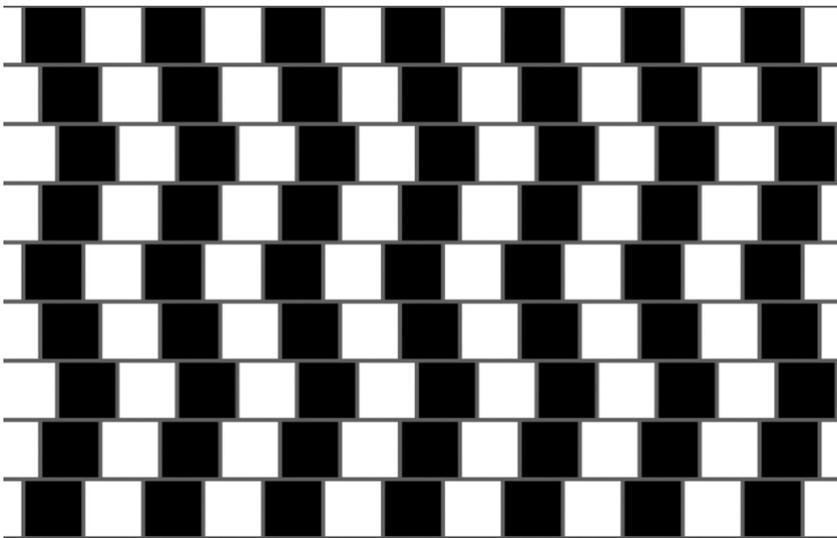


1

Perception and Reality



“Café Wall Illusion,” a well-known visual illusion, depicts the difference between perception and reality. Things are not always as they appear to be. In this case, the horizontal lines are parallel to one another, even though they seem not to be, even after you know they are.

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Emblazoned in virtually every individual's mind is the knowledge that the United States is a nation of immigrants. That realization—taught in our schools and reinforced in political speeches, particularly on the Fourth of July—serves as a source of nationalistic pride for all Americans, even those who trace their ancestry back to 17th-century colonists. The American Dream—that promise of freedom of choice, education, economic opportunity, upward mobility, and a better quality of life—inspires many to come here. It also serves as the underpinning for basic value orientations that are the foundation of American beliefs, behaviors, definitions of social goals, and life expectations.

Today, immigrants continue to arrive in pursuit of that dream, just as others have done for more than 200 years. Yet these newcomers frequently generate negative reactions among native-born Americans despite their common pride in belonging to a nation of immigrants. In all parts of the United States, we often find frequent expressions of fear, suspicion, anxiety, resentment, hostility, and even violence in response to the immigrant presence. Immigrants are not the only group triggering a backlash, however. African American and Native American assertiveness often provokes resistance. Challenges to the status quo by feminists and gay rights activists also regularly induce adverse responses.

Why this contradiction? If Americans value their nation's immigrant heritage and ideals of equality and opportunity, why do they begrudge those traveling the same path to the same destination? Answers come readily from the critics. It is different now. When earlier immigrants came, they learned the language, worked hard, and became Americanized. We are getting too many immigrants now. They take away jobs from Americans. They drain our tax dollars through health and welfare benefits and schooling for their children. They do not want to assimilate or even learn English, and therefore they present a threat of unraveling the fabric of our society. Too many people today are just lazy and want a handout. Too many want undeserved privileges at the expense of everyone else. They want the rewards without earning them.

At least partially fueling these everyday conversational complaints by the citizenry are provocative stories in the media or public pronouncements from reactionaries and immigrant-bashers. Sometimes, however, even respected scholars are in the forefront. Noted historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., for example, denounced “the cult of ethnicity” (an insistence on maintaining vibrant ethnic subcultures) as a forerunner to the imminent “balkanization” of U.S. society.¹ His reference to the hostility that led to intense violence among Bosnians, Croats, and Serbs in the Balkan Peninsula is a scary one. No one wants U.S. society disintegrating into a collectivity of groups hostile to one another. Nor do they want the “snuffing out” or “shipwreck” of the

American republic by new immigrants that Peter Brimelow, ironically himself an immigrant (from England), warned us about with apocalyptic rhetoric in *Alien Nation*.²

Minority actions also reinforce nativist perceptions. The rhetoric of leaders from the National Council of *La Raza* and from the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) for the maintenance of Spanish language and culture at public expense, in both the schools and the workplace, demonstrates to native-born Americans an unwillingness to assimilate.³ The insistence of some African American leaders for slavery reparation payments to all Blacks enrages many Whites as an unreasonable demand. The “clannish” retail shopping patterns of Asian Americans and their noninvolvement in community activities annoy many local residents and merchants. News reports about militant actions, public mayhem, street crimes, and mob violence all trigger other negative reactions against minorities.

