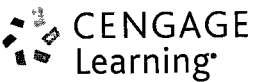


# RACE AND ETHNIC RELATIONS

American and Global Perspectives

TENTH EDITION

Martin N. Marger



Australia • Brazil • Japan • Korea • Mexico • Singapore • Spain • United Kingdom • United States

**Race and Ethnic Relations:  
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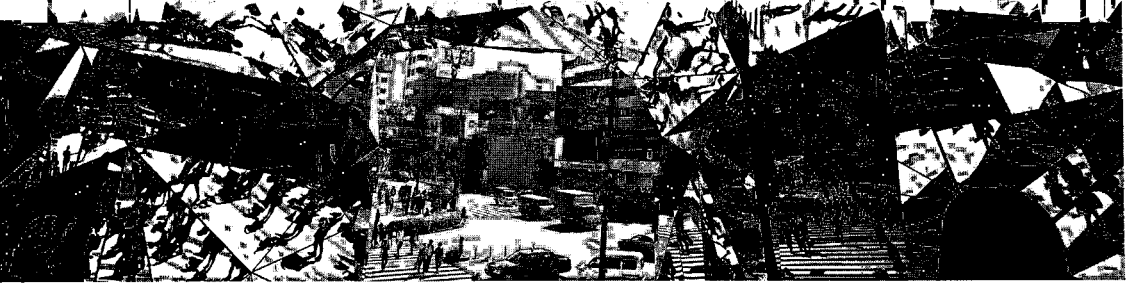
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# PATTERNS OF ETHNIC RELATIONS

CHAPTER

# 4

## Assimilation and Pluralism

The chief question we pursue in this chapter is, "What is the nature of relations among diverse groups in a multiethnic society?" Specifically, when various ethnic groups meet, what is the outcome of that contact? We have already seen that the emergence of a system of ethnic stratification, with its attendant prejudice and discrimination, is most common. But other dimensions and processes of group relations create a variety of interethnic patterns.

Judging from frequent news accounts of violence and general hostilities in multiethnic societies, it would seem that ethnic relations are, as a rule, conflictual. Indeed, almost all theorists have viewed conflict as a fundamental, if not permanent, feature of relations between ethnic groups. Donald Young's observation more than eight decades ago seems no less accurate today: "Group antagonisms seem to be inevitable when two peoples in contact with each other may be distinguished by differentiating characteristics, either inborn or cultural, and are actual or potential competitors" (1932:586).

Though they may not always take overt and extreme form, power and conflict are the primary underlying facets of systems of ethnic inequality. The dominant group may mobilize its power through force, ideology, or both to ensure its dominance, and minority groups will respond with counterforce, accommodation, or submission.

Although ethnic relations are, by definition, relations of conflict, certain qualifications to this maxim must be kept in mind. First, ethnic conflict is not maintained at a constant rate, does not take the same form, and is not based on the same factors from one society to another or even within the same society. It is obviously more intense and sustained in some cases than in others. Ethnic conflict can be reduced, and some societies—though rare—may even achieve a system whereby groups live side by side for long periods in a generally harmonious state. Switzerland provides such an example. Here four languages are spoken, and the society is further subdivided along two main religious lines. Yet, linguistic and religious tolerance have characterized Swiss ethnic relations, and serious conflict has been avoided for many generations.

It should also be understood that conflict is not characteristic only of multiethnic societies, nor is *ethnic* conflict the only or even chief form in all societies, even those that are ethnically heterogeneous. Societal conflict is based on power relations that stem from differences in class, age, gender, and numerous other social factors in addition to ethnicity.

Finally, no matter how discordant or peaceful they may be, intergroup relations in multiethnic societies do not remain fixed. Internal migrations, immigration from other societies, political events, and varying economic conditions continually force revisions in public policies and create the social conditions that lead to change. At particular times, societies may move in the direction of either more harmonious relations among groups or greater separation and more intense conflict.

## THEORETICAL MODELS OF ETHNIC RELATIONS

Sociologists have proposed theoretical models that describe patterns of intergroup relations in multiethnic societies (Barth and Noel, 1972; Burkey, 1978; Marden and Meyer, 1978; Schermerhorn, 1970) or cycles of relations through which such societies presumably pass (Bogardus, 1930; Gordon, 1964; Park, 1924). These theories have suggested that ethnic groups follow one of two paths: they either increasingly blend together or remain segregated. Most simply, *groups may become more alike culturally and interact with one another more freely*—this is **assimilation**; or *they may remain culturally distinct and socially segregated*—this is **pluralism**. The latter is of two types, depending on the distribution of political and economic power among groups. In the first type, culturally and structurally distinct groups are relatively balanced and proportionate in political and economic resources; in the second type, they are unequal politically and economically. These differences will be explained later in more detail.

### CONFLICT AND ORDER

As models of interethnic relations, assimilation and pluralism are related to the two broad theoretical paradigms in sociology, *order* and *conflict*. These paradigms pertain not simply to specific parts or aspects of societies (like ethnic relations) but to *all* social structures and relations. They are intended to explain generally how societies are sustained and how they change.

Order theorists, whose tradition is most heavily influenced by the late-nineteenth-century French sociologist Émile Durkheim, *see society as a relatively balanced system made up of differently functioning but interrelated parts*. In this view, society is held together and social order maintained through a consensus of values among its groups and through the imperatives of functional interdependence. In contrast, **conflict theorists**, beginning with Karl Marx, *see societies as held together not by broad agreements among groups but by the power of dominant classes and ruling elites to impose their will on others*. Stability and order are maintained through coercion, not consensus. Whereas order theorists stress the manner in which societies maintain cohesion and balance, conflict theorists emphasize the disintegrative aspects of societies and the manner in which they change. As many have pointed out,

societies are of course neither wholly ordered nor wholly in conflict, and we must therefore account for both (Dahrendorf, 1959). Nonetheless, sociologists have favored one or the other of these broad theoretical perspectives in their analyses.

Assimilation and pluralism, as models of interethnic relations, correspond closely with these two general sociological paradigms. Order theorists have stressed the assimilation side, emphasizing the ways in which different groups progressively become more unified and indistinct. Conflict theorists, in contrast, emphasize the inequality among ethnic groups and the patterns of dominance and subordination that develop among them. They have thus preferred a pluralistic model of ethnic relations that underscores the persistence of group differences and divisions.

For many years, American sociologists traditionally favored the assimilationist model (Metzger, 1971). The prevailing assumption was that multiethnic societies like the United States tend to gradually but inevitably move toward a fusion of diverse groups. American and world patterns of ethnic conflict in recent decades, however, have seriously undermined this assimilationist bias. Sociologists today increasingly recognize the complexity of interethnic relations and seem to have accepted the inevitability of some degree of pluralism and conflict.

The investigations of American ethnic relations in Part II and of several other multiethnic societies in Part III generally employ a conflict approach; thus the pluralistic aspects of these societies are highlighted. Theoretical frameworks in ethnic relations vary in utility, however, depending on the specific problems to be explained. In general, assimilation, stressing progressive cohesion, applies to groups in multiethnic societies that have entered as voluntary immigrants, whereas some form of pluralism is relevant to those groups that have entered through involuntary immigration, conquest, or expansion. (Recall the discussion in Chapter 2 regarding different forms of initial contact among culturally or physically distinct groups leading to different patterns of ethnic relations.) In the remainder of this chapter, we look more closely at these two general processes and the more specific levels and forms of each.

## ASSIMILATION

Most simply, assimilation means increasing similarity or likeness. As Yinger defines it, assimilation is "a process of boundary reduction that can occur when members of two or more societies or of smaller cultural groups meet" (1981:249). Similarly, Harold Abramson defines it as "the processes that lead to greater homogeneity in society" (1980:150). Each of these definitions stresses that assimilation is best seen as a path or trajectory on which ethnic groups may move. It is a process, not a fixed condition or state of relations.

