphasis on the difficulties typical immigrants were likely to encounter became the received wisdom for sociologists and historians for decades to come.

Nowhere was this more evident than in Harvard historian Oscar Handlin's Pulitzer Prize–winning book, *The Uprooted* (1951). Influenced by the Chicago School in general and the work of Thomas and Znaniecki in particular, he preferred to use the language of alienation and anomie, drawing upon the mass-society literature of the time (Gleason, 1983; Kivisto, 1990, p. 467). The book sought to offer an account of the ideal-typical peasant immigrant who arrived on America's shores during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Handlin contended that the sea change produced a

dramatic disjuncture in the consciousness of these immigrants as the world-view of the peasant village was challenged by the impersonal nexus of an urban/industrial society. A tradition-oriented, religious, deferential world-view rooted in the soil and in the intimate relationships of family and community underwent a rapid process of deracination. The immigrant generation was portrayed as living in but not of the new society; inclusion eluded it, as did the reorganization described by Thomas and Znaniecki. The process of assimilation that Handlin thought would unfold only did so as the second generation came of age.

This is a "dark view" of the immigration experience (Deaux, 2006, p. 11). As will be seen in the following paragraphs, such a view has been challenged in recent decades by social historians, sociologists, and social psychologists. However, it is worth noting that this position has not disappeared, though it is no longer linked to the Chicago School formulation or to the particularities of the U.S. context. Pointing to one exemplary case, the title of the late Algerian sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad says it all: *The Suffering of the Immigrant* (2004). Influenced by the theoretical orientation of Pierre Bourdieu, the book focuses on the painful transformation Algerian peasants have experienced since they began to enter France in large numbers after World War II. Sayad stresses the ambivalence of the immigrants' situation, captured well in the following passage:

> Torn between two "times," between two countries and between two conditions, an entire community lives as though it were "in transit." Being condemned to refer simultaneously to two societies, emigrants dream, without noticing the contradiction, of combining the incompatible advantages of two conflicting choices. At times, they idealize France and would like it to have, in addition to the advantages it gives them (a stable job, a wage, etc.), that other quality of being a "second" land of their birth—which would be enough to transfigure the relationship and to magically transform all the reasons for the dissatisfaction they experience in France. At other times, they idealize Algeria in their dreams after spending time there during their annual holidays. (Sayad, 2004, p. 58)

Neil Smelser (1998) describes ambivalence as an affective state characterized by simultaneously holding two opposed emotions toward an object: attraction and repulsion; love and hate. While it would be a mistake to claim that all immigrants react ambivalently to their homeland and their new place of residence, there is abundant evidence not only in the work of social historians and sociologists but also in fictional accounts of immigrant life, past and present, that ambivalence is a very common emotional reaction to migration. Borrowing from Albert Hirschman (1970), Smelser contends that

there are three responses to ambivalence: by exit (which stresses the negative side of ambivalence), loyalty (which represses the negative side), and voice (which seeks to steer a middle course between the positive and negative). These options are more complicated for immigrants given that they can feel ambivalent toward their place of origin, their destination, or both.

Elizabeth Aranda's (2007a, 2007b) research on contemporary Puerto Rican professionals who often move several times between the island and the mainland provides a telling example of the struggles involved in responding to ambivalence. That her subjects are not by our definition true immigrants since they are U.S. citizens is not relevant here; their ability to move freely back and forth offers a particularly telling instance of how difficult it can be for people attempting to sort out their emotional attachments and their prospects for reconfiguring a sense of belonging.

The consensus among scholars today is that immigrants deal with ambivalence with more resources than scholars such as Thomas and Znaniecki, Handlin, and Sayad took into account. This consensus, while recognizing the fact that immigrants frequently confront nativist hostility, economic exploitation, and political and cultural marginalization, contends that they nonetheless have generally managed to be agents of their own lives. In other words, they play an active role in the process of adjustment and becoming a part of their new homeland. John Bodnar's *The Transplanted* (1985) presents a synthesis of the work of social historians and historical sociologists dating from the 1960s forward. As the title of his book suggests, it is meant to be in part a critique of Handlin's ideal-typical portrait of an uprooted generation. While it is true that many immigrants opted for exit, returning to their origins (Wyman, 1993), and others sought to express their loyalty by rejecting their roots in an effort to fit in, the typical immigrant in Bodnar's account exhibited voice, seeking to negotiate the terms of incorporation predicated on a selective embrace of the host society's institutions and values, while picking and choosing which aspects of their cultural heritage to transplant and which to abandon. They did so, he argued, with a *mentalité* that he characterizes as pragmatic.

Two central features of his work serve to distance it from the earlier generation of immigration scholarship. First, while his predecessors tended to either ignore the macro context of migration or located it in terms of modernization theory, as noted in Chapter 2, Bodnar stresses the specific linkages between the rise of industrial capitalism and immigration. Second, he treats the negotiation process as a group endeavor and not an individual initiative. In so doing, he focuses on the ethnic community as both resource and agent. Although he didn't use the language of networks, the affiliations made possible by a complex of ethnic institutions and social relationships that made up ethnic communities was seen as playing a profound role in the precise

way that different groups ended up over time becoming incorporated into American society. The community served to buffer the difficulties immigrants inevitably encountered and, in so doing, assisted in the process of becoming members of the wider society—a phenomenon that Barbara Ballis Lal (1990, p. 96) has referred to as the "ethnicity paradox." What she meant by this term is that ethnic communities, rather than retarding incorporation, actually were important for making incorporation possible.

Social psychologist Kay Deaux's (2006) recent work reinforces Bodnar's stress on the negotiated character of immigrant behavior. Focusing on contemporary immigrants in the world's liberal democracies, she finds that the vast majority of immigrants do not seek to remain separate from the wider society. Indeed, the only exception she reports is that of Turks in Germany who prefer separation to incorporation. We would point out that there is abundant evidence that challenges the view of Turks in Germany as an exception to the general inclination to seek inclusion. Whether the immigrants call it integration or assimilation, the major conclusion to be drawn from her work is that voluntary labor migrants are prepared to some extent to be transformed in order to become part of the settlement society. That the preferred term, especially outside the United States, tends to be integration rather than assimilation is due to the fact that while the former is defined as permitting immigrants to maintain their cultural identity, assimilation is by many seen as entailing a loss of such identity (Deaux, 2006, pp. 60–61). Whether this is an accurate depiction of assimilation—in either its canonical formulation or current usage—will be addressed in the following paragraphs.

Of significance here is the fact that outcomes are dependent on several factors, including the obstacles to inclusion posed by the receiving society. Deaux pays particular attention to public opinion and the stereotypes and prejudices harbored by citizens toward newcomers. In addition, it is important to factor into the equation what immigrants bring to the table—motivations, skills, expectations, values, and needs—and what they encounter, which includes social networks, a particular opportunity structure, and a climate shaping interpersonal relationships. At the social psychological level, these factors serve to shape the varied ways immigrants negotiate their identity while at the level of social interaction they influence relationships with group members and with members of the wider society, which includes the sorts of collective action generated by the immigrant community.

A major lesson to be derived from both Bodnar and Deaux is that for most immigrants, being an immigrant means being prepared to be transformed. However, this seldom means that immigrants think that the transformation in question calls for a complete repudiation—a forgetting—of the preimmigration past. Rather, the process of becoming incorporated into the new setting

requires a sifting and choosing of which aspects of one's cultural background to preserve and which social ties to maintain. This is an inherently complex undertaking, made even more complex when immigrants must reckon with their ambivalent feelings about both their homeland and the land of settlement. Given the layers of complexity, it is not surprising that assimilation, transnationalism, and multiculturalism offer theoretical accounts of the incorporation of immigrants and their offspring that are highly contested.

The Return to Assimilation?

We turn to assimilation. The goal of the remainder of this chapter is first to offer a portrait of the so-called canonical view of assimilation. The purpose of this account is to achieve greater clarity about a concept that is often misunderstood. Second, we will examine the two most significant contemporary efforts to reframe assimilation theory, the idea of segmented assimilation developed by Alejandro Portes and associates (e.g., Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) and Richard Alba and Victor Nee's (2003) work on the redefining of the "American mainstream."

In the final decade of the 20th century—a decade that witnessed more newcomers arriving in the United States than at any point in its history—Richard Alba referred to the impact on the nation brought about by assimilation as a "quiet tide" and a "dirty little secret" (1995a, p. 3). What he was reflecting on was a growing realization that despite an aversion among many scholars to employ assimilation theory in accounting for immigrant incorporation, in fact, there was abundant evidence to suggest that assimilation was occurring. Within a decade, the secret was out in the open. Assimilation was once again a topic of interest within sociology and related disciplines. For example, this was evident in the title of an article appearing in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*: "Scholars Cook Up a New Melting Pot" (Glenn, 2004) as well as in the title of a collection of essays edited by Tamar Jacoby of the Manhattan Institute, *Reinventing the Melting Pot* (2004). Among the contributors to Jacoby's book are such prominent immigration scholars as, in addition to Alba, Herbert Gans, Nathan Glazer, Douglas Massey, Alejandro Portes, Stephen Steinberg, Stephan Thernstrom, Roger Waldinger, and Min Zhou. Nevertheless, considerable debate persists about what assimilation actually means and many scholars remain suspicious about assimilation, either for its presumed ideological biases or empirical inadequacies.

Clearly, any effort to make sense of the analytical utility of assimilation must be pursued first by recognizing the three incontrovertible facts about assimilation that we have just identified: (1) there is little consensus about

what we mean by the term; (2) it remains highly contentious; and (3) it continues to shape contemporary research agendas (e.g., Chiswick, Lee, & Miller, 2005; Waters & Jiménez, 2005). In the following pages, we will attempt to sketch out the historical trajectory of this concept. This will involve tracing the career of the concept beginning in the late 19th century and culminating in an effort to account for the return of assimilation among scholars of migration and ethnicity since the 1980s, despite confusion about what exactly it means and in spite of the controversies that surround it.