Once we talked about the United States as a melting pot. Now there is something called multiculturalism, which Schlesinger and others fear is undermining the cohesiveness of U.S. society.

What is happening? Are such instances illustrations of a different pattern emerging than in previous generations? Are we witnesses to a new social phenomenon? Is a flood of immigrants who do not wish to integrate overwhelming us? Are they and the people of color born in the United States pursuing separatist paths that will lead to the disuniting of our society? Is the land of *e pluribus unum* (“from the many, one”) therefore disintegrating into *e pluribus plures* (“from the many, many”) right before our very eyes, as Diane Ravitch warned?⁴

What This Book Is All About

These questions and issues reflect real concerns. They require responses that are more than subjective impressions of the current scene, for what people may think is happening is not necessarily what is actually occurring. This book is an attempt to provide those responses.

The famed Roman orator Cicero once remarked, “Not to know what happened before we were born is to remain perpetually a child.” Just as children gaze with wonderment on new sights, so too can adults react to social phenomena as new and different unless they recognize these phenomena as variations of past patterns. It is my contention that the perception of many Americans is tainted because (a) they lack an accurate understanding of past U.S. diversity, and (b) they fail to view contemporary events in a larger context.

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As mentioned in the Preface, this book is about race and ethnicity in the United States and the interaction of gender relations within that context. As such, it does not include other aspects of diversity (aged, disabled, and gays) found in other books on the subject. The book's origins trace back to my replies to the many concerned (and similar) questions asked of me during a U.S. State Department-sponsored lecture tour in 1993 throughout Canada and Western Europe. Just as Alexis de Tocqueville attempted to explain our form of government in *Democracy in America* in the 1830s, I have sought to explain our diversity—past, present, and future—in this book, deliberately titled *Diversity in America*, in homage to Tocqueville, although some may criticize my use of *America* because there are other Americas in the Western Hemisphere.

A central thesis of this book is that multiculturalism has always been part of the U.S. scene and is no more a threat to the cohesiveness of society today than at any time in the past. Rejecting claims that modern circumstances create a different situation than in the past, this book shows parallels, similarities, and continuities. It also shows instances when U.S. society was actually more multicultural than today.

Another central tenet of the book is that assimilation and pluralism are not mutually exclusive entities, nor are they necessarily enemies of one another. They have always existed simultaneously among different groups at different levels. Whether they are persistent or multigenerational convergent subcultures, culturally distinct groups have always existed. Even when their numbers have been great, they never threatened the core culture. Assimilation remains a powerful force affecting most ethnic groups, although it has been less effective in enabling racial minorities to achieve full integration. Proponents of one position may decry the other, but both pluralism and assimilation have always been dual realities within U.S. society.

The idea behind this book, then, is to place the current debate on immigration and multiculturalism in a proper sociohistorical perspective. Within a sociological context of social patterns and social change, the historical record of past and present cultural diversity in the United States is presented. Included are factors such as economic conditions, elitism, nativism, racism, social class biases, and the struggle for power that mitigate against harmonious intergroup relations.

The first half of this book contains a brief portrait of U.S. diversity through five eras: Colonial, Early National, Growth and Change, Industrial, and Information Ages. These chapters outline how cultural diversity has always been characteristic of U.S. society. They also show the continuity of various social patterns from one era to the next, down to the present.

Women, of course, have constantly been an integral part of the U.S. experience, although their efforts often received little public attention until recent

decades. Partly to compensate for that neglect, the period portraits in the following chapters include information about women during these times. My intent is to emphasize more fully their gender experiences of status, power, and influence within a sociohistorical framework as a prelude to understanding today's feminism.

In these discussions of women, you will learn how women's experiences varied greatly depending on their locale, social class, and length of residency in the United States. Indicators of how they fared compared to men delineate gender diversity in terms of rights and power. Explanations about women's social activism also show a parallel to the militancy of other minority groups seeking equal treatment.

Seeing Is Believing, but Is It Knowing?

Some people believe what they see, but appearances can be deceptive, as are optical illusions or mirages. Magicians are human illusionists, and the good ones can stupefy us with their artful tricks on a grand scale. We know they tricked us, but we don't know how.

In everyday life, we think we know what we see, but here, too, we may be deceived. As Peter Berger once observed, "The first wisdom of sociology is this—things are not what they seem."⁵ He was suggesting that social reality has many layers of meaning, and as you discover one layer, your perspective of the whole changes. So, perceptions about diversity or anything else change with increased knowledge. Seeing is not enough. You need to know what it is that you are seeing.