The end point of this homogenizing process is, for an ethnic group, the disappearance of any cultural or racial distinction setting it off from other groups (Alba and Nee, 1999). Or, for the society as a whole, it is "the biological, cultural, social, and psychological fusion of distinct groups to create a new ethnically undifferentiated society" (Barth and Noel, 1972:336). Following this idea to its logical end point, with complete assimilation there are no longer distinct ethnic groups. Rather, there is a homogeneous society in which ethnicity is not a basis of social differentiation and plays no role in the distribution of wealth, power, and prestige. This does not mean, of course, that other forms of social differentiation and stratification such

as age, gender, and class do not exist; it means only that the ethnic forms are no longer operative. In essence, a society in which all groups have perfectly assimilated is no longer a multiethnic society.

This complete form of assimilation, however, is rarely achieved. Instead, assimilation takes different forms and is evident in different degrees. In other words, it is a variable that "can range from the smallest beginnings of interaction and cultural exchange to the thorough fusion of the groups" (Yinger, 1981:249). Therefore, in examining the assimilation of ethnic groups, the question that must concern us is not simply "Are groups becoming more alike?" but "To what extent and in what ways are they becoming more alike?"

### DIMENSIONS OF ASSIMILATION

Assimilation can be seen in four distinct, though related, dimensions: cultural, structural, biological, and psychological. Our concern is mostly with the first two, but let's briefly examine each of these.

**CULTURAL ASSIMILATION** *The cultural dimension of assimilation involves the adoption by one ethnic group of another's cultural traits—language, religion, diet, and so on.* This process is sometimes referred to as **acculturation** (Gordon, 1964; Yinger, 1981). Almost always, weaker (that is, minority) groups take on the cultural traits of the dominant group, though there is ordinarily some exchange in the opposite direction as well. This uneven exchange occurs not only because of the dominant group's superior power but also because of the social advantages for the subordinates in adapting to the dominant group's ways. As van den Berghe explains, "It often pays to learn the ways of the rich, the powerful and the numerous; in the process one becomes more like them and, by that token, often becomes more acceptable to them" (1981:215). The end point of the process of cultural assimilation implies a situation in which the previously distinct ethnic groups are no longer distinguishable on the basis of their behavior and values.

Yinger (1981) has noted that when groups are not highly antagonistic or culturally very disparate, acculturation can be additive rather than substitutive. That is, one group may augment its native culture with select elements of the other's rather than substituting entirely. If the most basic cultural components (like language and religion) are not exchanged, however, the assimilation process can proceed only to a minimal point.

**STRUCTURAL ASSIMILATION** Whereas cultural assimilation refers to a blending of behaviors, values, and beliefs, **structural assimilation** refers to an increasing degree of social interaction among different ethnic groups. Specifically, with structural assimilation, *members of minority ethnic groups are dispersed throughout the society's various institutions and increasingly enter into social contacts with members of the dominant group.*

Structural assimilation may occur at two distinct levels of social interaction: the *primary* (or informal) and the *secondary* (or formal). Primary relations are those occurring within relatively small and intimate groups, in particular the family and friendship cliques. Relations among members of these groups are affective, and the

group's purposes extend well beyond instrumental goals. There is, most simply, an emotional bond among group members, and relations are therefore close and long lasting. Secondary relations, by contrast, are chiefly within large, impersonal groups such as the school, the workplace, or the polity. These groups are purposeful, designed to fulfill some practical and specific social need; relations among members are thus formal and nonaffective.

Structural assimilation at the primary level implies interaction among members of different ethnic groups within personal networks—entrance into clubs, neighborhoods, friendship circles, and ultimately marriage. In short, people interact in close, personal relations without regard for one another's ethnic identity. Other social traits, such as class, and individual characteristics become more critical than ethnicity. The degree of informal, or primary, structural assimilation of a particular group would be measured using such indicators as rate of intermarriage, club memberships, and residential patterns. The higher the level of interaction with members of the dominant group in these areas of social life, the greater the extent of structural assimilation.

At the secondary level, structural assimilation entails equality of access to power and privilege within the society's major institutions—the economy, government, education, and so on. This means that jobs, housing, schooling, and other key life chances are distributed without regard to people's ethnic affiliation. Essentially, structural assimilation at the secondary level involves, in its ultimate stage, the elimination of minority status. To measure the degree of secondary structural assimilation, we would look at the extent to which a minority ethnic group is approaching parity with the dominant group in the allocation of income and wealth, political power, and education (Hirschman, 1975).

Secondary structural assimilation has often been referred to as *integration* (Burkey, 1978; Davis, 1978; Hunt and Walker, 1974; Simpson, 1968; Vander Zanden, 1983), and we can consider these terms to be synonymous. The essential idea is that *people of diverse ethnic groups are able to participate freely in the various institutions of the larger society, unconstrained by ethnicity.*

This level of structural assimilation involves a legal termination of group discrimination based on ethnicity. Inequality exists, of course, but is founded on bases other than ethnic group membership. With integration, ethnic groups may remain distinct, and members may continue to identify with them. Similarly, out-groups may continue to recognize and respond to them as ethnic groups. What has been achieved, however, is a measure of political and economic equality.<sup>1</sup>

The distinction between primary and secondary levels of structural assimilation is important because it is clear that the entrance of ethnic minorities into formal relations with the dominant group must precede relations within intimate social settings. Groups may achieve a significant degree of secondary structural assimilation without

<sup>1</sup> Schermerhorn (1970) has used the term integration in a somewhat different but related way. As he defines it, integration is "a process whereby units or elements of a society are brought into an active and coordinated compliance with the ongoing activities and objectives of the dominant group" (66). The key to integration in this sense is a mutual acceptance of the scope and nature of activities and group objectives by both the dominant group and minority groups. Thus societies may even be integrated around a system in which extreme segregation and inequality are accepted by all parties. Schermerhorn postulates that "when the ethos of the subordinates has values common to those in the ethos of the superordinates, integration (coordination of objectives) will be facilitated; when the values are contrasting or contradictory, integration will be obstructed" (172). See also Kuper (1968).

moving beyond this level into the primary type. Most Euro-American ethnic groups, for example, have reached a point at which they enjoy relatively equal access to jobs, political authority, and other important life chances. They have, in other words, entered into full participation in all institutional areas of American society. Moreover, for most, primary relations are no longer limited largely to the ethnic group. For African Americans and other racial-ethnic groups, however, although they have begun to achieve substantial integration in the economy, polity, and education, that has not been the case in clubs, cliques, neighborhoods, and intermarriage.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSIMILATION** Our focus is primarily on how various groups interrelate; our concern, therefore, is chiefly with the cultural and structural dimensions of assimilation. But there is an individual dimension of assimilation, in which attention falls on particular members of an ethnic group rather than on the group as a whole. This is part of the social psychology of ethnic relations and concerns the extent to which individuals have been absorbed into the larger society and identify with it.

With **psychological assimilation**, members of an ethnic group undergo a change in self-identity. To the extent that *individuals feel themselves part of the larger society rather than an ethnic group*, they are psychologically assimilated. As psychological assimilation progresses, people identify themselves less in ethnic terms. Whereas first-generation immigrants and their children will define themselves as Italian American or Irish American, by the third generation ethnicity for most is no longer a major component in response to the question, "Who am I?" This level of assimilation consists not simply of becoming culturally like members of the mainstream society but accepting that society as "home" and thoroughly identifying with it.

Psychological assimilation implies a change not only in self-identification but also in identification by others. Although individual members of an ethnic group may see themselves as simply part of the larger society rather than as ethnics, outsiders may continue to identify them as members of their group, thereby impeding psychological—and structural—assimilation. As Yinger notes, "Prejudice on the part of a dominant group may prevent the granting of full membership in a society to members of minority groups, even though the latter think of themselves only in terms of the larger society" (1981:253). Visibility is, of course, critical here. Those with salient marks of ethnic identity—physical characteristics, in particular—are unable to fully achieve out-group recognition as "nonethnics."

Some individuals may find themselves unable to feel fully part of the larger society or the ethnic group. Park (1928) and Stonequist (1937) used the term "marginal men" to describe these people. First-generation immigrants often find themselves in a situation where they are pulled in the direction of the culture of the new society but remain culturally and psychologically tied to the old. Those who are not clearly part of one racial category or another also may be marginal people. In American society in recent years, such individuals have begun to be recognized by themselves and others as constituting a unique "mixed-race" or "multiracial" category.