The Canonical Formulation of Assimilation Theory

Robert Park, in conjunction with key colleagues of his at the University of Chicago such as W. I. Thomas and Ernest Burgess, is generally and appropriately considered to be the sociologist most responsible for the canonical formulation of assimilation theory (Hirschman, 1983; Kazal, 1995; Kivisto, 2004; Lal, 1990; Lyman, 1972; Matthews, 1977; Persons, 1987; Rumbaut, 1999). However, there is less consensus about both what Park had in mind when he described assimilation and to what extent he merely presented a summary of prevailing views or developed an original position. His perspective has been portrayed by some as a theoretical articulation of the melting pot, as a synonym for Americanization, the final outcome of a "race relations cycle," and an expression of a "straight-line" process of incorporation (Gans, 1992a; Lyman, 1972; Portes, 1995). In these various interpretations, it has been assumed that his particular perspective on assimilation is incongruent with, if not antithetical to, cultural pluralism or its more recent parallel concept, multiculturalism (Gordon, 1964; Kivisto, 2002).

Park's Precursors

Earlier uses of assimilation as a sociological concept predate Park's contribution by three decades. The appearance of assimilation, both in popular usage and among social scientists, coincided with the beginning of a great migratory wave around 1880. Regarding the former, Rubén Rumbaut (2001, p. 845) cites an editorial in *The New York Times* from this era that expressed concern about the capacity of the nation to assimilate many of the new immigrants then arriving in the United States. Within the social sciences, the term was commonly used, though seldom explicitly defined. James McKee (1993, p. 122) contends that "assimilation became a central concept in sociology without prolonged debate and without much concern for any preciseness of definition." This is not entirely true insofar as in at least two

instances, sustained systematic attempts were made to both add clarity and to employ assimilation as a concept accounting for the processes associated with immigrant incorporation.

The earliest such effort was political economist Richmond Mayo-Smith's "Assimilation of Nationalities in the United States," which appeared in 1894 as a two-part installment in the *Political Science Quarterly*. According to Mayo-Smith, there were three primary forces promoting assimilation: intermarriage, physical environment, and social environment. He ignored the first factor due to a lack of adequate data, and thus did not examine the biological mixing of peoples, but rather focused on whether or not members of the varied ethnic groups in the United States were adapting to and embracing the customs, laws, and institutions of the nation, and thus were fusing culturally into an American nationality (Mayo-Smith, 1894, p. 431). Like Frederick Jackson Turner, he argued that with the passing of the frontier, the role of the physical environment receded, leaving the social environment as the primary factor promoting assimilation.

More specifically, Mayo-Smith (1894, pp. 652–669) identified two primary factors that contribute to assimilation: education and the exercise of citizenship rights. In this discussion, it is clear that assimilation is construed to be a one-way process wherein the newcomers transform themselves, but there is no reciprocal process affecting the members of the host society. His version of what Milton Gordon (1964) would seven decades later refer to as "Anglo-conformity" appeared to be the outcome of a relatively easy, seamless, and unidirectional process. Indeed, although he supported some form of immigration control, he was critical of those among his contemporaries who feared some of the new immigrants—whom they accused, among other things, of being prone to political radicalism and being responsible for rising crime rates—because he was confident that the social environment would serve as an antidote to these problems. Because of this, he assumed that assimilation was "natural and almost inevitable" (Mayo-Smith, 1894, p. 670). This conviction was predicated on the capacity of the nation to socialize newcomers into its folkways and mores and on the presumed willingness of immigrants to be so resocialized.

The second significant contribution to the early development of assimilation theory was Sarah Simons' five-part article on "Social Assimilation" that was published in the *American Journal of Sociology* during 1901 and 1902. It was a detailed, richly documented, and theoretically sophisticated essay that explored assimilation in world historical terms. Part of the rationale for the essay was to provide conceptual clarity to a term that was viewed as important for both sociological and historical research (Simons, 1901–1902, pp. 790–791). Simons defined assimilation as "that process of adjustment or

accommodation which occurs between the members of two different races, if their contact is prolonged and if the necessary psychic conditions are present," with the result being "group-homogeneity to a greater or less degree" (Simons 1901–1902, pp. 791–792).

Assimilation was construed to have both a social and a psychological dimension. Moreover, it was seen as having two aspects, the first of which entails an unconscious or unplanned social process that occurs in situations where sustained contact between groups exists. The second is a volitional aspect, and in this regard Simons (1901–1902, p. 793) is especially interested in "purposive assimilation" that is "directed by the state." Social contact is regarded as becoming more frequent and intense in modern societies as a result of improvements in transportation brought about by the railroad and steamship and in communications by such factors as the availability of mass-produced newspapers and the telegraph. Sounding like a precursor to contemporary globalization theorists, Simons wrote, in language that offers a remarkably prescient account of globalization akin to such contemporary accounts as those found in the work of Anthony Giddens and David Harvey, that developments in transport and communication technologies have resulted in "a system which does much toward annihilating the barriers of space and time" (Simons, 1901–1902, p. 800).

Simons (1901–1902, p. 803) treated assimilation as a reciprocal process, but she posed it in an unusual way insofar as she described those involved in the assimilation of others as constituting the active factor while those being assimilated were the passive factor. The attractive assimilation of modern societies relies primarily on education and the political and civic involvements of newcomers. They become incorporated largely due to imitation, and thus assimilation is reactive, or in her terms, passive. In the conclusion of her theoretical discussion, she contended that the creation of group homogeneity does not necessarily mean that all group differences are eliminated. While a universal civic culture is essential, which means a shared language and an embracing of democratic values, she asserted that "in personal matters of religion and habits of life, however, individuality shall be allowed free play" (Simons, 1901–1902, p. 821). While it is clear that Simons' view of assimilation is not the melting-pot variety, what is left unclear is the extent to which difference is a group or an individual phenomenon.

Park's Theory of Assimilation

It is in the context of these two predecessors that Park's distinctive contribution to assimilation theory needs to be understood. Although he used the term repeatedly in many of his publications, Park explicitly and in a sustained

way addressed assimilation as a topic in only three publications that span the course of his career at the University of Chicago. Two of these are very brief, including a section introduction to the textbook he coauthored with Ernest W. Burgess and an encyclopedia article (Park, 1930; Park & Burgess, 1969/1921). His earliest treatment, appearing in the Chicago flagship journal, the *American Journal of Sociology*, is clearly his most sustained and arguably his most original and theoretically sophisticated analysis of the topic (Park, 1914).

Before proceeding to summarize Park's argument in this seminal essay, an observation is in order. Contrary to a commonly held view that was advanced in particular by Stanford Lyman (1972, pp. 27–70), Park's theory of assimilation is not inextricably linked to the "race-relations cycle," which entails a four-stage teleological process that has groups moving slowly and gradually from contact to conflict, to accommodation, and culminating in assimilation. Park used the idea of a cycle in only two publications, and in only one did this process seem to be what he had in mind. In none of the previously noted articles explicitly concerned with assimilation does he mention the term. For this reason, it is reasonable to concur with Barbara Ballis Lal (1990, pp. 5, 41–42) that the race-relations cycle idea served only a minor role in Park's work and does not inform his conceptual discussions of assimilation.

In "Racial Assimilation in Secondary Groups With Particular Reference to the Negro" (1914), Park identified three objectives. First, he sought to clarify the significance of assimilation as a category of sociological analysis, implicitly distinguishing it from assimilation as a normative concept. Second, he articulated a theory that treated assimilation as a process. Third, he presented his understanding of the implications of racial impediments to assimilation. Park noted that two different meanings of assimilation coexist. The first is "to make like" and the second is "to take up and incorporate." Both represent societal processes. The former operates more or less spontaneously as individuals "acquire one another's language, characteristic attitudes, and modes of behavior." The latter is more volitional, involving the incorporation of both individuals and ethnic groups into "larger groups." In combination, these two processes are responsible for the construction of national identities in the modern world (Park, 1914, p. 606).

As with Durkheim, Park considered changes in the division of labor in society as creating a new structural matrix for social relations. He saw homogeneity as the predominant feature of the premodern world, while in modern societies, increasing heterogeneity among individuals becomes typical. In such societies, social solidarity no longer demanded the "consciousness of kind" characteristic of the past. Rather, the interdependencies made possible by the new economic order serve as a powerful basis for a new form

of solidarity characterized by the potential for considerable diversity. Because modern societies are able to accommodate to far greater levels of diversity, individuals are increasingly free to develop autonomously.

One of the ways they do so is by emancipating themselves from the constraints of parochial groups that constrain expressions of individualism. In place of such groups, individuals are inclined to become voluntary members of what Park (1914, p. 607) described as larger and more inclusive "cosmopolitan groups." What he had in mind appears to be connected to two insights of Simmel (1971/1911, pp. 252, 274): first, that increases in individualism coincide with the expansion of the "social circle encompassing the individual," and second, that individualism and a "cosmopolitan disposition" are intimately intertwined. Park (1914, pp. 607–608) made the following observation:

> What one actually finds in cosmopolitan groups, then, is a superficial uniformity, a homogeneity in manners and fashion, associated with relatively profound differences in individual opinions, sentiments, and beliefs. . . . So far as it makes each individual look like every other—no matter how different under the skin—homogeneity mobilizes the individual man. It removes the taboo, permits the individual to move in strange groups, and thus facilitates new and adventurous contacts.