To understand how people could mistakenly accept a reality as natural or obvious requires an understanding of *social constructionism*. The major focus of this perspective is that an individual's views form through social interaction, interpersonal communication, and cultural influences. What emerges is a perceived reality, one that societal members have created and institutionalized into a shared tradition and understanding. Like the perceived reality presented to us by the illusionist, another social reality of the past or present may possibly exist "out there" independent of the cultural view that dominates people's interpretation and acceptance. However, the only reality that matters to societal members is the one on which they agree. This social construction of reality thus serves as the basis for their approval or criticism, acceptance or rejection of events and/or groups that complement or run counter to the "facts" as they see them.

Another dimension exists that may affect whether what we believe from what we see is actually what we truly understand. Complementary to Berger's statement is the aphorism, "You can't see the forest for the

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trees.” Its message is clear. When you are too close to the situation, you can’t see the entire picture. You can’t get a sense of the whole because you are caught up in the small details. It is necessary to find a detached viewpoint if you are to comprehend what you see. (Later in this chapter, we discuss the reverse problem of perception and reality, that believing is seeing.)

That detached viewpoint can be found in the sociological perspective, which provides, says Berger, “a special form of consciousness” (p. 23). It enables us to focus objectively on aspects of our social environment that may have previously escaped our notice, allowing us to interpret them in a different, meaningful way. If we add a historical frame of reference along with a sociological analysis to our study of diversity, we gain a valuable dimension to observe what continuities and changes are occurring.

The Cultural Homogeneity Myth

Diversity has been an ongoing social reality in the United States, not just since its inception as a nation, but even in its primeval colonial cradle. This viewpoint is not the prevalent one. The prevailing belief that this nation was essentially a culturally homogeneous launching pad for the new nation is steeped in the historic myth that the 13 colonies were almost entirely populated by English immigrants and their descendants. Such was not quite the case. As we see shortly, this “historic reality”—this fallacy of cultural homogeneity—changes under careful sociohistorical analysis.

That we are a nation of immigrants is an undeniable fact, but often not connected to the current multicultural picture. Contemporary public views on multiculturalism often assume erroneously that what occurred in the past were fleeting moments of heterogeneity that yielded to fairly rapid assimilation. Today’s cultural diversity is misperceived as different, more widespread, and resistant to assimilation—something to be celebrated, respected, and maintained, say its proponents—thus making it, in the eyes of alarmed others, not only a new construction, but somehow also a threat to the cohesiveness of society.

Only an objective analysis that peels away layers of myths, assumptions, presumptions, and misconceptions can provide an accurate assessment. To do so, we must take a sociohistorical perspective, moving beyond only present-day realities and noting instead long-term patterns throughout the nation’s history. In this way, we can put the current scene in a wider context and determine more precisely how unique our situation is.

Before we can embark on this examination of our past and present, however, we must first address three areas that affect judgments about diversity

in the United States. The first of these is the changing views about minority adaptation to U.S. society. The second is the melting pot concept and its limitations of application. The last, but an extremely important area, is the Dillingham Flaw, in which perceptions about immigrants can be misdirected through faulty comparisons.

The Rise, Fall, and Rise of Pluralism

Because the term is of recent vintage, many incorrectly conclude that *multiculturalism* is therefore a fairly new social phenomenon, the product of a changing world and of changing government policies. But as Nathan Glazer (1993) and Peter Rose (1993) correctly assert, *multiculturalism* is actually a refashioning of an older concept of cultural pluralism.⁶

Early Advocates

In the early 20th century, educator John Dewey and social worker Jane Addams both spoke out against assimilation destroying the cultural values of immigrants. In 1915, Horace Kallen, an immigrant from Eastern Europe, advocated this ideology in an essay in *Nation*; by citing the persistence of cultural identity among the Irish in Massachusetts, Norwegians in Minnesota, and Germans in Wisconsin, he promoted a multicultural society, a confederation of national cultures.⁷ As Peter Rose puts it:

To Kallen . . . the United States was not a fondue of amalgamation but a symphony of accommodation. Pushing his own metaphor, Kallen saw the orchestra—that is, the Society—as consisting of groups of instruments—nationalities—playing their separate parts while together making beautiful music resonant with harmony and good feeling.⁸

Kallen's ideas, expanded in his seminal work on cultural pluralism, *Culture and Democracy in the United States* (1924), contained only incidental references to racial groups.⁹ Foreshadowing today's opponents to multiculturalism, part of Kallen's focus was on public concern that the recent arrivals of his time might not integrate fully into society.