Although Park, in a classic work (1928), described marginal people as experiencing psychological turmoil, not all of them find difficulty in social adaptation. Some successfully adapt to two cultures, shuttling between them, and others may use their marginality to advantage by serving as middlemen between dominant and minority groups. Moreover, where they constitute a large population, marginal

people may form communities of their own, occupying an in-between status in the society's ethnic hierarchy (Shibutani and Kwan, 1965). Recall the description of middleman minorities in Chapter 2.

The social psychology of ethnic identity is a complex matter, the details of which go well beyond our present purposes.<sup>2</sup> Suffice it to say that within any multiethnic society, individuals may vary widely in the extent to which they identify with an ethnic group or choose to disregard ethnicity as part of their self-identity. Much depends not only on visibility but also on the political and social conditions that may affect the individual costs and values of an ethnic identity. For example, whites in American society are permitted much latitude in their choice of personal identity; the same is not the case for racial-ethnic groups.

**BIOLOGICAL ASSIMILATION** **Biological assimilation**, or **amalgamation**, represents the ultimate stage in the assimilation process. At this point, intermarriage has occurred to such an extent that *there is a biological merging of formerly distinct groups*. They are indistinguishable not only culturally and structurally but physically as well. Some degree of amalgamation is a common by-product of group contact and interaction. But the biological fusion of diverse groups is an outcome of interethnic relations that can occur only over a very long period. Mexico, for one, is a society that seems to have moved far along toward this long-range objective (van den Berghe, 1978); Brazil, as will be seen in Chapter 15, has also progressed in this direction.

## THEORIES OF ASSIMILATION

**PARK'S RACE RELATIONS CYCLE** American sociologists in the 1920s, led by Robert Park, were intrigued by the ethnic polyglot that had emerged in cities of the U.S. Northeast and Midwest, and they began to focus their studies on the social forces that brought these groups together or sustained their differences. Park was one of the first to suggest a cycle of race or ethnic relations through which groups would pass in a sequence of stages, leading ultimately to full assimilation.

Park explained that groups first come into *contact* through migration and subsequently engage in *competition*, often characterized by conflict. Out of such competition eventually emerges some form of *accommodation* among the groups, leading finally to *assimilation*. Park maintained that this four-stage cycle pertained to race and ethnic relations everywhere, not simply the United States. Moreover, he saw the sequence as "apparently progressive and irreversible" (1950:150).

A view of ethnic assimilation not unlike Park's race relations cycle has been generally popular in American society. The prevailing thought is that over several generations, group boundaries break down, and the society becomes more homogeneous. However, Park's model has been subject to much sociological criticism over the years. Some have noted the cycle's lack of applicability to many groups (Lyman, 1968b). Although it has seemed to describe fairly accurately the experiences of most European immigrant groups in the United States (as well as in Australia, Canada, Argentina, and other immigrant societies), it does not conform to the patterns

<sup>2</sup> The issues of ethnic identity at the individual level are detailed in De Vos and Romanucci-Ross (1975), Horowitz (1975), Romanucci-Ross and De Vos (1995), and Shibutani and Kwan (1965).

displayed by more salient—that is, racial-ethnic—groups and those that have entered involuntarily.

Critics of Park's and other cyclical theories of ethnic relations have also pointed out that such cycles are rarely complete; that is, there are too many truncated instances (Shibutani and Kwan, 1965). Interethnic contact can produce stable outcomes—such as exclusion, pluralism, or continued ethnic stratification—that do not lead inevitably to assimilation. Finally, some have criticized the model's claim of irreversibility (Barth and Noel, 1972; Berry and Tischler, 1978). They note that the cycle may be terminated at any point, and groups may even revert to earlier stages.<sup>3</sup>

**GORDON'S STAGES OF ASSIMILATION** Park's model, despite its shortcomings, stands as a precursor to subsequent, more sophisticated theories of the assimilation process. Perhaps the most precise and compelling of these is Milton Gordon's (1964).

Like Park, Gordon explained assimilation as a series of stages, or steps, through which various groups pass. But rather than following a straight line leading from contact to eventual absorption, groups may remain indefinitely at one or another of these stages. The seven stages that Gordon outlined extend from cultural assimilation, the least intense, to civic assimilation, the most complete. At this last stage, there is an absence of prejudice and discrimination against the group, its members have fully adopted the dominant group's values, and they share in the society's power structure without regard to their ethnic origin (Table 4.1). The first two stages, cultural and structural assimilation, however, are the most important.

TABLE 4.1 | GORDON'S STAGES OF ASSIMILATION

Stage	Characteristics
Cultural or behavioral assimilation (acculturation)	Change of cultural patterns to those of host society
Structural assimilation	Large-scale entrance into cliques, clubs, and institutions of host society on primary group level
Marital assimilation (amalgamation)	Large-scale intermarriage
Identificational assimilation	Development of sense of peoplehood based exclusively on host society
Attitude receptional assimilation	Absence of prejudice
Behavior receptional assimilation	Absence of discrimination
Civic assimilation	Absence of value and power conflict

Source: *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* by Gordon (1964) 67w from p. 71. By permission of Oxford University Press, USA.

<sup>3</sup> Geschwender (1978) disputes the interpretation of Park's race relations cycle as absolute, maintaining instead that it is "situationally specific." He sees Park's cycle as an ideal type, not to be taken as inevitable. Rumbaut (1999) also points out that Park recognized that the eventual outcome of relations among racial groups could take several different forms.

As noted earlier, cultural assimilation, or acculturation, denotes the adoption by a minority ethnic group of the dominant group's cultural patterns—language, political beliefs, and so on. But acculturation, explains Gordon, does not assure movement to the next phase. Minority ethnic groups may become very much like the dominant group in behavior and values but still remain structurally segregated.

Structural assimilation, the second stage, is essentially what was previously referred to as primary, or informal, structural assimilation. This stage is the most critical for it is the key to all subsequent stages: "Once structural assimilation has occurred, either simultaneously with or subsequent to acculturation, all of the other types of assimilation will naturally follow" (Gordon, 1964:81). Presumably, as people of minority and dominant ethnic groups interact within close, intimate social settings, the other stages of assimilation necessarily occur, much like falling dominoes: minority group members increasingly intermarry with those of the dominant group, relinquish their ethnic identity, no longer encounter prejudice and discrimination, and fully agree with the dominant group on issues involving values and power conflicts. Indeed, the remaining stages (three through seven) in Gordon's scheme can be subsumed under structural assimilation. The dominant group's acceptance of members of a minority ethnic group into primary relations implies, for example, the absence of prejudice and discrimination and the likelihood of increased intermarriage.

It is with structural assimilation, then, that full assimilation involving all other stages becomes inevitable. But, as Gordon notes, cultural assimilation, the first stage, does not necessarily lead to structural assimilation; it may continue to be the extent of assimilation for many generations (see also van den Berghe, 1981; Wagley and Harris, 1958). Minorities may take on all or most of the cultural ways of the dominant group but still be refused entry into primary relations with its members. African Americans are an evident illustration of this. Though thoroughly assimilated regarding the major elements of the dominant culture (such as language and religion), they remain unassimilated at the structural level (specifically the *primary* structural level). In short, groups may become culturally alike yet remain in relatively segregated subsocieties.

Several criticisms have been made of Gordon's stages of assimilation model. One serious shortcoming lies in its understanding of structural assimilation, stage two, as entailing interaction with the dominant group only at the primary level. Intergroup relations, however, occur at the secondary level as well and indeed are antecedent to primary relations in any significant degree. To what extent do members of a minority ethnic group enter into positions of power in the society's economic, political, and other key institutions? To what extent are they afforded equal opportunities in employment and education? These are significant measures of structural assimilation—at the secondary level—that Gordon does not consider (Marger, 1979). African Americans, for example, appear to have realized substantial integration in recent years in the areas of work and government. They have, in other words, experienced increasing secondary structural assimilation. That they have not accomplished an equivalent level of interaction with whites at the primary level would, in Gordon's view, imply that little structural assimilation had occurred.