Thus, assimilation is conceived to be a process wherein individual social horizons expand and, simultaneously, increasingly complex webs of social interaction and affiliation arise. In other words, although it might appear paradoxical, assimilation signals the proliferation of diversity. Rather than enforced conformity, it makes possible a greater degree of autonomy.

At the same time, Park described a relationship between assimilation and social solidarity by arguing that in societies characterized by mutual interdependence, sentiments and habits develop that encourage pragmatic working relationships. Assimilation understood in terms of such relations creates the precondition for a situation wherein "groups of individuals, originally indifferent or perhaps hostile, achieve the corporate character," by which he meant that social groups, including ethnic groups, can persist in exhibiting their collective distinctiveness due to the fact that they buy into an overarching national sensibility of live and let live—or in other words a cultural climate predicated on pluralism and toleration (Park, 1914, p. 610). Thus, contained in Park's formulation is an explanation for how cultural pluralism or multiculturalism can coexist with assimilation—though not the essentialist version of pluralism associated with Horace Kallen (1924) or the parallel essentialism evident in some strong multiculturalist theorizing.

As the title of the essay indicated, Park treated assimilation as a process relevant to all ethnic groups, and not only voluntary immigrants and their offspring. Indeed, here he specifically used the concept for an analysis of the situation of blacks in the United States, the only nonvoluntary migrant group in the nation. In this discussion, he identified what he considered to be the chief obstacle to incorporation, which was predicated on invidious comparisons made on the basis of external features such as skin color. The consequence of race prejudice is that the member of the marginalized group cannot be seen as an individual, but merely as a representation of the collectivity. This constitutes the social psychological underpinning of racial prejudice, for insofar as people are not capable of viewing the other as an individual, they are unable to establish patterns of interaction based on reciprocity and respect—a theme he returned to in 1926 in his essay "Behind Our Masks." Park (1914, p. 611) did not explore the causes or varied manifestations of prejudice, focusing instead on the interactional implications of the color line that separates the races.

In applying assimilation theory to blacks, Park claimed that assimilation, at some level, takes place even in a situation of intense prejudice. He was clear that the aspect of assimilation that "goes on silently and unconsciously" and results in the acquisition of the dominant culture's language, religion, and values was quite thoroughgoing (Park, 1914, p. 611). On the other hand, blacks had not assimilated structurally because they had been denied entrée to and membership in the secondary groups of the dominant society. The result was the emergence of a sense of group identity associated with the idea of racial pride, a phenomenon akin to the nationalist movements among Europe's "nations without states." In this regard, Park concluded his essay with an intriguing speculation about the prospect of a multiethnic state wherein nationality groups maintain their distinctive identities while at the same time being committed to the interests and ideals of the state, a situation that is possible only if the state is prepared to deal with the demands of the nationality group for redistribution of resources and recognition (Park, 1914, p. 623).

What Is the Canonical Formulation of Assimilation?

Mayo-Smith, Simons, and Park rejected the view that assimilation was a theoretical expression of the melting pot, or what Park and Burgess (1969/1921, p. 735) disparagingly referred to as the "magic crucible" version of assimilation that they associated with theories of "like-mindedness." All three emphasized the role of culture over biology, though only in Park can one detect a genuine break with biological determinism.

Park's position, in contrast to his predecessors, advances the theory of assimilation in significant ways. First, he understood migration to be a group phenomenon, and not merely an individual one. Second, he disagreed with the Anglo-conformity view of assimilation that was explicitly articulated in Mayo-Smith and was certainly a large part of what Simons had in mind. Third, Park granted agency to ethnics. Finally, he articulated his position in a manner that very consciously sought to divorce sociological analysis from moral preferences and ideology.

His is, to borrow Herbert Gans' (1992a) term, a "bumpy-line" version of assimilation, not as some commentators have assumed (including Gans), a "straight-line" approach. Assimilation is the product of interaction and thus has a reciprocal character, although Park understood that differences in group location and power and status differences would affect outcomes. Racial hostility (he leaves out of consideration religious hostility) was consistently described as the major impediment to assimilation.

Assimilation boiled down to finding a way to live together cooperatively, playing by common rules that define the parameters of intergroup conflict. It entailed the creation of a shared national identity, which of necessity required certain commonalities, such as a shared language and core cultural values. However, it also permitted the persistence of ethnic identities and affiliations. Assimilation thus is not considered to be antithetical to a multicultural society; it does not require cultural homogeneity.

The unappreciated aspect of Park's contribution to this dialogue is his explanation for why modern societies can tolerate diversity and his account of why assimilation propels so many individuals to exit—totally or partially—their ethnic groups. Park was insistent that due to the division of labor in modern societies, assimilation did not entail homogeneity, and that considerable individual and group differences can persist without impairing national unity. The reverse side of the coin involves the lure of assimilation. Park thought assimilation was attractive because modern societies are individualistic. What this means is that people will seek to enhance their own opportunities and expand their life options, and that one way of doing so is to refuse to permit the parochial constraints of the ethnic group to limit self-realization. It means that individuals will seek to expand their social circles and will treat the ethnic group not as a community of fate, but as one of a variety of possible affiliations and sources of personal identity. The cosmopolitan group, in contrast to the parochial group, is one in which individuals possess options, including the options of loyalty, voice, and exit.

One of the unfortunate features of Park's discussion is that he failed to adequately define what he meant by cosmopolitan groups. In part, this was a failure to take up the research agenda presented by Arthur Schlesinger, Sr.,

in the pages of *The American Journal of Sociology*. The task of scholars, he contended, was not only to explore "the influence of America on the ever-changing composite population," but also to examine "the influence of immigration on American life and institutions" (Schlesinger, 1924, p. 71). Park ignored the latter. More specifically, he failed to understand the implications for American identity of cosmopolitan groups being receptive to being transformed as a result of their encounters with groups from outside the mainstream. In this regard, the insights of social critic Randolph Bourne (1916), in his advocacy on behalf of a "trans-national America," could have served Park well in amplifying his thesis. Unlike Kallen, who tended to view ethnic identities as fixed and distinct, Bourne had a more dynamic view in mind, one that presumed that not only would ethnic groups be transformed as a result of their encounter with the larger society, but that American society would also be transformed positively as a consequence of the encounter between the core culture and outsiders moving in. Park appears to have had something similar in mind, but unfortunately his argument in this regard remained woefully underdeveloped.

The Impact of the Paradigm

The version of assimilation articulated by Park can be seen as a theory of the middle range developed under the influence of those grand narratives of modernity associated particularly with the work of Durkheim and Simmel. For the first two-thirds of the 20th century, it constituted the hegemonic theory used by both sociologists and historians to study ethnicity in America.

Most sociologists spent little time refining or revising the theory, concentrating primarily on operationalizing it. This was clearly the case among Chicago School sociologists, as can be seen, for instance, in the social distance scale developed by Emory Bogardus (1933) and in the wedding of assimilation to the ecological focus on the spatial patterns of cities in the work of Louis Wirth (1928). The apogee of such work was W. Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole's *The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups* (1945), which was a part of their Yankee City Series.

They offered a complex conceptual scheme to account for the likely assimilative trajectories of a wide range of groups that they broadly distinguished into three categories: ethnic, racial, and ethnoracial (this is not well defined, but represents something of an interstitial category). The focus of their study was on the differential barriers to incorporation confronting various groups. Key to defining the strength of the barrier was the level and degree of subordination each group confronts, but factored into the equation

was the impact of the relative strength of the group's communal bonds. Located in the social distance tradition, the traits that made incorporation difficult for ethnic groups were cultural in nature, and, therefore, subject to change. In contrast, the racial traits that worked against assimilation were rooted in biology, and thus would remain persistent handicaps for racial groups. The ethnoracial groups (the two examples in the study were "Spanish Americans" in the Southwest and "mixed bloods" from Latin America) had sufficiently ambiguous identities that their futures might either look like the futures of ethnic groups or the futures of racial groups (Warner & Srole, 1945, pp. 284–292).

In their "scale of subordination and assimilation," Warner and Srole combined racial and cultural types to form a grid in which they located each specific group. They offered both a prognosis of the length of time it would take to assimilate (ranging from "very short" to "very slow") and their predicted future social location. In the case of ethnic groups, the movement over time would be from the ethnic group into specific social class locations. At the other end of the spectrum, for blacks it would be a movement from the racial group to a "color caste" location. Asians were destined to enter a "semi-caste" condition, while Latinos would either end up in a class or color caste location. Thus, they concluded, "The future of American ethnic groups seems to be limited; it is likely that they will be quickly absorbed. When this happens one of the great epochs of American history will have ended and another, that of race, will begin" (Warner & Srole, 1945, p. 295). This is a rather odd formulation given the prominent role race has played throughout American history, but it does serve to differentiate the future historical trajectories of white ethnics and people of color.

Both methodologically and in terms of the theoretical assumptions shaping their work, Warner and Srole's study can be viewed as emblematic of a tradition of sociological research that extended into the 1960s. A parallel connection to the canon can also be seen among historians of the era. This is especially evident in the seminal essay of Marcus Lee Hansen, "The Problem of the Third Generation Immigrant" (1938), whose thesis challenges the idea of straight-line assimilation, offering instead an account for why a renewal of interest in ethnic origins might materialize. Thus, his thesis has often been regarded as offering an explanation for ethnic revivals (for a retrospective account of the Hansen thesis, see the essays in Kivisto & Blanck, 1990). Hansen argued that unlike the second generation, which repudiated its ethnicity due to insecurity and a desire to be accepted into the mainstream, individuals of the third generation were inclined to manifest a renewal of interest in their ethnic identity precisely because they had adjusted to and been accepted by the mainstream society. However, this did not amount to a repudiation of

assimilation theory. Rather, it signaled the fact that the third generation inhabited a unique historical moment, one that was not likely to be replayed in subsequent generations. Although he posed his thesis in generational terms, the impact of specific historical events ought also to be factored into any analysis of the likelihood of ethnic return. In any event, Hansen assumed the overarching trend was toward acculturation and incorporation.