Assimilationists Prevail

Despite the pluralist advocates, a chain of events encouraged assimilation over ethnic persistence. Patriotic hysteria following U.S. entrance into World War I effectively ended the German subculture. Restrictive immigration laws

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in the 1920s, a world depression in the 1930s, and World War II in the 1940s dramatically reduced immigration. With little new blood to keep everyday ethnicity viable, with the second generation growing up as Americans, and with the housing and education entitlements offered to GIs, White ethnics by mid-century had moved closer to the center, loosening their ethnic ties as they did.

As the old idea of America as a melting pot seemed to reaffirm itself, major books by sociologists Robert E. Park¹⁰ and Milton M. Gordon¹¹ influenced social scientists to think more about assimilation than pluralism.

In *Race and Culture* (1950), Park offered a universal cycle theory suggesting that all groups go through a progressive, irreversible process of contact, competition, accommodation, and eventual assimilation. Park acknowledged that the process might take centuries, possibly even including a semipermanent racial caste system, but ultimately even racially subordinate groups would assimilate.

Gordon delineated, in *Assimilation in American Life* (1964), seven processes of group adaptation to the host society. Most important was his distinction between cultural and structural assimilation, showing how a group can change its cultural patterns but not yet mainstream into primary relationships in the cliques and associations of the society.

The Reassertion of Pluralism

Just as a series of social changes enabled assimilationists to prevail over the pluralists, a new set of circumstances reversed the situation. The civil rights movement of the 1960s and the White ethnic revival of the 1970s were precipitating factors. However, a major element was the third wave of immigration that began after the 1965 immigration law removed national quota restrictions, opening the door to millions of developing world immigrants.

Pluralism flourished at a time of peak immigration to the United States and ebbed when immigration declined. With a new influx of culturally distinct immigrants, it flowered again. Renamed multiculturalism, its advocacy of the preservation and appreciation of ethnic cultures and identities, as well as peaceful coexistence among groups, echoed the sentiments of Kallen, Addams, Dewey, and other cultural pluralists.

This time, however, the movement included people of color, not just White ethnics. Some arrived with a strong background that empowered them economically, allowing them to organize more effectively and assert themselves more so than past immigrants. Their ranks included educated, articulate spokespersons who used TV and computerized direct mailings to reach millions of potential members whom their predecessors could not.

Yet even as pluralism gained new advocates, another influential sociological voice reaffirmed assimilationist patterns. In *The Ethnic Myth* (1981), Stephen Steinberg argued that pluralism only appeals to groups that benefit from maintaining ethnic boundaries.¹² Disadvantaged groups, he maintained, willingly compromise their ethnicity to gain economic security and social acceptance. Moreover, he claimed, the United States was closer than ever before to welding a national identity out of its *mélange* of ethnic groups.

The Multiculturalist Challenge

Nevertheless, with minority group assertiveness, massive immigration, and bilingual/pluralist government policies, the change in popular usage from *cultural pluralism* to *multiculturalism* helped suggest to some that a new era for social consciousness of diversity had arrived. To others, it signaled that the disuniting of America through “ethnic tribalism” was upon us. The battle was joined and still continues.

Multiculturalism is especially strong on college campuses, where the ranks of multiculturalists include many college professors whose advocacy in their teaching and publications has spread the doctrine far and wide to millions of others. They have challenged the once-prevailing idea of the United States as a melting pot, a concept many social scientists now regard as an idealized myth.

The Melting Pot

In an often-quoted passage in *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), Michel Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur, an immigrant to the United States from France, defined an American and popularized the concept of America as a melting pot:

What is an American? He is either a European, or the descendant of a European; hence that strange mixture of blood which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a man whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. . . . Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world.¹³

Overstating Ethnic Inter marriages

Even if Crèvecoeur actually knew of such an exogamous family and did not invent it to illustrate his idealized concept of a melting pot, he was not

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accurately portraying the reality of his times. His would have been an atypical family in the late 18th century because most White ethnics then did not intermarry. In-group solidarity—based on nationality, clustering, geographic separatism, and most especially religion—mitigated against personal social interaction among the distinct groups, let alone intermarriage.

When Crèvecoeur spoke of those English, Dutch, and French intermarriages, he was covering a considerable span of the 18th century and most likely including several religious faiths in a time when religious ecumenicism was unknown. Religious tolerance may have slowly evolved out of a period of bigotry, close-mindedness, and intolerance just a few generations before, but that hardly meant that the ethnocentric barriers had vanished and amalgamation was flourishing.

No Racial Minorities

The greatest problem with Crèvecoeur's melting pot model is his omission of African and Native Americans.¹⁴ Was this omission a reflection of his ethnocentrism or a deliberate choice to augment his concept? Surely he was aware of their presence in significant numbers throughout the colonies. Perhaps he thought they were not relevant to the destiny of a nation struggling to be born.