Moreover, Gordon seems to suggest that if minorities do not enter into primary relations with the dominant group, it is because the dominant group has held them out. But such social segregation may be in some part voluntary.

Despite these omissions, Gordon's model is valuable to the analysis of interethnic relations primarily because it spells out the intricacies of the assimilation process and its various forms. Assimilation, as Gordon demonstrates, is clearly not a simple, straightforward movement, as earlier theories had seemed to imply.

**SEGMENTED ASSIMILATION** Some contemporary immigration theorists have explained that assimilation is more varied than the classical models have presumed. They point out that *assimilation is not a single process and may occur in different domains entailing different reference populations* (Brubaker, 2001, 2004; Fernández Kelly and Schauflyer, 1996; Waters, 1999). There are, as a result, diverse outcomes of the adaptation process of immigrants and, especially, their children—hence, the term **segmented assimilation** (Portes and Zhou, 1993, 1994). Ordinarily it has been assumed that movement toward assimilation implies adoption of the dominant group's culture and incorporation into the mainstream social structure. The idea of segmented assimilation suggests, however, that different groups, or elements of groups, may assimilate to an oppositional culture or to another culture clearly outside the mainstream. Rogers Brubaker (2004) explains that the traditional focus of assimilation therefore has shifted from the single question (how much assimilation?) to several questions (assimilation in what respect, over what period of time, and to what reference population?).

Contemporary immigrants in American society illustrate well the notion of segmented assimilation. As will be seen in Chapter 5, most are not European in origin and thus are perceived as racially different; for many, this blocks the path of rapid assimilation into the core culture (that is, "white, middle-class"). Also, the U.S. economy no longer provides opportunities for upward mobility through jobs in manufacturing and other industries as it did for immigrants of earlier periods, thereby preventing the movement of a large segment of the current immigrant population into the mainstream workforce.

Given these conditions, the children of immigrants may still move in the traditional path of assimilation, adopting the dominant culture and integrating into the dominant society. But it is also possible for them to assimilate to a minority culture, thus putting at risk their chances of upward social or economic mobility. Children of West Indian immigrants (from Haiti, Jamaica, and other Caribbean countries), for example, may drift toward African American culture rather than that of the white middle class (Kasinitz et al., 2001). And in a third variant of assimilation, under certain conditions immigrant families may advance economically, yet deliberately seek to preserve their ethnic culture and solidarity. In such cases, by instilling the ethnic culture parents try to protect their children from assimilation into an oppositional culture that may lead to downward mobility (Hirschman et al., 1999). Immigrant Asian families often adopt this path, encouraging their children to excel in education while continuing to adhere closely to traditional ethnic values (Zhou, 2004).

## FACTORS AFFECTING ASSIMILATION

Why do some groups in multiethnic societies display a rapid and almost complete assimilation into the larger society, whereas others remain segregated and are the constant targets of prejudice and discrimination? Where assimilation is the prevailing

model of intergroup relations, several factors are important in shaping the experience of different groups: how and when a group enters the society, its size and dispersion, its cultural similarity to the dominant group, and its visibility.

**MANNER OF ENTRANCE** As we saw in Chapter 2, the way in which a group enters the society is critical in determining its place in the ethnic hierarchy; it is also important in accounting for the nature of the group's long-range societal adaptation. Except for those groups that maintain unfaltering separatist goals ("pluralistic minorities," as they were referred to in Chapter 2), groups that enter voluntarily always make a less conflict-ridden adjustment than those that enter involuntarily or those that are conquered by more powerful invaders. Involuntary immigrants or conquered groups remain in a condition of segregation to one degree or another.

The United States presents a clear illustration of this tendency. European ethnic groups, having entered by choice, were able to assimilate culturally at a pace determined in large part by themselves, no matter how strong the pressures to conform. Furthermore, the option of returning to their society of origin was always present and was, in fact, taken by many. By comparison, African Americans and American Indians were absorbed into the society involuntarily; as a result they could not follow similar paths no matter what their intentions or long-range goals (Blau, 1972). As noted in Chapter 2, indigenous groups who are made subordinate at the entrance of an invading group (North American Indians) or who enter involuntarily (African Americans) are left with few options other than resistance to the new social order that is imposed on them. Long-term conflict is thus the usual outcome. Subordinate voluntary immigrants (like Europeans to America), in contrast, are more rapidly assimilated (Lieberson, 1961; Schermerhorn, 1970; van den Berghe, 1976; Wilkie, 1977).

**TIME OF ENTRANCE** In general, the more recent a group's entry into the society, the more resistance there is to its assimilation (Mack, 1963). Other things being equal, the simple factor of time will ease the fear and suspicion that accompany the entrance of strangers. Groups with alien ways are seen differently after they have lived in the society for several generations. Examples abound in the United States, beginning with the influx of large numbers of Irish immigrants in the early nineteenth century. Given the very substantial assimilation of Irish Americans today, the hostile reception encountered by the first generation is easily forgotten.

**DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS** The degree and rate of assimilation for minority ethnic groups is also affected by their size and the concentration of their population (Blau, 1977; Frisbie and Neidert, 1977). The entrance and assimilation of groups relatively small in number will be resisted less forcefully than that of groups representing a competitive threat. Van den Berghe (1981) suggests that smaller groups are assimilated more easily because they have fewer resources and therefore depend on the larger society and because they necessarily interact more frequently with out-group members.

The concentration or dispersion of ethnic groups also bears on their assimilation. Concentration in particular neighborhoods and geographical areas or in certain occupations tends to retard assimilation because the group is better able to retain its cultural ways and resist intrusions of the dominant group (van den Berghe, 1981).

Dispersal, on the other hand, leads to unavoidable contact and interaction with the dominant group and thus speeds up the assimilation process.

**CULTURAL SIMILARITY** No matter how or when the group enters the host society, or what its demographic patterns, assimilation will occur relatively quickly if the group is culturally similar to the dominant group (Berry and Tischler, 1978; van den Berghe, 1981). Those groups in the United States that have followed the assimilation route furthest have, predictably, been culturally closest to Anglo Protestants. In general, the more compatible the culture of the minority group with the dominant group's, the greater will be the depth and speed of assimilation.

**VISIBILITY** In almost all multiethnic societies, the most critical factor in determining the degree and rate of assimilation of ethnic groups is visibility. Where physical differences are obvious, manner of entrance, temporal factors, demographic patterns, and even cultural similarity are of much less consequence. For racial-ethnic groups, structural separation remains far more persistent than for groups that are only culturally distinct. Observers of American ethnic relations have long interpreted the retarded structural assimilation of blacks, for example, as a product chiefly of visibility (Park, 1950; Warner and Srole, 1945; Wirth, 1945; Yinger, 1981). The visibility factor is also evident in the case of Asian Americans who may be culturally indistinguishable from the dominant group, but because of their racial distinction are assumed to be outsiders. Second-, third-, and even fourth-generation Asian Americans are commonly faced with having to respond to questions of "Where do you come from?" or to comments like "You speak English so well."

In short, physical differences delay the process of assimilation more than do other factors. Harold Isaacs has poignantly described this dilemma: "An individual can change his name, acquire a new language, ignore or conceal his origins, disregard or rewrite his history, abandon his ancestral religion or convert to another one, adopt a different nationality, embrace new mores, ethics, philosophies, styles of life. But there is not much he can do to change his body" (1989:46). Thus the more visible the group or individual, the longer and more difficult is the process of structural assimilation.

### ASSIMILATION AS A SOCIETAL GOAL

Assimilation can be viewed as a goal, or ideal, for which multiethnic societies aim. As such, it is sometimes the basis of public policies designed to reduce the cultural and structural divisions between groups. In the United States, for example, measures intended to lessen segregation in various public spheres (housing, schools, work) and to equalize access to power and privilege (affirmative action programs, voting rights) can be understood as outgrowths of a societal commitment to the eventual achievement of complete assimilation for all ethnic groups. However, the form and ultimate objective of assimilation may vary in the minds not only of policy makers but also of both dominant and minority group members.