A similar assumption can be found in the work of the other major historian of immigration at midcentury, a scholar we have discussed earlier: Oscar Handlin. As Russell Kazal (1995, p. 446) has pointed out, both of Handlin's significant books on immigration, *Boston's Immigrants, 1790–1865: A Study in Acculturation* (1941) and *The Uprooted* (1951), "contained a healthy dose of Chicago-style sociology." If the first emphasized, as the subtitle indicates, the adjustment process, the latter was structured around the concept of alienation, and thus focused on the existential tensions, conflicts, and suffering experienced by the immigrant generation—those people whom, as noted earlier, he depicted as being consigned to forever live in two worlds without feeling truly at home in either.

Handlin did not focus, as did Hansen, on the American-born generations. Among those that have picked up on Hansen's theme of generational transformation, none have offered a more cogent sociological account than Vladimir Nahirny and Joshua Fishman (1965) in their reappraisal of the Hansen thesis. As they point out, since assimilation takes place over time, it is essential to take into account both history and generational transition. Nahirny and Fishman consider Hansen's social psychological explanation to be oversimplistic, and in its place they offer a far more complex portrait, one that arrived at what they describe as a paradoxical conclusion: "despite acculturation . . . the sons continued to remain acutely conscious of their ethnic identity." More than merely challenging the Hansen account of children forgetting and grandchildren remembering, in their phenomenological emphasis on lived experience, they have offered a sociologically informed explanation for why individual experience and social structural factors combine to yield the paradox of acculturation occurring simultaneously with the maintenance of a keen sense of ethnic identity.

In a parallel effort published in the same year, Tomatsu Shibutani and Kian Kwan (1965) offered an approach that weds the Chicago School version of assimilation similar to that developed by Park to symbolic interactionism. They advanced the theory of assimilation in part by moving from a singular focus on the United States to explore its applicability to a wide range of locations around the globe. In a recent reappreciation of their work, Richard Alba and Victor Nee (2003, p. 34) contend that their social constructionist approach

adds several features that are missing in the canonical account. One is a complex, causal analysis that allows for contingency. . . . Another is the preservation of the distinctions among levels of aggregation so that the interaction among individuals, groups, and the larger social environment is incorporated into the analytic accounting. . . . Finally, their analysis quite explicitly recognizes the centrality of stratification [and power] in the ethnic experience.

Gordon's Typology of Assimilation

These works are representative of the central orientation of the majority of sociologists and historians into the 1960s and a reflection of the hegemony exerted by assimilation theory decades after its canonical formulation. A half century after Park's initial formulation, Milton Gordon's seminal study, *Assimilation in American Life* (1964), both codified and systematized the theory of assimilation. However valuable this work may be, Roger Waldinger's (2003, p. 250) observation is on point, namely that Gordon "provided a typology of assimilation and its components, not a theory." Gordon (1964, p. 71) identified seven types of assimilation: (1) cultural or behavioral—also known as acculturation; (2) structural; (3) marital—or amalgamation; (4) identificational, which means creating a shared sense of peoplehood at the societal level; (5) attitude receptional; (6) behavioral receptional; and (7) civic, where interethnic conflicts over values and power are overcome by the shared identity of citizenship. Two of these, in our estimation, do not refer to assimilation per se, but rather to preconditions for assimilation, which have to do with the absence of various impediments to incorporation: attitude receptional assimilation refers to the lack of prejudice while behavioral receptional assimilation concerns the related absence of discrimination.

One of the intriguing aspects of Gordon's thesis is that he located cultural pluralism within this schema. This is because he did not think that there was a straight and uniform path to assimilation, but rather assumed as others before had that it would occur along a variety of different avenues and at differing speeds. Moreover, if persistent levels of prejudice and discrimination characterize interethnic relations, all or some types of assimilation would be stymied. Thus, assimilation did not necessarily mean that ethnic identities and affiliations would disappear or become irrelevant.

Gordon referred to these aspects of assimilation not simply as types, but also as stages, and thus he did have a sense that assimilation might in some circumstances signal the demise of ethnic allegiances. He hedged his bets on how the process of assimilation would occur, though he was clear about two things. First, he thought that marital assimilation would be the last to occur

(on this score, see David Hollinger, 2003, for a reconsideration of the history of amalgamation). Second, he contended that the type of assimilation most crucial to the process was structural assimilation. Once it occurs, he argued, all the others will inevitably follow: "Structural assimilation, then, rather than acculturation, is seen to be the keystone in the arch of assimilation" (Gordon, 1964, p. 81). In this regard, what Gordon had done was to codify and add analytical rigor to Park's formulation. If acculturation can be seen as that aspect of assimilation that Park described as occurring spontaneously, structural assimilation entails volition on the part of ethnics and members of the larger society.

The point at which Gordon adds a significant dimension to the matrix missing in Park is when he separates out civic assimilation from structural assimilation. Park's discussion of assimilation had a curiously apolitical quality to it—one that ignored entirely the significance of the role of citizen. He did deal with the identificational side of this when discussing the significance of national identity as a unifying and thus assimilating force. However, the extent to which the idea of the citizen as actor might override or complicate the idea of the ethnic as actor is not advanced in his formulation. In Gordon's case, he laid it out but does not develop it, implicitly agreeing with Talcott Parsons' contention that the salience of ethnicity progressively gives way to citizenship as the principal basis of solidarity in liberal democracies (Parsons, 1971, p. 92). It should be stressed that for both, it was not an either/or proposition pitting ethnicity against citizenship. Rather, what they had in mind was the capacity of citizenship to reduce levels of interethnic hostility and conflict. The enhanced salience of citizenship did not mean that the memories of ancestors and the embracing of one's cultural roots would necessarily disappear.

Assimilation Abandoned?

Within a decade after the publication of Gordon's book, assimilation theory's hegemonic status came under attack. Given that difficulties associated with dissociating the theory of assimilation from assimilation as ideology and policy, this is not surprising. According to Gary Gerstle (2001, p. 327), the civic nationalism that took hold during the administration of Theodore Roosevelt (who, incidentally, attended a performance of and had high praise for Israel Zangwill's *The Melting Pot*) and defined American national identity until the 1960s came under attack in what amounted to a "revolt against assimilation." This was due chiefly to the combined impact of the civil rights and the anti–Vietnam War movements. In the case of the former, ideas associated

with black pride (recall Park on this score) and with the critiques of white America offered by militant black nationalists signaled an end to the idea that "assimilation into the national culture took precedence over the maintenance of cultural or religious particularity" (Gerstle, 2001, p. 330). Opposition to the Vietnam War furthered this trend, especially insofar as the "best and the brightest" who had led the nation into the quagmire were associated in the minds of many antiwar activists with the WASP elite (as, coincidentally, were many antiwar activists, such as William Sloane Coffin and Robert Lowell).

Related to these developments, in part as a reaction to them in a context where the center did not hold, by the early 1970s there was considerable discussion about an ethnic revival among the southern and eastern European ethnics whose ancestors had arrived in the nation between 1880 and 1930. Reviving the essentialist argument that Horace Kallen (1924) had advanced on behalf of cultural pluralism shortly after World War I, polemicists such as Michael Novak (1972) depicted groups such as Greeks, Italians, Jews, and Poles as "unmeltable ethnics." Part of the heightened sense of ethnicity among these ethnics entailed a benign search for roots. However, it also signaled a reaction to the perceived gains achieved by blacks in the immediate aftermath of the civil rights movement and a resistance to integration (Rieder, 1985).

Assimilation Challenged

The zeitgeist of this era, not surprisingly, filtered into scholarship on ethnicity. Within both sociology and history, there was a rather widespread abandonment of assimilationist theory in favor of variant versions of pluralism. The idea of ethnic persistence gained currency with the publication—at virtually the same time that Gordon's book appeared—of Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963), which examined five ethnic groups in New York City (Italians, Irish, Jews, blacks, and Puerto Ricans) and concluded, in a richly documented and nuanced thesis, that these groups functioned to large extent as interest groups. One could draw the conclusion that to the extent that this instrumentalist *raison d'être* persisted, so would the saliency of ethnic identities and affiliations. Despite the book's provocative title, the authors did not offer an explicit pluralist alternative to assimilation at the theoretical level. Reflecting on the book 35 years after its publication, Glazer (2000, p. 270) remarked that it was "clear how much it is a book of its time."

The sociologist most responsible for the promotion of a research agenda that sought to indicate the persistence of ethnicity, rather than its erosion, was Andrew Greeley (1971, 1974; Greeley & McCready, 1975), who relied on National Opinion Research Center surveys to examine a wide array of

attitudinal and behavioral topics, all of which were intended to ascertain the extent to which ethnicity still mattered. Greeley limited his subjects to European-origin ethnics, excluding from consideration racial minorities that have not been able to assimilate structurally due to externally imposed barriers. His findings did not lend much validation to the idea that assimilation theory was irrelevant. Indeed, his results about the persistence of ethnicity were mixed at best, and moreover, crucial issues that would call the thesis into question, such as intermarriage rates, were largely ignored. Greeley's findings pointed to little more than the obvious fact that assimilation had not yet reached its end stage, but no serious sociologist actually made such a claim. Greeley, too, did not attempt to offer a theoretical alternative to assimilation.