Many shared this attitude. The framers of the Constitution, in Article I, Section 2, excluded "Indians" and counted each slave as three fifths of a person to determine a state's representatives. In 1790, the First Congress passed the Naturalization Law, which limited citizenship only to free White aliens. Until passage of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, people of color born in the United States were not citizens.

Crèvecoeur's melting pot model was not accurate for several reasons. By restricting its application only to those with political power (Whites), it excluded a sizable segment of the population (people of color). Thus, it did not describe a society that had "melted." Moreover, even in its narrow focus on Whites, the model ignored the existing cultural diversity and social distance existing among the diverse White groups.

Emerson's Vision

Crèvecoeur influenced others who helped popularize the image of the United States as a melting pot. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for example, struck a similar theme in 1845:

Well, as in the old burning of the Temple at Corinth, by the melting and intermixture of silver and gold and other metals, a new compound more precious

than any, called Corinthian brass, was formed; so in this continent—asylum of all nations—the energy of Irish, Swedes, Poles, and Cossacks, and all the European tribes—of the Africans, and of the Polynesians, will construct a new race, a new religion, a new state, a new literature, which will be as vigorous as the new Europe which came out of the smelting-pot of the Dark Ages, or that which earlier emerged from Pelasgic and Etruscan barbarism.¹⁵

Emerson's private journal entry is interesting for several reasons. He "hated" the "narrowness" of nativist reactions against immigrants as "precisely the opposite of true wisdom." Significantly, he included people of color (but not Native Americans) in his vision of an amalgamated society, and it was a vision of the future, not a pretense about his times or of Crèvecoeur's time 63 years earlier. For Emerson, America as a melting or smelting pot was a tomorrow to come, not a reality that was.

Turner's Frontier

In contrast, Frederick Jackson Turner saw the American frontier as the catalyst that had already fused the immigrants into a composite new national stock. His frontier thesis of 1893 followed the 1890 declaration of the Census Bureau that the "unsettled area has been so broken into . . . that there can hardly be said to be a frontier line."¹⁶ Unlike Emerson's private musings known only to a few, Turner's update of Crèvecoeur's melting pot greatly influenced historical scholarship for more than 40 years.

Thus, the Middle West was teaching the lesson of national cross-fertilization instead of national enmities, the possibility of a newer and richer civilization, not by preserving unmodified or isolating the old component elements, but by breaking down the line fences, by merging the individual life in the common product—a new product that held the promise of world brotherhood.¹⁷

The previous quotation is taken from Turner's 1920 book, *The Frontier in American History*, where he expanded on his 1893 essay. He argued that, because pioneers confronted many problems and harsh conditions, their adaptation necessitated innovative solutions that they shared with others. Out of this mutual assistance evolved a new and distinct culture, a blend of shared cultural contributions, but noticeably different from any of their source cultures.

Turner's argument popularized further the romanticized notion of a melting pot, but it also did not accurately reflect frontier reality any more than Crèvecoeur had depicted his times. The pioneers did adapt to their new environment, but the culture remained Anglo-American in form and content.

Furthermore, in many areas of the Middle West that Turner speaks about, culturally homogeneous settlements of Germans or Scandinavians, for example, often maintained distinct ethnic subcultures for generations.

Zangwill's White Fusion

Another voice raised in support of the melting pot was Israel Zangwill in a 1908 play appropriately called *The Melting Pot*. Some of its oft-quoted lines are these:

Ah, what a stirring and a seething—Celt and Latin, Slav and Teuton, Greek and Syrian. America is God's Crucible, the Great Melting Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming!

. . . Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and English, Jews and Russians, into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American!

. . . the Real American has not yet arrived. . . He will be the fusion of all races, perhaps the coming superman.¹⁸

The term *race* once referred more loosely to either racial or ethnic groups. So, Zangwill appears to mean only White ethnic groups in the melting or fusion of all races when he speaks of the "races of Europe" and excludes any specific example of people of color. Although he curiously includes Syrians as Europeans, Zangwill's words nonetheless echo those of Crèvecoeur in describing the melting pot as a White ethnic phenomenon, thereby implying that an American is a White person.

In this book, we use the contemporary applications of race and ethnicity. A *racial group*, therefore, is one in which its members share visible biological characteristics and regard themselves or are regarded by others as a single group on that basis. An *ethnic group* is one in which its members share a common culture, language, nationality, and/or religion. Of course, members of a racial group are also members of an ethnic group, and vice versa. What clouds this distinction, however, is that members of the same racial group can be members of different ethnic groups (e.g., Black Americans, Haitians, Jamaicans, and Nigerians), and members of one ethnic group can be members of different racial groups (i.e., Hispanic Blacks, Whites, and mulattos).