Essentially there are two possible forms of complete assimilation for which societies may strive, each involving a different objective and thus a somewhat different path.

- Ethnic groups will assimilate to the dominant ethnic group, adopting its cultural ways and seeking integration into its social institutions.
- Groups will assimilate into an entirely new ethnicity in which all groups surrender their ethnic heritage but in the process create a hybrid society with no dominant group as such.

In the United States and most other multiethnic societies, it is the first form, assimilation to the dominant ethnic group, that has prevailed as the long-range goal. The other, hybrid, option is what has been popularly referred to as "the melting pot." Although that idea has had wide currency, it is not what has prevailed for most of American history. Dominant group assimilation, as we will discover in the chapters of Part II, has been expected of new ethnic groups in the past and continues to be expected of the latest immigrants to America.

As long as one group disproportionately controls power resources in the economic and political realms, that group can dictate the shape and direction of minority group adjustment. It is the dominant group that, in the main, mandates or approves policies of acculturation and integration. In the United States, for example, there has never been any question of whose language, whose religious and political principles, and whose basic institutions will prevail. For most of U.S. history they have been those of the dominant Anglo core group and, despite the challenge in recent decades of a more ethnically diverse population and culture, they continue to be upheld. Ideologically, societies may advocate some kind of ethnic melting pot wherein all groups contribute in proportionate amounts to form a new social system (Brazil, as we will see in Chapter 15, has produced something of a cultural hybrid), but in the modern world such a fusion remains an ideal.

As previously noted, however, we should not think that assimilation is a one-way process whereby minority ethnic groups seek out and become like the dominant group, with no change occurring in the opposite direction. Obviously, the assimilation process will be to some extent mutual, with many aspects of minority cultures becoming part of the dominant culture. But the exchange is far short of equal. On the major elements of culture—language, religion, political beliefs, economic practices, and so on—there is little evidence of mutuality, and at the structural level the exchange is even more lopsided. Those aspects of culture and social structure remain firmly controlled by the dominant group, and minority ethnic groups must adjust to them.

## PLURALISM

Like assimilation, pluralism entails several dimensions and forms.<sup>4</sup> In all cases, however, the retention or even strengthening of differences among ethnic groups is presumed. Thus in a general sense pluralism is the opposite of assimilation. Abramson defines pluralism as "conditions that produce sustained ethnic differentiation and continued heterogeneity" (1980:150). In brief, pluralism involves social processes and institutions that encourage group diversity and the maintenance of group boundaries.

<sup>4</sup> Pluralism as applied to political systems refers to the relative dispersion of power among various interest groups in a society. This is different from its usage in describing ethnic relations. See Marger (1987).

Just as assimilation occurs in different degrees and at different stages, so too must pluralism be understood as a variable for groups and societies. Ethnic pluralism never entails an absolute separation of groups. Recall the definition of ethnic group as a distinguishable group *within a larger society*. Thus in a pluralistic society there is always some common political or economic system that binds various ethnic groups together. If this were not so, there would not be a multiethnic society but several distinct societies in themselves. Within the broad confines of a common political or economic system, however, groups may differ widely.

**CULTURAL AND STRUCTURAL PLURALISM** As with assimilation, we can delineate cultural and structural dimensions of pluralism. Cultural pluralism *implies the maintenance of many varied cultural systems within the framework of the larger sociocultural system* (Gordon, 1964). This dimension of pluralism has been referred to in the United States in recent years as **multiculturalism**.

**Structural pluralism** *connotes not simply differences in culture but also the existence in some degree of segregated ethnic communities within which much of social life occurs for group members*. These ethnic subsocieties, or communities, comprise institutions—schools, businesses, churches, and the like—that duplicate to some extent those of the dominant group. Notice how cultural and structural pluralism are basically opposing counterparts of cultural and structural assimilation.

## SYSTEMS OF ETHNIC PLURALISM

Several different types of ethnic relations can be seen among multiethnic societies that are organized around pluralist rather than assimilationist principles.

**EQUALITARIAN PLURALISM** Where **equalitarian pluralism** characterizes interethnic relations, *groups retain their cultural and, for the most part, structural integrity while participating freely and equally within common political and economic institutions* (Barth and Noel, 1972; Shibutani and Kwan, 1965). Some have referred to this condition as **accommodation**, wherein *the minority group "desires equality with, but separation from, the dominant group and the dominant group agrees to this arrangement"* (Kurokawa, 1970:131). Technically, of course, if equality with the dominant group is reached, there are no longer dominant-minority relations; there are relations among ethnic groups, but they are not hierarchical and invidious.

Equalitarian pluralism corresponds, like assimilation, to the order model of society, in which balance and cohesion are emphasized. Differences among groups are recognized and even encouraged, but within the framework of a larger set of agreed-on principles. All groups give allegiance to a common political system, participate in a common economic system, and understand a common set of broad ethical values (Williams, 1977). In a sense, ethnic groups become political interest groups that compete for the society's rewards (Glazer and Moynihan, 1970). But these competitive differences do not lead necessarily to serious cleavages and conflict; rather, they are dealt with by a reasonable give-and-take within the context of the consensual rules of the society.

There may be vast cultural differences among ethnic groups, but their essence is not threatened because tolerance of such differences is integral to the social order.

Relations between ethnic groups are thus confined mainly to functional areas such as government and the marketplace, not affective ones such as the family or friendship circles.

**CORPORATE PLURALISM** In some societies, equalitarian pluralism is formally declared, and much of the structural and cultural separation is upheld by political authorization. In societies such as Switzerland, Belgium, Malaysia, and to some extent, Canada, *the structural and cultural differences among ethnic groups are protected by the state, and institutional provisions are made to encourage an ethnically proportionate distribution of societal rewards.* Gordon (1975, 1981) calls such cases corporate pluralism.

In such pluralistic systems, ethnic units are formally recognized by the government, and political and economic power is allocated on the basis of an ethnic formula. Thus in the political arena legislative seats and other government offices may be apportioned on the basis of ethnicity. Not only is proportionality in the distribution of political benefits assumed, but most important, there is cooperation among leaders of all the significant segments of the plural society.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, on local matters each group maintains a great deal of political autonomy. In the economic realm as well, the objective is an equal distribution of income and jobs among the various groups, proportional to their makeup in the national population (Lijphart, 1977; McRae, 1974; van den Berghe, 1981).

In this type of pluralism, cultural and structural separation are emphasized, not discouraged, and multilingualism is officially sanctioned (Gordon, 1981). Switzerland, with its four official languages—German, French, Italian, and Romansh (the latter spoken by only a very small number)—is perhaps the most obvious and successful multilingual system (McRae, 1983). Canada, with its French- and English-speaking groups, is another familiar multilingual (in this case, bilingual) society, though, as we will see in Chapter 16, multilingualism there has been the source of a severe social divide.

In societies characterized by corporate pluralism, ethnic groups consist mainly of homogeneous, territorially concentrated peoples who have long historic roots in their native area. They have become part of a larger national society either through conquest or by voluntarily relinquishing sovereignty to a central state in order to secure economic and political benefits. Such societies are not at all similar to multiethnic societies like the United States, in which ethnic groups have been formed primarily by voluntary immigrants who came from distant societies, severed most of their native roots, and dispersed geographically after arrival.

The cultural divisions among ethnic groups in corporate pluralistic societies are much sharper than those among groups in the United States, where the English language tends to become a great commonizing factor. Structural separation is also stronger, given the territorial concentration of groups. In Switzerland, for example, each ethnic group remains geographically distinct; and in Canada more than 80 percent of French-speaking people reside in one province, Quebec. By contrast, ethnic groups in

<sup>5</sup> This type of political arrangement has been described by Lijphart (1977) and others (McRae, 1974; van den Berghe, 1981) as *consociational*.

the United States are scattered, though regional concentrations of particular groups are noticeable (such as Mexican Americans in the Southwest or Swedish Americans in the upper Midwest). Ethnic concentrations in the United States more often take the form of urban pockets or neighborhoods.