Pluralists who did attempt to provide theoretical explanations were divided between two alternative accounts of ethnic persistence. Some theorists, including Harold Isaacs (1975) and Pierre van den Berghe (1981), embraced what has been described as a primordialist perspective (though the current terminology that could be used to describe this camp is essentialist). Ethnicity from this perspective is considered to be deeply rooted in the psyche or from a sociobiological perspective in the genes, and, as such, is an immutable and universal given. Ethnic attachments are the result of a little understood but nonetheless extraordinarily powerful psychological attachment to the group. This position is problematic insofar as it devalues the role played by both historical events and social structural factors and because it fails to appreciate the mutability of human attachments and loyalties.

For this reason, most sociologists who embraced pluralist theory did so from what became known as a circumstantionalist (Glazer & Moynihan, 1975, pp. 19–20) or optionalist (Gleason, 1983, p. 919) perspective, which provided a more compelling sociological basis for understanding ethnicity. This version of pluralist theory looked to those social, cultural, and political factors that created conditions that either sustained or undermined ethnic attachments for particular groups at particular times.

Assimilation Ignored

It also dovetails with the work of social historians of ethnicity during this time period, who, by being sensitive to the distinctive features of specific groups, the particularities of time and place, and the significance of complexity and contingency, added to the appreciation of the variability of possible outcomes (Higham, 1982). Olivier Zunz (1985, p. 53) correctly contends that this generation of social historians to large extent neglected assimilation. In their effort to write history from the bottom up, they gave

voice to the ethnics, stressing the choices they made, the strategies they employed, the resources they mustered, the ambiguities they felt, the coalitions they formed, and the constraints they encountered. This is clearly the case in John Bodnar's "transplanted" thesis discussed earlier, which like much of the best social history of this period represents a fruitful interplay between ethnic history and labor history (Higham, 1990; Kivisto, 1990). His portrait of the immigrant generation—the "children of capitalism"—is one in which they reacted pragmatically to the larger society's institutions and values, creating a world as best they could that was "an amalgam of past and present, acceptance and resistance" (Bodnar, 1985, p. 210). He did not raise the prospect that, as Warner and Srole predicted, European ethnics would shift from a primary identity rooted in ethnicity to one located in class, but rather concentrated on the dialectical tension and mutual reinforcement of these two aspects of individual identity. Kazal (1995, p. 456) writes, "When Bodnar used the terms 'Americanization' and 'assimilation,' he appeared to distinguish them from the larger process of immigrant adjustment and to deny that they happened for the majority of immigrants and their children."

Perhaps because there is a tendency among historians to focus on the particular and to resist the temptation to generalize about larger social processes, social historians such as Bodnar did not offer a frontal rebuttal of assimilation theory. Nor did they explicitly embrace cultural pluralism or propose an alternative. Rather, as Zunz (1985) has argued, they tended to simply ignore assimilation, thereby implicitly casting into question its utility as a concept for understanding the incorporation of immigrants and their offspring into the larger society.

Rethinking the Theoretical Legacy

By the 1990s, a growing number of sociologists and historians, reacting to the critiques and the neglect of assimilation theory, began to express their conviction that a reconsideration of its utility and validity was in order. This included some scholars who had remained supporters of assimilation theory throughout this period, such as Herbert Gans, Nathan Glazer, John Higham, and Stephen Steinberg, in addition to a younger generation that included Richard Alba, Rogers Brubaker, Douglas Massey, Ewa Morawska, Victor Nee, Alejandro Portes, Rubén Rumbaut, Roger Waldinger, and Min Zhou (Jacoby, 2004). In reacting to what Rogers Brubaker (2001, p. 531) referred to as the "massive differentialist turn" that occurred during the latter part of the 20th century, these figures are among those most responsible for the

"return of assimilation." The idea of a return stimulated an effort to rethink and reappropriate a line of thought dating back to Park (Rumbaut, 2005).

In part, this disparate group of thinkers was challenging the theoretical adequacy of cultural pluralism in accounting for the fate of ethnicity over time for European-origin groups. At some level, the argument advanced was quite simple: assimilation had proved to be a far more useful analytical tool for understanding the historical trajectories of these groups. Glazer (1993, p. 123) answered his own question about whether assimilation was dead by contending that however unpopular the term might be at the moment, if "properly understood, assimilation is still the most powerful force affecting the ethnic and racial elements of the United States." The fact that blacks have not been successfully incorporated into the mainstream of American society accounts for much of the criticism of assimilation, but according to Glazer, this does not undermine assimilation theory but illustrates the fact that, as he notes Park had already stressed, prejudice and discrimination stymie assimilation. In other words, assimilation is a powerful force, but not inevitable.

Glazer's argument dovetailed with Ewa Morawksa's (1994) defense of assimilation, in which she called for its resuscitation. She also called for correcting what she saw as certain problematic features of the "classical" theory of assimilation. These included that it was too simplistic and ahistorical, that its efforts to understand the dominant group and what it is that groups are assimilating into were insufficient, and that it exhibited a lack of concern about the role of gender in the assimilation process. In a similar vein, Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco (2002) pointed to questionable assumptions that have underpinned much work in assimilation (though, we would point out, not necessarily to the canonical formulation): (1) the clean-break assumption, which suggests that immigrants quickly and thoroughly sever their ties to their homeland; (2) the homogeneity assumption, which fails to appreciate that the host society is multilayered and diverse; and (3) the progress assumption, which views the length of time in the host society as key to the improvement of the socioeconomic circumstances of the group.

Still other scholars cast a sympathetic but simultaneously critical perspective on assimilation theory from Park to Gordon, addressing, as Rumbaut (1999) described it, the "ironies and paradoxes" of assimilation. Rumbaut argued that rather than seeing it in terms of a terminal end state, it ought instead to be imaginatively conceived as an analytical construct of an "endlessly astonishing synthesis" (Rumbaut, 1999, p. 191). Efforts to make the concept more complex and less unidirectional included Gans' (1997, 1999a) effort to expand upon Gordon's (1964) attempt to reconcile assimilation and pluralism. Milton Yinger (1994, pp. 38–55) offered a similar effort by treating assimilation and "dissimilation" as operating in a state of dialectical tension.

Gans (1979), responding to the claims made in the 1970s about an ethnic revival among European-origin ethnics, developed the idea of "symbolic ethnicity." It was intended to account for both the indicators of the persistence of various manifestations of ethnicity and the simultaneous gradual decline of ethnic affiliations and behaviors. He thought it was especially apt in describing the significance of ethnicity for the third generation and beyond. In Gans' view, by the latter part of the 20th century, the ethnicity of these offspring of immigrants could be characterized as manifesting a low-level intensity—occupying an individual's attention only periodically. The decline in ethnic organizations and cultures no longer permitted more substantive expressions of ethnic identity or affiliation. Rather than relying on community or culture, these latter generations used symbols, primarily out of a sense of nostalgia for the traditions of the immigrant generation. According to Gans (1979),

> Most people look for easy and intermittent ways of expressing their identity, for ways that do not conflict with other ways of life. As a result, they refrain from ethnic behaviors that require an arduous or time-consuming commitment, either to a culture that must be practiced constantly, or to organizations that demand active membership. Second, because people's concern is with identity, rather than with cultural practices or group relationships, they are free to look for ways of expressing that identity which suit them best, thus opening up the possibility of voluntary, diverse, or individualistic ethnicity.

Mary Waters described such an ethnicity in terms of "ethnic options," whereby individuals pick and choose from their ancestral cultural traditions. Like Gans, her portrait is one of an ethnicity predicated on *feeling* (at least periodically) ethnic rather than having to permanently *be* ethnic. This emptying out of a once-robust ethnicity would appear innocuous except that it serves to create a sense of "us" versus "them," wherein the "us" includes all white European-origin groups while "them" includes blacks and new immigrants. Waters (1990, pp. 147, 155) contends that "symbolic ethnicity persists because of its ideological 'fit' with racist beliefs," offering these ethnics "a potent combination" entailing both "a community without cost and a specialness that comes to you just by virtue of being born." This conclusion is reinforced in Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Roots Too*, a study of the ethnic revival of the 1960s and 1970s in which he sees the drawing of boundaries in terms of invidious comparisons: "we" are hard-working, law-abiding, religiously devout, family-oriented people, while "they" lack these virtues (Jacobson, 2006, p. 150). In this regard, assimilation is seen in terms of boundary drawing, a topic we turn to later in the chapter when we examine the work of Alba and Nee.

The most sustained attempt to offer a systematic rethinking of assimilation theory rooted in the tradition was that offered by historian Elliott Barkan (1995). On the surface, it appears to represent an effort to revive the race relations cycle that, as noted earlier, has been inappropriately associated with Park, insofar as it involves a model consisting of six stages: contact, acculturation, adaptation, accommodation, integration, and assimilation into the core society/core culture. However, Barkan insisted that this model ought not to be construed as a cycle or a straight-line teleological process, writing that "*there has been no one pattern, no cycle, no one outcome that uniformly encompasses all ethnic experiences*" (Barkan, 1995, p. 46; italics in original).

The analytical purpose of the model is to identify both those patterns that occur with a certain regularity as well as the exceptions to the patterns. By noting the exceptions and by being attuned to the impact of prejudice and discrimination as well as individual choices on the part of marginalized people to either seek incorporation or to resist it, the model is designed to link assimilation to pluralism. He saw assimilation as a two-way process, entailing both the level of openness on the part of the host society and the extent to which there is a desire to incorporate on the part of marginalized individuals. More than that, as an effort to remedy a particular shortcoming in the canonical model, he viewed assimilation as "a bidirectional phenomenon in that the general society and culture are affected by the heritages of those who assimilate" while recognizing that the interplay between newcomer and host is not an equal exchange (Barkan, 1995, p. 49). Barkan was less attentive to the fact that the host society is multifarious and thus outsiders who assimilate do so into differing sectors of the society, thus making assimilation a far more complex and varied phenomenon, and one that does not necessarily signal a successful entry into the societal mainstream.