Recent Studies on Intermarriage

The White ethnic intermarriage that Crèvecoeur prematurely asserted as evidence of his melting pot is now a reality. Alba (1991) reported that only half

as many third-generation Italians of unmixed ancestry born after 1949 had spouses of unmixed Italian ancestry, compared with third-generation Italian males born before 1920.¹⁹ Lieberman and Waters (1988) found significant declines in endogamous marriages among virtually all White groups.²⁰ In Census 2000, 58 percent of the U.S. population identified only one ancestry.

Although such intermarriage patterns provide support for melting pot proponents, they do not necessarily indicate assimilation. As Lisa Neidert and Reynolds Farley (1985) reported, third-generation members of second-wave ethnic groups were not indistinguishable from the core English group, although they had been successful in their occupational achievements.²¹ That is, they remained distinct, and a considerable social distance existed between them and mainstream society. Furthermore, within-group marriages are still fairly common among people of unmixed ethnic ancestry.

When race and culture are similar, marital assimilation is more likely. If the past patterns of 19th- and 20th-century White Americans are an indicator, however, this process may require three or more generations to blend together the post-1965 ethnic groups.

The Dillingham Flaw

The continuing debate between assimilationists and pluralists revolves around the issue of cultural homogeneity. Part of those polemics often contain what I identify as the *Dillingham Flaw*, an erroneous way of comparing people from one time period with people living in the present. As a consequence, one group usually suffers in the comparison and is judged negatively.

The Dillingham Commission

Senator William P. Dillingham of Vermont chaired the House-Senate Commission on Immigration (1907–1911), which listened to the testimony of civic leaders, educators, social scientists, and social workers. It even made on-site visits to Ellis Island and New York's Lower East Side, where hundreds of thousands of impoverished immigrants lived. When its investigation was completed, the Commission issued a 41-volume report, part of which was based on social science research and statistics.

Unfortunately, the report was flawed in its application and interpretation of the data. It was more than the fact that the Commission members, however well intentioned they may have been, reflected the perceptions and biases of their times. The Dillingham Commission committed several errors of judgment that led them to conclude that the immigration from southern,

central, and eastern Europe was detrimental to U.S. society. Their conclusion led them to recommend the enactment of immigration restrictions.

The Commission erred in its use of simplistic categories and unfair comparisons of the “old” and “new” immigrants, thus ignoring differences of technological evolution in their countries of origin. It also erred in overlooking the longer time interval that immigrants from northern and western Europe had to adjust, as well as the changed structural conditions wrought by industrialization and urbanization.

No doubt influencing the Commission members were the highly reported intelligence test findings. By 1908, Alfred Binet and Thomas Simon had developed the intelligence quotient (IQ) measurement scale. Using an alpha test (for those literate in English) and a beta test (for those illiterate or non-English-speaking), the low scores of newly arriving southern, central, and eastern Europeans, in contrast to higher scores by native-born Black and White Americans, seemingly gave “scientific evidence” that mentally deficient ethnic groups were entering the United States.

Although many social scientists today recognize that cultural biases affected those outcomes, controversy continues about whether intelligence measures reveal genetic or environmental differences. This “nature versus nurture” issue boiled over in the 1960s with the writings of Arthur Jensen and William Shockley, and again in 1994 with the publication of *The Bell Curve* by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray. Each of these writers argued that genetic differences existed between Black and White Americans, a point fiercely contested by many others.

Back in 1911, however, these test results were unquestioned and were just one more aspect to convince Commission members about the rightness of their views. The social conditions in 1911 help explain how such flawed conclusions were accepted so easily. President Theodore Roosevelt had called for the Commission to address the “immigrant problem,” thereby creating a mind-set about the situation in the first place. Both he and the Commission reflected the biases and perceptions of most native-born Americans witnessing the unprecedented mass influx of immigrants who were culturally, and often physically, different. The Commission’s findings reinforced public opinion and were therefore readily accepted.

The Concept of the Dillingham Flaw

In our society, similar errors of thinking also influence people’s perceptions of outgroup members. An *outgroup* is any group with which an individual does not identify or belong. In our discussion, we are referring to the foreign born as the outgroup to native-born Americans of different backgrounds.