With their retention of language and their territorial base, ethnic groups in corporate pluralistic systems are integrated only in their mutual allegiance to a larger national government and the need to participate in a national economic system. Ideally, no single group is dominant, and each is afforded an approximately proportionate share of the society's rewards (Wagley and Harris, 1958). No corporate pluralistic society, of course, has met this ideal, although some have achieved a greater degree of group equality than others.

Equalitarian pluralism seems like an ideal way of managing an ethnically divided society and assuring relative equality among the various groups. But if we can judge from contemporary societies that have attempted this path to ethnic harmony, the results are mixed. The breakup of Yugoslavia is a tragic illustration of an equalitarian pluralist system that failed. Here, several ethnic nationalities, living for the most part in distinct territories, made up a state that provided roughly proportional political power for each. But the system collapsed in 1991, giving rise to one of the most brutal episodes of ethnic warfare that has been witnessed in modern Europe. This case is discussed in more detail in Chapter 17. In the case of Canada, with a number of features of this type of pluralism, the results have been far more benign, though not without persistent low-level conflict, as we will see in Chapter 16. Cases like Belgium and Switzerland, where interethnic relations have been balanced and harmonious for many decades, appear to be exceptional, and even in those societies periodic group conflict is evident. Belgium, for example, experienced a national crisis in 2007 when its two regionally concentrated ethnic communities, French-speaking Walloons and Dutch-speaking Flemings, could not reach an agreement on the country's future direction. So serious was the discord that many feared Belgium as a unified nation-state would be irreparably broken up.

The assertion of Wagley and Harris (1958) that pluralistic aims perpetuate some degree of conflict and the subordination of one group by another is well taken. Indeed, conflict, whether latent or active, seems to be endemic to pluralist systems. The level of conflict, however, is much greater in societies with *inequalitarian* pluralist systems, to which we now turn.

**INEQUALITARIAN PLURALISM** Both assimilation and equalitarian pluralism are characteristic of societies that have made the reduction of ethnic inequality a well-established commitment of the state, legitimated by a democratic ideology. With *inequalitarian* pluralism, however, the outcome of ethnic relations is inequality among the various groups. And, that inequality is sanctioned by the state. Although most characteristic of classic colonial societies and racist regimes like South Africa during its period of apartheid, *inequalitarian* pluralism can also be seen in some degree in other multiethnic societies where assimilation or equalitarian pluralism is the prevailing type of interethnic relations.

Under *inequalitarian* pluralism, *ethnic groups not only are separated structurally and perhaps culturally but also exist in a state of highly unequal access to power and privilege.* Indeed, the authority and power of the dominant group are key

coordinating mechanisms of such systems (Kuper and Smith, 1969; van den Berghe, 1978). In an equalitarian pluralistic system, the various ethnic groups are held together through the consensual allegiance to a common state. In unequalitarian pluralistic societies, however, the state holds the different groups together not through a mutually recognized legitimacy but through coercion. Basically, the state acts to protect the interests of the dominant group. The anthropologist M. G. Smith (1969:33) explains that in a plural society of this type, the state is the agent of the ruling group only. Others have no rights or protection. The majority of people are "subjects, not citizens." Whereas equalitarian pluralism assumes a progressive equalization of political and economic power among groups, the assumption here is quite the opposite. Sustained or increased inequality among groups is a built-in feature of the system, with the dominant group retaining all political authority and the bulk of material wealth.

Social relations between dominant and minority groups are typified by extreme polarization, supported by high levels of prejudice and discrimination. Basically, it is only within the impersonal confines of the economic and political systems that dominant and minority group members interrelate, and those relations are limited to purely functional contacts such as work and government administration. As Kuper and Smith (1969:11) describe it, "Economic symbiosis and mutual avoidance, cultural diversity and social cleavage" characterize the social basis of this type of plural society.

Although the dominant group holds sway, ethnic groups are in a state of economic interdependence. The dominant group needs subordinate ethnic groups to perform physical and menial laboring tasks necessary to economic production; given their relative powerlessness, subordinate groups must meet those demands. Occupational roles are assigned strictly on the basis of ethnicity, with the subordinate group or groups delegated those most onerous and least prestigious (Rex, 1970). The dominant group, as van den Berghe explains, "rationalizes its role in an ideology of benevolent despotism and regards members of the subordinate group as childish, immature, irresponsible, exuberant, improvident, fun-loving, good humored, and happy-go-lucky; in short, as inferior but lovable as long as they stay in their place" (1978:27).

Institutional separatism and duplication characterize unequalitarian pluralistic systems (Smith, 1965; van den Berghe, 1978). This means that each group maintains its own schools, churches, businesses, and so on. In each case, however, there is a great disparity in the quality of dominant and minority group institutions.

**PATERNALISTIC AND COMPETITIVE RACE RELATIONS** In its ultimate form, unequalitarian pluralism resembles a caste system in which strict segregation is enforced in all areas of social life (Furnivall, 1948). In these cases, the social distance between groups is maximized in all social situations. What emerges is a system van den Berghe (1978) calls *paternalistic race relations*. *All people understand their social place and, as long as the subordinates do not deviate from their ascribed role, stability is ensured.* In such systems, there is at least some acquiescence of subordinate groups to their inferior status. Actual physical distance need not be enforced in all situations as long as the *social* distance between groups is understood and adhered to. Slavery in the American South, for example, was characterized by a good deal of physical proximity, particularly among slaves who performed household duties (Stampp, 1956).

Inequalitarian pluralistic relations in such an extreme form are realized only in slave or classic colonial systems (Rex, 1970), neither of which is evident in the contemporary world (though South Africa, until the end of its apartheid system, closely approximated them). In those industrialized societies where ethnic divisions are based primarily on race rather than culture, *ethnic stratification bears some resemblance to a caste or colonial system but is less extreme in the segregation of social institutions and relations*. Van den Berghe (1978) has referred to such cases as **competitive race relations**. With the society's economic base changed from agrarianism to industrialism, such competitive relations replace paternalistic relations. Industrialization requires that social roles be assigned more through competition than through ascription. As a result, there are no longer "master-servant" relations as in a caste or paternalistic system; however, competition between the subordinate group or groups and the working-class element of the dominant group emerges. Because the norms of social distance, so well institutionalized in the paternalistic condition, now break down, physical segregation becomes more rigid. Ethnic groups tend to reside and carry out much of their daily activities in homogeneous ghettos. As we will see in Chapter 7, the plight of African Americans following slavery generally conformed to this pattern.

**EXPULSION AND ANNIHILATION** Inequalitarian pluralism may reach the point of **expulsion** or even the **annihilation** of minority ethnic groups. Neither of these outcomes is without precedent in recent Western history. The deportation of Chinese from the United States in the nineteenth century, the detention of Ukrainians in Canada during World War I, and the internment of Japanese in both the United States and Canada during World War II are notable examples of expulsion. As for annihilation, destruction of native groups by white settlers in North America, Australia, and South Africa in the nineteenth century as well as in Latin America earlier are all relevant examples. A more deliberate and methodical case is the genocidal policy of the Nazis, which resulted in the near-destruction of the European Jews. In the 1930s, German Jews were systematically subjected to an almost complete expulsion from every phase of the society's life. Later, Jews were impelled to leave Germany through a terroristic campaign that included physical attacks and the appropriation of their homes, businesses, and wealth. Finally, Nazi policies culminated in the establishment of death camps to which German and subsequently other European Jewish populations were sent to be slaughtered. The campaign of ethnic cleansing by Serbs against Muslims in Bosnia and ethnic Albanians in Kosovo (examined in Chapter 17) are more recent cases of a combination of expulsion and annihilation.