Critics have identified problematic features of Barkan's model. Its inattentiveness to class and gender has been noted (Vecoli, 1995). Likewise, its singular focus on the individual over the group has been criticized (Alba, 1995b). Finally, the model appears to be intended primarily to account for the historical trajectories of voluntary immigrants. This raises concerns about whether or not it can be proven suitable in accounting for the historical experiences of nonvoluntary immigrants such as blacks, indigenous peoples, or ethnonationalist minorities.

Nevertheless, the model served to amplify the argument that assimilation and pluralism were interrelated phenomena, and not either/or propositions. In a sense, it can be read as a culmination of a rethinking of conceptual frameworks dating from the early part of the 20th century. It can also be seen as offering a theoretical account of the historical fates of European-origin ethnics in the United States, and in so doing provides a theoretical framework

for locating such studies as Richard Alba's *Ethnic Identity* (1990). This study was perhaps the most influential research project that mounted compelling empirical evidence for the erosion of ethnic institutions and neighborhoods, the declining role of ethnic cultures, the progressive decline in ethnic identities and loyalties, the concurrent increase in intermarriage rates, and substantial evidence of social assimilation.

During the past several years, two projects aimed at building on a long history of work on assimilation while pushing it in new directions. We turn to them in what follows.

New Directions I: Segmented or Downward Assimilation

Segmented or downward assimilation is a concept developed by Alejandro Portes and various colleagues, including Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, Rubén Rumbaut, and Min Zhou. However, one can turn to a speculative essay by Herbert Gans (1992b) for a precursor discussion about the potential differential occupational and socioeconomic outcomes of contemporary immigrants. This article was part of a growing body of work devoted to exploring the possibility of second-generation socioeconomic decline. Gans describes six potential scenarios, three positive and three negative. The positive, involving outcomes resulting in intergenerational upward mobility, can be (1) education driven; (2) succession driven (moving up into more attractive jobs as the native-born exit them in their own quest for upward mobility); and (3) due to niche improvement (remaining in the jobs occupied by parents and using them for economic advance). The possible negative scenarios are the reverse of the positive: (1) educational failure (such as high dropout rates); (2) the stalling of ethnic succession; and (3) niche shrinkage. The reason for concern about the prospects of decline had to do with a sense that the changes in the American economy that led to positive outcomes for the earlier wave of European immigrants no longer exist, and instead the emergence of a postindustrial economy called into question whether contemporary immigrants were likely to follow the upward mobility pattern of the past.

In the first articulation of the segmented assimilation thesis, Portes and Zhou (1993, p. 76) point out that for the first time since Irving Child's work of a half century earlier, sociologists were turning their attention to the second generation. They contend that in contrast to the Italians that were the focus of his work, the situation for many contemporary immigrants differs in two ways. First, many of today's immigrants are defined as nonwhite and

thus race must be factored into the equation. Second, the economy has changed as a result of deindustrialization, which has drastically reduced the number of available jobs in the manufacturing sector. The idea of segmented assimilation was born of the idea that the incorporative trajectories of contemporary immigrant children might take three possible paths. As Portes and Zhou (1993, p. 82) put it, "One of them replicates the time-honored portrayal of growing acculturation and parallel integration into the white middle-class; a second leads straight in the opposite direction to permanent poverty and assimilation into the underclass; still a third associates rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community's values and tight solidarity." By being "absorbed" into "different segments of American society," immigrants are being socialized into different subcultures (Zhou, 1997, p. 999).

In considering the factors that can be expected to yield different outcomes, Portes and Rumbaut point first to the relationship between the first and second generations. Immigrants arrive with differing stocks of human capital, and these differences serve to locate them both in terms of occupations and residency. Related to parental human capital is family structure, which in large part means whether or not the family is headed by one (usually female) or two parents. Put simply, those second-generation children living in families whose parents possess high levels of human capital are expected to do better than children of those with lower levels. Likewise, dual-parent families offer a stronger system of parental guidance than do single-parent families, and they provide a richer network of social ties. In terms of their location in different sorts of families, gender is also salient insofar as socialization differs for boys and girls (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, p. 64). As Figure 4.1 reveals, the third background variable they specify is modes of incorporation, which refers to the varied types of reception of immigrants by the state, the society at large, and the immigrants' preexisting ethnic community. In terms of state and society, some immigrant groups are favored and others are not. Thus, during the Cold War, the earliest waves of Cuban refugees were greeted warmly, while since 9/11 immigrants from the Middle East have not been.

The acculturation of the second generation is viewed as the outcome of the complex interplay of the three background factors. Portes and Rumbaut stress the relationship between the two generations that results from this interplay, distinguishing three types of acculturation: dissonant, consonant, and selective. Dissonant refers to a situation where the children become rapidly acclimated to the language and ways of life of the new society and at the same time experience a dramatic loss of their cultural heritage. At the

First Generation		Second Generation				
Background Factors	Intergenerational Patterns	External Obstacles			Expected Outcomes
		Racial Discrimination	Bifurcated Labor Markets	Inner-City Subcultures	
Parental human capital	Dissonant acculturation	Confronted directly and without support	Met with individual resources alone	No countervailing messages to adversarial attitudes and lifestyles	Downward assimilation
Modes of incorporation	Consonant acculturation	Confronted directly with family support	Met with parental guidance and family resources	Countervailing message based on family aspirations	Mostly upward assimilation, blocked at times by discrimination
Family structure	Selective acculturation	Filtered through ethnic networks and confronted with family and community support	Met with parental guidance backed by family and community resources	Countervailing message based on family aspirations and community networks	Upward assimilation combined with biculturalism

Figure 4.1 The Process of Segmented Assimilation

Source: Portes and Rumbaut (2001, p. 63).

same time, their parents find getting acclimated difficult and thus remain rooted in the premigration worldview. In this setting, parents become dependent on their children, thus establishing a "role reversal, especially where parents lack other means to maneuver in the host society without the help of their children" (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, p. 54). In such a context, the second generation confronts three primary external obstacles—racial discrimination, a bifurcated labor market, and inner-city subcultures—on its own, without sufficient support from parents because there is either a generational rupture or a lack of parental authority and without support from the ethnic community. Thus, dissonant acculturation can lead to downward assimilation, particularly if the children embrace the adversarial lifestyle associated with what Elijah Anderson (2000) calls the "code of the street." Downward assimilation contributes to gang involvement, drug activities, unplanned pregnancies, and dropping out of school.

In contrast, one version of consonant acculturation results when parents and children acclimate to their new setting in more or less parallel fashion, both managing to become culturally and socially competent in the new society and at the same time exiting the ethnic community together. In this scenario, parents and children are on the same page insofar as both generations are seeking integration into the American mainstream. This particular trajectory is most likely among families whose parents possess high levels of human capital, and are thus from the outset poised to enter the middle class and to experience upward mobility (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, pp. 52, 54). In the other form of consonant acculturation, parents and children are again coming to terms with the new society congruently. However, in this version, both are slow to make a language transition and to embrace the host society's values and lifestyle. At the same time, both remain embedded in the ethnic community. These immigrants and their offspring remain isolated from the larger society, dependent on the ethnic enclave. One outcome of such acculturation is that mobility and integration into the larger society are blocked. If the sense of isolation becomes sufficiently pronounced and unattractive, it can prove to be an incentive to return to the homeland.

Finally, selective acculturation entails a successful balancing act on the part of both immigrants and their children between embracing the cultural values and language of the society and remaining embedded in the ethnic community. Thus, assimilation occurs gradually and without the anomic dislocations that can occur in consonant or dissonant acculturation. The ethnic community in this case serves as a decompression chamber that helps ease the transition into the larger society. In this scenario, there is very little intergenerational conflict, the second-generation children count many coethnics among their friends, and they tend to be genuinely bilingual (Portes &

Rumbaut, 2001, p. 54). R. Stephen Warner (2007, p. 108) summarizes the virtues of selective acculturation in the following passage:

> [It] is the most promising trajectory for those families with at least a modicum of resources and the chance of escaping the worst forms of treatment by the host society. . . . Insofar as acculturation of the second generation is all but inevitable but also fraught with danger, selective acculturation—which slows the process of Americanization, promotes ethnic pride in ethnic identity, and helps parents maintain their authority while both they and their children accommodate to the new society—would seem to be the wiser course for those who can manage it.

The three obstacles identified earlier serve to establish what Portes and Rumbaut view as the novel features making contemporary immigrant incorporation different than it was in the past. Thus, they contend that "while assimilation may still represent the master concept in the study of today's immigrants, the image of a relatively uniform and straightforward path is questionable given the many contingencies and novel forces affecting the process" (Portes & Rumbaut, 2005, p. 986). In their Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study, a study of second-generation students in Miami/Ft. Lauderdale and San Diego, they found that a majority of these youth are poised to experience a successful entry into the mainstream. They are acquiring educations that can serve them well in that quest, and their early occupational experiences suggest they are moving in a positive direction. On the other hand, "a significant minority is being left behind" (Portes, Fernández-Kelly, & Haller, 2005, p. 1000).

Whether or not these findings ought to be read optimistically or pessimistically is open to question. Charles Hirschman (2001) focused on educational attainment and concluded that there was partial support for optimism and partial support for pessimism. In a major research project on new immigrants in New York City—one of the nation's two primary gateway cities—Philip Kasinitz, John Mollenkopf, Mary Waters, and Jennifer Holdaway (2008, p. 16) conclude that their evidence leads them to be "guardedly optimistic about the second generation." They contend that the portrait of entry into an oppositional culture that can over time reproduce downward assimilation is too negative. It overstates the significance of an adversarial subculture among both native minorities, particularly blacks, and second-generation immigrants and, conversely, fails to appreciate the fact that native-born whites, too, can be found embracing an oppositional identity (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, & Waters, 2002, p. 1030; see also, Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, & Waters, 2004).