Because some of today's negative judgments flow from the same faulty logic as that of the Dillingham Commission, I call this weakness the *Dillingham Flaw*. Quite simply, this term refers to inaccurate comparisons based on simplistic categorizations and anachronistic observations. We make these comparisons when we apply modern classifications or sensibilities to a time when they did not exist, or, if they did, they had a different form or meaning. To avoid the Dillingham Flaw, we must avoid the use of modern perceptions to explain a past that its contemporaries viewed quite differently.

One example of an inappropriate modern classification would be the term *British* to describe colonial Americans from the British Isles. Today, this word refers collectively to the people of Great Britain (the English, Welsh, Scots, and Scots-Irish). However, in the 18th century, *British* had the much narrower meaning of only the English and for good reason. The English, Scots, and Scots-Irish may have been English-speaking, but significant cultural and religious differences existed among them. Moreover, the geographic segregation, social distance, and even hostility that existed between English Anglicans and Scots-Irish Presbyterians created a wide cultural gulf between them. They did not view each other as similar. Among the English, divergent religious beliefs created various subcultures whose shared sense of identity, social insulation, and endogamy resulted in limited social interaction. *Ecumenicism*, the tendency toward greater Christian unity that is occurring in our times, is a far cry from the antipathy among the Protestant sects of colonial America.

Religion, a meaningful component of everyday life in the 18th century, was cause for outgroup prejudice and avoidance, and we must not overlook its significant impact on intergroup relations. It would be a mistake to presume that the English were a single, cohesive entity.

It also is misleading to speak broadly of either African slaves or Native Americans as single entities. In a period of White dominance and racial exploitation, ethnocentric generalizations such as these failed to pay heed to the fact that these groups consisted of diverse peoples with distinctive cultures. Similarly, European immigrants were not alike despite their collective grouping by mainstream society. Instead, all of these groups—African American, Native American, and immigrant—were diverse peoples with linguistic and cultural distinctions that set them apart from one another.

The Dillingham Flaw Chain Reaction

Once someone falls victim to the Dillingham Flaw, other misconceptions usually follow about one's own time. This phenomenon is to be expected.

Such victims falsely believe that they understand their nation's past and so confidently assess their own world in what they presume is a wider context. Certain that they have a knowledgeable, objective frame of reference, they tend to be highly critical of the present scene because they perceive it as different from the past.

However, because their observations and reactions are predicated on a reference point rendered inaccurate by the Dillingham Flaw, they are more likely to reach incorrect conclusions. Like that old congressional commission, they are susceptible to mistaken impressions about a threat posed by recent immigrants whose presence and behavior they view as different from past immigrants.

For instance, some people suggest that today's steadily increasing ranks of Asians, Hispanics, and Muslims present an unprecedented challenge to an integrative society. The undercurrent of this thinking includes the continuing large numbers of new arrivals, their racial group membership and/or non-Judeo-Christian background, and their alleged nonassimilationist patterns.

Such concerns and fears are echoes of those raised about earlier groups, such as the racist responses to the physical appearance of southern Europeans or the anti-Semitic reactions to eastern European Jews. Or, consider the petition to Congress by 19th-century Germans in the Northwest Territory to create a German state with German as the official language; it easily matches the fear of some nativists that Florida may become "America's Quebec."

Believing Is Seeing

In writing about the improper use of biology as ideology to justify the naturalness of gendered behavior and social statuses, Judith Lorber (1993) informed us that the way we think about a particular social phenomenon affects what we actually see or at least what we think we see.²² The actions of the Dillingham Commission and the politics of those times are another illustration of this concept. When we feel most threatened by outsiders who are different because of their religion, skin color, or social class, we may see different things in the current immigration (they are a threat because there are too many of them and/or they "fail" to assimilate) rather than see other things (ourselves, our ancestors, past generations of immigrants, new workers, new consumers, new taxpayers, human capital to fuel our economic growth).

In other words, the two major themes of this book are interconnected. The political controversies swirling around the assimilation/pluralism

debates affect how people think about and react to diversity in society at any given time. Thus, the influence of beliefs on perceptions and reactions is an important element in understanding why some groups or issues become problematic and others do not.

The Boundary Flaw

With the oldest democratic constitution among all nations and its centuries-old experience of accepting tens of millions of immigrants from all parts of this planet, the United States certainly offers a rich reservoir of history, social change, and patterns of intergroup relations. Furthermore, it was the first to offer the promise of freedom and opportunity to one and all while showing the rest of the world its willingness to accept and include foreigners within its societal mainstream. Yet, however special many of these elements may have been, they did not occur in a global vacuum. A second flaw we must thus avoid is the *boundary flaw*, the assumption that we can explain everything solely in the context of internal social dynamics unique to U.S. culture.²³

Virtually nothing has ever occurred in the United States that was self-contained or universal within its borders. In the early stages of its sociocultural evolution, when it was a minor player on the world stage and there was no such entity yet as a global community, regional—even local—cultural differences abounded. In the sociocultural epochs described in the next six chapters, the United States went through changing positions in the world order even as it was buffeted by external social forces that affected its citizens' sense of self and perceptions of demographic and technological changes.