### PLURALISM IN THE UNITED STATES

Although the United States is a multiethnic society that is basically assimilationist in its ethnic ideology and organization, there are pluralistic elements that are evident. Sociologists have pointed out that, despite the forces of assimilation, American ethnic groups still express elements of their ethnic cultures many generations after their immigration. They also note that individuals continue to conduct many of their primary group relations within an ethnic context. The choice of close friends or marital partners, for example, is still strongly influenced by ethnicity. Moreover, many

people continue to identify themselves, at least symbolically, in ethnic terms. There is an important difference, however, between continued expressions of ethnic pluralism for Euro-American groups as opposed to racial-ethnic groups in American society.

For Euro-Americans, the persistence of ethnicity is more a matter of individual choice than a collective imperative. Gordon (1975, 1981) has referred to this condition as "liberal pluralism" (as contrasted with corporate pluralism) in which there is no formal recognition of ethnicity in the allocation of government offices or economic rewards and in which individuals are free to express their ethnic identity to whatever extent they choose.

For racial-ethnic groups, pluralism—particularly at the structural level—is mostly involuntary and remains in place largely as a result of the resistance of Euro-Americans. Cultural assimilation for these groups progresses relatively rapidly but structural pluralism remains strongly evident in many areas of social life, including high levels of residential segregation and low rates of intermarriage with whites. This is especially so for African Americans, as we will see in Chapter 7.

## THE VARIABILITY OF ETHNIC RELATIONS

The three major patterns of ethnic relations we have examined—assimilation, equalitarian pluralism, and inequalitarian pluralism—are outlined in Figure 4.1. Several points should be kept in mind in looking at these patterns.

- In no case does any one of these models by itself perfectly characterize what occurs in a multiethnic society. Realistically, most societies will exhibit features of two or possibly even all three simultaneously. The United States illustrates this quite well, where assimilation has been the predominant pattern, but a number of features of inequalitarian pluralism pertain to racial-ethnic groups.
- Some degree of conflict is characteristic of all three systems. Although it is obvious in the case of inequalitarian pluralism, conflict is a feature in more subdued fashion of assimilation and equalitarian pluralism as well. It must be remembered that these types of interethnic relations are *movements* in the direction of either homogeneity or ethnic separation, not realized conditions. In either case, some degree of ethnic stratification is evident, and conflict, whether latent or active, is therefore present as well. In societies where assimilation or equalitarian pluralism is more prevalent, the ethnic hierarchy will, of course, be less inflexible and the divisions between groups less acute than in societies where inequalitarian pluralism is the predominant form.
- The outcome of any of these systems, whether assimilation or pluralism, ultimately depends on the aims of both the dominant group and minority groups. As noted in Chapter 2, minority groups have different goals regarding their place in the society and the nature of their relations with the dominant group, but this is only one side of the issue. Perhaps more important are the goals the dominant group wishes for the minorities. When the objectives of dominant and minority groups are congruent, conflict is reduced; when they are in opposition, conflict is unavoidable.

In sum, all these processes and outcomes of ethnic contact are relations of power—power of minority groups and, of course, power of the dominant group.

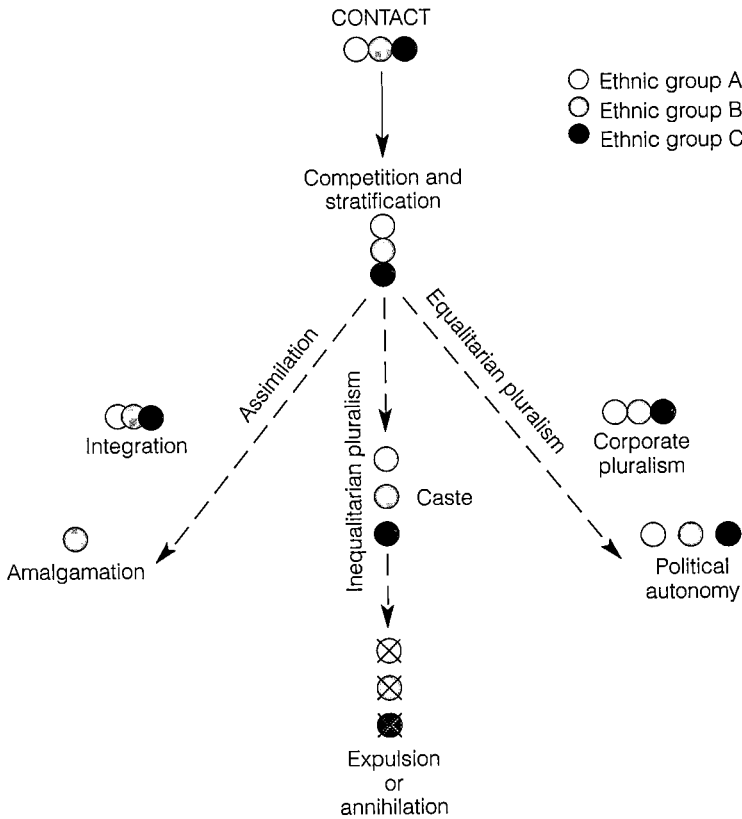


FIGURE 4.1 | RELATIONS AMONG THREE ETHNIC GROUPS, BEGINNING WITH (1) INITIAL CONTACT, FOLLOWED BY (2) EMERGENCE OF COMPETITION AND STRATIFICATION, AND (3) MOVEMENT IN ONE OF THREE GENERAL DIRECTIONS

In any situation of ethnic contact, one must first ask, “Who has power and to what ends can they apply it?” On that question hinges the eventual nature of relations among groups.

### A TYPOLOGY OF MULTIETHNIC SOCIETIES

In Chapter 2, we explored the manner in which multiethnic societies are stratified, noting that the degree of ethnic stratification can vary from society to society. These different levels of ethnic inequality can now be combined with the processes of assimilation and pluralism to construct a typology of multiethnic societies (Table 4.2). These descriptions are not meant to serve as pigeonholes into which particular societies can be conveniently placed; any society will probably exhibit some features of all. In broad terms, however, a society will be more characteristic of one or the other. The typology will, then, point out major features of multiethnic societies and will serve as a reference that can be consulted in our analyses of specific groups and societies in Parts II and III.

TABLE 4.2 | THREE TYPES OF MULTIETHNIC SOCIETY

Feature	Type of Society		
	<i>Colonial (Segregationist)</i>	<i>Corporate Pluralistic (Multicultural)</i>	<i>Assimilationist</i>
<i>Initial contact between dominant and minority groups</i>	Conquest of indigenous groups by dominant group or involuntary migration of minorities	Annexation or voluntary immigration	Mainly voluntary immigration but involuntary immigration and conquest for salient minorities
<i>Relations between dominant and minority groups</i>	Paternalistic or competitive	Ideally equalitarian, but often competitive	Competitive
<i>Nature of stratification</i>	Caste or castelike; caste and ethnicity overlap closely	Class hierarchy within each ethnic group	Class; class and ethnicity generally overlap, but minority group members are dispersed throughout general class system
<i>Segregation between group</i>	Very rigid; explicitly defined and enforced by tradition and law	Voluntarily rigid; groups often concentrated in distinct territories	Mild and largely voluntary for groups culturally and physically similar to dominant group; rigid and involuntary for salient minorities
<i>Institutional separation among ethnic groups</i>	High except in economy	High except in economy and central government	Low in polity and economy; variable in other areas
<i>Physical and cultural differences between dominant and minority groups</i>	Sharp physical differences; sharp cultural differences, at least initially	Usually slight or no physical differences; key cultural difference usually language or religion	Broad range of physical types; sharp cultural differences initially
<i>Main objectives of ethnic policy</i>	Inequalitarian pluralism	Equalitarian pluralism	Assimilation; some degree of unofficial structural pluralism for salient minorities
<i>Degree of conflict among ethnic groups</i>	High eventually, though usually subdued for long periods	Relatively low except on matters pertaining to cultural and political rights	Mild but at times high between racially distinct groups
<i>Examples</i>	Antebellum U.S. South, colonial India, South Africa under apartheid	Switzerland, Malaysia, Canada (partially)	United States, Brazil, Israel, France

## COLONIAL (SEGREGATIONIST) SOCIETIES

Inequalitarian pluralism is the chief feature of societies that can be called colonial or segregationist. *A dominant group exerts maximum political and economic power and is thereby able to shape the nature of interethnic relations in such a way as to sustain its interests.*

In these societies, the dominant group has ordinarily entered as a conqueror of physically distinct indigenous groups or has brought the minority groups to the society as slaves. Such societies are ordinarily agrarian or preindustrial, with labor-intensive economies calling for a large supply of unskilled workers; minority ethnic groups assume that role. Undergirding this exploitative system is a racist ideology in which the subordinate place of minorities is deemed natural.