Two other studies have addressed the theory to determine if the American-specific focus of its formulators meant that it had little applicability in other national contexts. Monica Boyd (2002) concluded that in the Canadian context, segmented assimilation did not appear to be evident. On the other hand, Roxane Silberman, Richard Alba, and Irene Fournier (2007; see also Alba & Silberman, 2002) found evidence of downward assimilation among Muslim immigrants in France who came from former French colonies. They question the applicability of one of the central obstacles in Portes and Rumbaut's formulation: race. Rather than racial markers based on such features as skin color, the salient obstacles in the French context appeared to revolve around ethnic markers, with people's names serving as a key divider between in-group and out-group members.

This leads to explorations conducted independently and jointly by Joel Perlmann and Roger Waldinger that call into question the assumption that segmented assimilation is a novel phenomenon characteristic of today's immigrants versus the presumably more uniform assimilation that occurred several decades earlier and involved European-origin immigrants. Of particular note, they question the assumption that the racial makeup of contemporary immigrants—defined as nonwhite—puts them at a distinct disadvantage compared to their white European predecessors. As whiteness studies research argues, eastern and southern European immigrants from the 19th century and early 20th were often defined upon arrival as nonwhite. As such, they were treated as racial outsiders by the hegemonic culture. Thus, the process over time of becoming assimilated meant in part "becoming white" (Roediger, 2005; see Guglielmo, 2003, for a critique). The wide variety of racial categories employed a century ago—Nordic, Mediterranean, Slavic, Semitic, and the like—as the markers used to distinguish those who were white from those who were not declined in significance. Increasingly, they were replaced by a perspective that treated all European-origin groups as white, with Jews probably entering that side of the racial divide last due to the more durable character of anti-Semitism.

Gans (1999b) raises the possibility that something similar might be occurring at present in pondering whether or not a new racial hierarchy might be in the process of formation. Specifically, he speculates about the prospect of a new racial divide that no longer is framed in terms of white/nonwhite, but instead in terms of black/nonblack. If, for example, Asian immigrants—sometimes depicted as the "model minority"—find themselves as "honorary whites," this would suggest that for them, at least, the significance of race is a declining barrier to incorporation. They would not actually have to be defined as white: the key to their acceptance is that they are on the nonblack

side of the divide. Though their situation is not the same, a similar process might be underway for Latinos, which if true would mean that for the new immigrants as a whole, race will prove to be less and less of an obstacle, while for their part, native-born blacks will end up being more socially isolated. Gans is not claiming that such a new racial formation already exists, merely that such a scenario is a realistic possibility.

Perlmann and Waldinger (1997, 1998) contend that if taken as a whole, today's immigrants show little evidence of being uniquely disadvantaged. In fact, "the children of the post-1965 immigration began with disadvantages no greater than those encountered by immigrant children before." However, if there is one stark difference between the old immigrants versus the new, it is that today there are far more middle-class immigrants who come poised for upward mobility. Thus, generalizations about the new immigrants must be made carefully and with this reality in mind. Given the fact that Mexican immigrants in the United States represent by far the largest component of the new immigration and that they are considerably poorer and possess far less human capital than the new immigrants overall, it is reasonable to question whether they might be uniquely disadvantaged, and thus particularly likely to experience downward assimilation.

It is with this in mind that Perlmann (2005) engaged in a comparative study of the Italian second generation of the past and today's second-generation Mexicans. When Handlin created his ideal-typical portrait of the "uprooted" immigrant, Italians constituted a paradigmatic example. So, too, do Mexicans. Thus, this is a particularly apt comparison in testing whether or not the chances for intergenerational upward mobility today have declined compared to those in the preceding migratory wave. Perlmann's study reveals two things. First, the progress made by Italians was slower and more difficult than is often seen in retrospect. Second, although Mexican progress has been slower than that of their Italian counterparts, nonetheless the trend is in the same direction. Without discounting the fact that the society Mexicans have entered in recent years is in many ways different from the one Italians entered earlier, Perlmann's study calls into question the view that upward mobility is less likely today than in the past—and implicitly challenges the claim that segmented assimilation is only applicable to the present.

One of the key assumptions of segmented assimilation is that contemporary immigrants confront a major economic obstacle due to the economic restructuring that has been underway since the early 1970s. The portrait of an hourglass economy is central to this conviction, for the precipitous decline in manufacturing jobs is considered to be a major barrier to mobility. This particular assumption has been widely accepted by immigration scholars, though it has not until recently been subjected to empirical investigation. The

untested assumption underlying this view is that manufacturing jobs proved to be the route to upward mobility for earlier immigrants. Waldinger (2007b) has raised the fundamental question: "did manufacturing matter?" He observes that a key difference between traditional assimilation theory and segmental assimilation is that while the former does not, the latter has an explanation for how the children and grandchildren of immigrants in the past improved their economic lot: it was as a result of obtaining jobs in the manufacturing sector, which, it is claimed, provided them with wage levels that served to narrow the economic gap between them and native-born whites. He points out that this focus on the role of factory work in heavy industry "has a muscularly proletarian feel," an account of male rather than female (other than during World War II) workers (Waldinger, 2007b, p. 9).

Waldinger contrasts two of the largest immigrants groups from that era, Italians and Poles. He found a pronounced difference between the two in terms of their respective locations in the manufacturing sector. While second- and 2.5-generation Poles were twice as likely as native white, native parentage (NWNP) workers to be located in manufacturing, Italians were less likely (Waldinger, 2007b, pp. 18–21). This would imply, from the segmented assimilation perspective, that Poles should have had higher incomes than Italians. In fact, the reverse was the case. Moreover, Poles did not narrow the income gap between themselves and NWNP workers, while Italians did. Thus, while finding work in the manufacturing sector did not produce the expected results, it appears that Italians found an alternative route to economic advancement. Precisely what this finding means for contemporary immigrants inhabiting a society that has been transformed by deindustrialization is not clear. However, one reasonable conclusion to be drawn is that the relationship between manufacturing jobs and upward mobility has been overstated.

Despite these problems with segmented assimilation theory, it has the virtue of attempting to connect immigrant socioeconomic destinations to different social class locations. If classical assimilation theory paid scant attention to class, even with Gordon's (1964) call for consideration of what he called "ethclass," this is a salutary development—one that represents less of a break with the older theoretical tradition than an emendation of it.

One problematic feature of the idea of segmented assimilation is that, in offering a dichotomous description of entry into either the upwardly mobile middle class or the underclass, the model oversimplifies a more complex picture (Waldinger & Feliciano, 2004). Although it may be that the economy looks more like an hourglass than it did before, the metaphor can mislead insofar as immigrants are to be found in the working class as well as the underclass and the educated middle class. As Alba and Nee (2003, p. 8) point out, the concept also carries the risk of treating the culture of the

underclass as static and immune to outside cultural influences. Related to this point, it also carries with it a tendency to overlook the fact that not all members of the underclass are embedded in an adversarial culture. Nevertheless, the significance of segmented assimilation is that it calls attention to the fact that the location of immigrants in the class structure plays a significant role in shaping distinctive incorporative paths.

That being said, Gans (2007) has recently reminded immigration scholars that assimilation and economic mobility are interrelated but distinct processes. He suggests that during the earlier phase of immigration research, it was presumed that upward mobility would occur over time and across generations, and therefore there was a tendency to convolute assimilation and mobility. Stepping back from this tendency, he suggests that one of the tasks today is to consider the extent to which assimilation leads to mobility, and vice versa—or in other words, without using such Weberian language, he calls for a consideration of the nature of the elective affinity between the two. In making this case, Gans (2007, p. 161) stresses that cultural assimilation (acculturation) and structural assimilation "refer to people's adaptation to changing conditions, and all those who undergo any kind of adaptation are thus likely to acculturate and assimilate as a result."

New Directions II: Boundaries and the Mainstream

In comparison to segmented assimilation's focus on the connection between assimilation and mobility, Richard Alba and Victor Nee (2003, pp. 35–66; for earlier versions, see Alba, 1998, and Alba & Nee, 1997) have produced a revisionist theory of assimilation that gets at Gans' point in the preceding paragraphs, an approach that they refer to simply as "new assimilation theory." Influenced by the new institutionalism in sociology and building on the "forms-of-capital" model formulated by Nee and Sanders (2001), their theory is intended to both link agency to structure and the microlevel to the macrolevel. Furthermore, the theory is intended to be sensitive to historical and structural contexts.

Alba and Nee (2003, p. 38) distinguish between proximate and distal causes, the former referring to factors operating at the individual and group network level and the latter to the macrostructural level, focusing for instance on the role of major societal institutions, particularly the state and the economy. From the agency side of the equation, their framework calls for considering differentials in financial, human, and social capital among immigrants and the varied ways these resources are deployed, both by individuals and collectivities (this is an approach that Alba and Nee clearly share

with segmented assimilation theorists). From the structure side, they seek to locate these deployments in terms of the existing institutional mechanisms that either facilitate or inhibit assimilation. Of particular significance in the post–civil rights United States is the impact that the rights revolution has had on both the potential for and modes of incorporation of immigrants and other minorities. In this regard, the state plays a critical role in structuring and enforcing mechanisms for incorporation, and its impact has been profound in challenging discrimination, particularly in the workplace (Alba & Nee, 2003, pp. 53–55; see also Collins, 2001).