This interplay of regional, national, and global forces often generated tensions as sociocultural changes occurred and new migration patterns emerged. Part of the explanation for the dualities of, and conflicts between, assimilation and pluralism trends lies in recognizing this process.

In each of the following chapters, then, we attempt to identify the place of the United States in the world system as a key referent to understanding more fully the developing themes of this book.

Understanding Today by Knowing About Yesterday

Understanding the past sociohistorical reality of U.S. diversity allows for a more accurate comparison with today's multicultural society without falling victim to either the Dillingham Flaw or the Boundary Flaw.

In this way, we can avoid those flaws and debunk the cultural homogeneity myth. It is essential to know truly what we were if we are to comprehend what we are now and what we are becoming.

Telecommunications today enable each of us to bear witness to many aspects of our multicultural society, but our knowledge about our nation's past comes to us chiefly through the words of others whose ethnocentric perceptions often hid from us what truly was that reality. Although rarely presented in the comprehensive form found in this book, enough data exist to peel away the layers of nationalist myth-building to get at the sociocultural actualities about our multicultural past.

What follows is not an exercise in revisionist thought, but a sociohistorical analysis of the past and present. Hopefully, this book provides the perspective that diversity is the nation's strength, not its weakness.

Notes

1. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (Knoxville, TN: Whittle Communications, 1991).
2. Peter Brimelow, *Alien Nation: Common Sense About America's Immigration Disaster* (New York: Random House, 1995).
3. Hispanic leaders' views on language maintenance appear in Linda Chavez, "Hispanics vs. Their Leaders," *Commentary* (October 1991): 47–9.
4. Diane Ravitch's much-discussed views appeared in her article "Multiculturalism: E Pluribus Plures," *American Scholar*, 59 (1990): 337–54.
5. Peter Berger's thoughts are expressed in his wonderful sociological primer, *Invitation to Sociology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), 23. Another classic on perception and reality is Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Doubleday, 1966).
6. The comparison of multiculturalism and cultural pluralism by Nathan Glazer and Peter Rose appeared in the special issue edited by Peter I. Rose, "Interminority Affairs in the U.S.: Pluralism at the Crossroads," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 530 (1993). The two articles are Nathan Glazer, "Is Assimilation Dead?" 122–36; Peter I. Rose, "Of Every Hue and Caste," 187–202.
7. Horace Kallen, "Democracy versus the Melting Pot," *Nation*, February 18, 1915, pp. 190–4, and February 25, 1915, pp. 217–20.
8. Peter Rose, "Of Every Hue and Caste," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 530 (1993): 193.
9. Horace Kallen, *Culture and Democracy in the United States* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1924).
10. The posthumous publication of Robert E. Park's writings is *Race and Culture: Essays in the Sociology of Contemporary Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1950).

11. Milton Gordon's seminal work on assimilation is *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).
12. Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth* (New York: Atheneum, 1981).
13. Crèvecoeur's famous statement appears in *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782; reprint, New York: Alert and Charles Boni, 1925), 54–5.
14. Observations about Crèvecoeur's omission of racial minorities first appeared in Vincent N. Parrillo, *Strangers to These Shores* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 98, and then in all subsequent editions; Nathan Glazer's "Is Assimilation Dead?" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 530 (1993): 124.
15. Emerson's recorded thoughts appear in *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, eds. Ralph H. Orth and Alfred K. Ferguson (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1971), 9:299–300.
16. James A. Henretta et al., *America's History Since 1865* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1987), 588.
17. Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1920), chap. xiii.
18. Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot: Drama in Four Acts* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 33.
19. The intermarriage findings of Richard D. Alba are reported in "The Twilight of Ethnicity Among Americans of European Ancestry: The Case of the Italians," *Rethinking Today's Minorities*, ed. Vincent N. Parrillo (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991), 29–62.
20. The study by Stanley Lieberson and Mary C. Waters is *From Many Strands* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1988).
21. Lisa Neidert and Reynolds Farley, "Assimilation in the United States: An Analysis of Ethnic and Generation Differences in Status and Achievement," *American Sociological Review*, 50 (1985): 840–50.
22. Judith Lorber, "Believing Is Seeing: Biology as Ideology," *Gender & Society*, 7 (1993): 568–81.
23. I am indebted to Gonzalo Santos for suggesting this concept.