Social segregation between dominant and minority groups is maximized, and the rules of interaction are explicitly defined and enforced by both tradition and law. The dominant group and minority groups develop parallel and duplicative institutions (education, religion, recreation), and only within the polity and economy do they interact with frequency. In these contacts, however, the dominant group is clearly in command.

The socioeconomic and ethnic hierarchies closely overlap in these societies so that, for the most part, defining one's ethnicity is tantamount to defining one's class. Indeed, stratification is more castelike, with members of groups automatically afforded privileges (in the case of the dominant group) or inferior status and low access to the society's rewards (in the case of minorities). There is little or no mobility for individuals or groups within this system.

Given the extremely wide power differentials and the well-entrenched racist ideology, conflict usually remains submerged for long periods, and attempts to upset the system are rare and short lived. Eventually, however, the forces of both coercion and ideology break down, and the degree of internal conflict becomes great.

The colonial and slave societies of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries are, of course, prime examples of this type. In the modern age, among the world's nations only South Africa under apartheid reflected the major characteristics of a colonial society.

## CORPORATE PLURALISTIC (MULTICULTURAL) SOCIETIES

Corporate pluralistic, or multicultural, societies are also characterized by cultural and physical separation of ethnic groups, but the key difference between these and colonial societies is the extent to which one group is dominant. In corporate pluralistic societies, *the groups are relatively balanced in political and economic power, and no single one is able to exert its will on all vital societal issues.* Moreover, group segregation, to the extent that it exists, is mainly voluntary.

A basic assumption on which such societies are founded is that ethnicity is not to be discouraged; on the contrary, ethnic groups are expected to retain their identity, uniting only within a common political and economic system. Indeed, the pluralistic basis of the society is usually built into the political framework. Territorial concentration of groups contributes to the retention of ethnic differences and interests.

Given the territorial clustering of groups and the relatively balanced power situation among them, conflict in these societies is ordinarily held to a minimum. Where

issues of cultural or territorial integrity arise, however, competition and conflict may become quite intense. In Canada, for example, the dominant English-speaking group is not entirely comfortable with the linguistic rights of French-speaking Quebecers. This has created constant tension between the two groups, at times subdued and at other times heightened.

### ASSIMILATIONIST SOCIETIES

Assimilationist societies differ from the first two types in that there is no recognized obligation or objective in protecting the retention of ethnicity. If ethnic groups survive, they do so because of voluntary actions by the groups themselves or because of informal patterns of prejudice and discrimination—not through the designs of political institutions, as in a corporate pluralistic society, or the segregationist dictates of a dominant group, as in a colonial society.

In these societies, *there is a dominant group and a large number of minority ethnic groups, the latter in various stages of cultural and structural assimilation.* The dominant group encourages cultural assimilation—to its ways—and most groups retain only symbolic aspects of their ethnic cultures beyond two or three generations. Structural assimilation, however, is a different matter. Much social interaction, particularly at the primary level, continues to take place within ethnic subsocieties. Highly visible ethnic groups are segregated to some degree in social relations and thus are least structurally assimilated. Those closer to the dominant group in culture and physical appearance are in more advanced stages of structural assimilation, including intermarriage.

Ethnic relations are competitive. Groups compete in the political and economic arenas for power and jobs, as well as in other realms of social life. The nature of socioeconomic stratification is class, not caste; members of various ethnic groups can thus rise (or fall) on their individual merits, at least theoretically. In reality, ethnic groups tend to cluster at certain points in the socioeconomic and political hierarchies so that class and ethnicity overlap to a greater extent than the society's ideology may proclaim. Indeed, for some groups—namely, racial-ethnic groups—castelike features of stratification are often apparent.

In assimilationist societies, a racist ideology explaining the superiority of the dominant group may be openly proclaimed by extremist elements but is more commonly expressed informally and subtly. In modern assimilationist societies, racism is officially and customarily denied, though its undercurrents may manifest themselves in group relations, particularly between the dominant group and racial-ethnic groups.

Because of the more open and competitive stratification system and the lack of an officially sanctioned racist ideology, low-grade conflict among ethnic groups may be more prevalent in assimilationist societies than in either of the other types. In the colonial society, people “know their place” and stick to it; in the corporate pluralistic society, conflict is held in check by a relative balance of political and economic power. But in the assimilationist society, minority ethnic groups compete with the dominant group for social positions and power. In this competition, of course, the dominant group retains substantial power resources and thus great advantages.

## SUMMARY

- Although intergroup conflict is intrinsic in multiethnic societies, groups follow one of two general paths: increasing integration or increasing separation. The former is called *assimilation* and the latter *pluralism*. Each is a process through which groups pass as well as an idealized outcome of group relations.
- Assimilation can be viewed at four distinct but related levels: cultural, structural, biological, and psychological. For our purposes, emphasis is placed on the first two. *Cultural* assimilation is the adoption by one ethnic group of another's (usually the dominant group's) cultural traits. *Structural* assimilation is the increasing social interaction between different ethnic groups at both the primary and secondary levels.
- Pluralism occurs in two different forms in multiethnic societies, *equalitarian* and *inequalitarian*. In the former, groups retain their cultural and much of their structural distinctness but participate on an equal basis in a common political and economic system. In the latter, ethnic groups are also structurally separated, but they are grossly unequal in political and economic power.
- *Colonial*, or *segregationist*, societies are those in which groups meet through conquest or involuntary migration of minorities; inequalitarian pluralism prevails, with a castelike stratification system in place.
- In *corporate pluralistic*, or *multicultural*, societies, annexation of territory or voluntary migration brings previously separate groups together. Segregation between them is high, usually in distinct areas, though it is mainly voluntary; equalitarian pluralism is the predominant form of ethnic relations.
- *Assimilationist* societies emerge mainly from voluntary immigration of groups, though other contact situations may also be apparent. The degree of segregation between groups varies on the basis of cultural and physical visibility, as does the level of institutional separation and intergroup conflict. Assimilation of an ethnically varied population is the long-range societal objective.

## CRITICAL THINKING

1. Assimilation is a process that is dictated strongly by the dominant ethnic group, but it is not a one-way process; some aspects of minority ethnic cultures become part of the dominant culture. In what ways have contemporary immigrant groups to the United States brought changes to the mainstream, or dominant, cultural system? Consider different elements of culture, like language, food, and music.
2. Some groups that are quite thoroughly assimilated may become targets of discrimination and even extreme oppression. German Jews in the 1930s are such a case. What might bring about such a sharp reversal of ethnic relations?
3. As this chapter explains, expulsion and annihilation are extreme forms of inequalitarian pluralism. An example of expulsion is the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Could something similar occur again in the United States? Consider the wave of anti-Muslim sentiment that has periodically erupted since September 11, 2001.

4. Although conflict at some level seems to be an essential characteristic of multi-ethnic societies, there are cases, such as Switzerland or Malaysia, where diverse ethnic groups coexist for long periods in a relatively harmonious and peaceful fashion. What social, political, and economic circumstances must exist to bring about such conditions?

#### PERSONAL/PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. Consider normative theories of prejudice and discrimination (discussed in Chapter 3), specifically socialization theory. If you lived in an inequalitarian pluralistic society and you were part of the dominant group, what might motivate you to voice objection to the system of extreme inequality?
2. As explained in this chapter, the United States has moved increasingly from assimilation as the prevailing ideology of ethnic integration to a form of mild cultural pluralism, referred to as multiculturalism. In your view, are there limits to multiculturalism? For example, some Americans are resentful of the growing status of Spanish as a second language that people can choose in securing government services or in everyday affairs like shopping or watching television.