The central concept employed in the new assimilation theory is that of boundaries, which in the area of ethnic studies is usually associated with the work of Fredrik Barth (1969). Barth famously argued that the boundaries dividing ethnic groups are more significant than cultural similarities or differences. The idea that boundaries are socially constructed rather than being givens has since become a taken-for-granted assumption in ethnic and racial studies. In this regard, this subfield is not so unique for, as Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár (2002) have illustrated, boundaries and the related concept of borders have increasingly been employed by social scientists in a wide range of fields, including social and collective identity; class, ethnic/racial, and gender/sexual identity inequalities; the professions; science; communities; and national identity. Andreas Wimmer (2008, p. 970) has recently attempted to move beyond constructivism, treating boundaries as the outcome of "the classificatory struggles and negotiations between actors situated in a social field." In this article, Wimmer (2008, p. 985) notes that Alba's recent work (he cites a solo-authored article rather than the coauthored work with Nee) can be seen as emerging out of an intellectual heritage that begins with Weber and leads to Barth.

Boundaries are central to Alba and Nee's *Remaking the American Mainstream*. In this work, they "distinguish among three boundary-related processes: boundary crossing, boundary blurring, and boundary shifting" (Alba & Nee, 2003, p. 60). This is not an original formulation, but rather builds on the work of Rainer Bauböck (1994) and in particular that of Aristide Zolberg and Long Litt Woon (1999). Bauböck distinguished between the first two types of boundary process. The first of these processes—boundary crossing—occurs at the individual level and does not entail the altering of the boundary itself. It does not make a bright boundary blurry nor does it either expand the boundary or shift its location. Rather, the boundary remains intact as an individual opts to exit one group and enter into another. Assimilation posed in terms of boundary crossing means that the individual departs the marginalized outside group and enters the mainstream. The second process is blurring, which is a group phenomenon brought about by situations in which the

boundary demarcating "us" and "them" becomes less clear, and thus calls into question where people are located. Zolberg and Woon (1999) add to Bauböck's two boundary processes the third: boundary shifting. Here, as the term implies, the boundary moves rather than individuals moving.

It is worth quoting Zolberg and Woon at length to understand these three processes and their implications for evolving relationships between immigrants and the host society:

1. Individual *boundary crossing,* without any change in the structure of the receiving society and leaving the distinction between insiders and outsiders unaffected. This is the commonplace process whereby immigrants change themselves by acquiring some of the attributes of the host identity. Examples include replacing their mother tongue with the host language, naturalization, and religious conversion.

2. *Boundary blurring,* based on a broader definition of integration—one that affects the structure (i.e., the legal, social, and cultural boundaries) of the receiving society. Its core feature is the tolerance of multiple memberships and an overlapping of collective identities hitherto thought to be separate and mutually exclusive; it is the taming or domestication of what was once seen as "alien" differences. Examples include formal or informal public bilingualism, the possibility of dual nationality, and the institutionalization of immigrant faiths (including public recognition, where relevant).

3. *Boundary shifting,* which denotes a reconstruction of a group's identity, whereby the line differentiating members from nonmembers is relocated, either in the direction of inclusion or exclusion. This is a more comprehensive process, which brings about a more fundamental redefinition of the situation. By and large, the rhetoric of pro-immigration activists and of immigrants themselves can be read as arguments on behalf of the expansion of boundaries to encompass newcomers, while that of the anti-immigrant groups can be read as an attempt to redefine them restrictively in order to exclude them. (Zolberg & Woon, 1999, pp. 8–9)

Alba and Nee accept this model, as well as Zolberg and Woon's (1999, p. 9) claim that "boundary shifting can occur only after substantial boundary crossing and boundary blurring have taken place." Their empirical focus for the post-1965 immigrants is on boundary blurring, which they consider to be distinctly characteristic of the contemporary second generation, which has entered a society more receptive to difference than in the past. In contrast, boundary shifting is little discussed.

Boundary crossing is perceived as having been far more characteristic of immigrants and their children during the last great migratory wave to the United States, and as less common today. Alba and Nee (2003, p. 63) cite as

an example the attempts made in the past to make physical changes by resorting to cosmetic surgery in order to eliminate what was seen as a distinctly ethnic look. They point to the popularity among Jews of "nose jobs." Another common form of boundary crossing occurred when individuals shed their ethnic-sounding names for WASP substitutes. While this was commonplace among movie stars and entertainers, it was not limited to this group. One could find it, for example, among sociologists, witnessed in Milton Meyer Goldberg's decision in 1941 to legally change his name to Milton Myron Gordon (Gordon, 1978, p. vii) and when Meyer R. Schkolnick was transformed into Robert K. Merton.

Boundary crossing was the likely option for Jews seeking to assimilate in a context characterized by a bright boundary. Alba (2006, p. 349) points to Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America,* a novel located in the Nazi era, as "a reminder of the bright boundaries that once governed Jewish-Gentile relations in the U.S." However, he contends that the bright boundary has in recent decades given way to boundary blurring, which leads to a situation in which ethnic distinctions come to play a less significant role in shaping intergroup relations. The form of assimilation resulting from blurring differs from that characteristic of crossing. In the latter, the conversionlike move across boundaries produces a radical disjuncture between people's past identities and their new identities, the consequence of being "*forced to choose* between the mainstream and their group of origin" (Alba, 2006, p. 351).

By contrast, blurring occurs when the mainstream's boundary is "relatively porous and absorbs elements of the minority culture. In other words, boundary blurring is brought about because cultural change is not limited to the minority group; it occurs to the majority group as well, and therefore the process of acculturation is to some extent a two-sided affair" (Alba, 2006, p. 351). The sort of assimilation made possibly by boundary blurring can lead to the maintenance of a meaningful and substantive minority group identity, something that Alba thinks can be more substantive than the thinner version of ethnic identity maintenance depicted in Gans' (1979) symbolic ethnicity and Waters' (1990) "ethnic options" thesis. Alba (2006, p. 356) suggests that it "lends itself to hyphenated, if not hybrid, identities, which allow individuals to feel that they remain part of the group of origin." Although he does not offer much by way of empirical contrast, he appears to think that blurred-boundary assimilation leads to a form of assimilation that not only differs from the bright boundary conversion version, but also from a "vaguely imagined multiculturalism" (Alba, 2006, p. 357).

In a comparative study of Mexicans immigrants in the United States, Turks in Germany, and North Africans in France, Alba (2005) attempts to illustrate the comparative utility of the boundary concept for research on assimilation.

He discusses citizenship, race, language, and religion as the three most salient markers used in the construction of boundaries and observes that they are deployed in different ways in different societal contexts. The question he poses is whether these three groups confront bright or blurred boundaries in their efforts to become incorporated into their host society's respective mainstreams. His conclusion is that to large extent Mexicans confront a blurred-boundary situation, with race confounding that somewhat. On the other hand, the two Muslim groups in France and Germany to large extent inhabit societies in which the boundaries remain bright.

The main criticism to date of the new assimilation theory does not challenge its approach to boundaries. Indeed, if Wimmer's (2008) earlier mentioned article is any indication, the present constitutes a return on the part of immigration scholars to boundaries—whether it be articulated in terms of a return to the Weber/Barth tradition or an embrace of a perspective most closely associated with Bourdieu. Rather than taking exception to the idea of boundaries, Waldinger (2003) has questioned the idea of a mainstream. Linked to this, he argues that Alba and Nee are mistaken when they contend that assimilation entails a "decline of an ethnic distinction" (Alba & Nee, 2003, p. 11). Rather, Waldinger (2003, p. 255) contends, it refers to a "transmutation." Arguing that there cannot be a mainstream without a sidestream, he concludes that this means that ethnicity persists, both at the center and on the periphery.

In a subsequent article, Waldinger (2007c, p. 366) argues that the key point about assimilation is that it involves transforming foreigners into Americans, imbuing them with a particularistic identity that sets them apart from non-Americans and as such is connected to the state's process of closure whereby it seeks to create and maintain a "container society." Alba's (2008) response is that in "two-way" assimilation, the majority also changes as a result of boundary blurring.

Conclusion

This comment leads from these recent efforts to revise assimilation theory in order to address its presumed earlier defects while also recasting it to address that which is distinctive about contemporary immigrant incorporation. By using the term "container society," Waldinger is raising a key issue developed by theorists of transnationalism, to which we turn in the following chapter. Neither spokespersons for segmented assimilation or new assimilation theory have attempted to link these concepts to transnationalism (it should be noted that although Portes is a theorist of transnationalism, his work has not attempted to connect assimilation and transnationalism). In

focusing on how immigrants and their offspring do or do not manage to become incorporated and on what terms, the role of the state, the larger public, and transnational actors have been largely undeveloped, despite the stated intentions of its key advocates. As will be seen in Chapter 5, such is not the case for transnational theorists. Some central figures associated with transnationalism have been critics of assimilation theory in its various guises. However, others agree with Waldinger (2007c, p. 343; see also Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2004) that assimilation and transnationalism ought to be construed as processes that are "inextricably intertwined." We will explore Waldinger's claim.

Given that the focus of this recent work has been on the new second generation, new assimilation theory has not attended to concrete instances of boundary shifting. Agreeing with Zolberg and Woon (1999) that this is only likely to occur after considerable crossing and blurring, the idea that boundaries can be reconfigured in such a way that the society either expands the prospects of inclusion or, conversely, that it becomes more exclusive is postulated but remains underdeveloped. Alba and Nee (2003, pp. 141–145; see also Alba, 1999) pay relatively scant attention to multiculturalism, and generally they view it as a political project rather than a useful concept relevant to incorporation. In Chapter 6, we take up the topic of multiculturalism, and when we do so, we will see whether it has relevance for the idea of boundary shifting.

In short, in the next two chapters we will attempt to review the histories of two recent and highly contested concepts. In this regard, the objective is the same as in this chapter: to achieve greater clarity in order to better appreciate a concept's relevance for understanding the process of immigrant settlement. Beyond that, we will make an effort to indicate in what ways transnationalism and multiculturalism should be seen as potentially operating as processes in tandem with assimilation rather than as alternatives to it.