

Assimilation, Pluralism, or Ethnic Nationalism?

Historically non-Europeans were never fully accepted as “Americans”: “Blacks, American Indians, Asians, and Mexicans, for example, were all considered inferior peoples, culturally and intellectually.” (Janzen: 36)

Paradigm I: Melting pot. Assimilation

- various cultural groups, regardless of their origin, are treated with essential equality in the United States;
- “*complete mixing together* of various cultural traditions with regard to language, customs, religion, economic system, and political system.” (ibid.: 37).
- All immigrant groups eventually accept an “*Americanized form of English* as a common tongue.” (ibid.)
- *Individual rights and liberties have priority* over rights of cultural groups. It celebrates personal achievement and self-reliance. (Janzen: 37; Kim: 10)
- “Although each person is unique, all humans are also endowed with the same set of universal human needs, rights, and responsibilities.” (Kim: 10)
- *The primacy of the individual over the group*. Emphasis on group identity over individual identity is wrong (ibid.).
- Individual ties to ethnic groups culturally rooted in other parts of the world are not considered important or relevant> melting away of all original ethnic cultures and traditions > *melting away non-Anglo-Saxon traditions*. (Janzen: 37)
- Suggests that most immigrants in the past jumped into the pot voluntarily and with great enthusiasm. (ibid.)
- ‘*Color-blind society*’: “The government is responsible for universally applying societal rules to all its citizens irrespective of skin color and religious creed.” (Kim: 110)
- “Prejudice directed for or against individuals simply based on group membership is morally wrong ... “ (ibid.)
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Paradigm II: Pluralism

- Upholds group identity: “we are different “types” of persons defined by social categories such as race, ethnicity, language, culture, and national origin.” (Kim: 111)
- Status equality instead of procedural equality: a demand for equal results in the interest of ‘emancipation’ specific groups that are historically ‘oppressed’ and ‘underprivileged’ (ibid.)
- Race and ethnicity: cultural as well as political claims for “pride,” “dignity,” and “justice” (ibid.)
- Commitment to many traditional ‘American’ beliefs and practices and at the same time the integrity of indigenous cultural identities. (Janzen: 39)
- More pragmatic attitude: “America needs to continue to hold itself together as a vital national system, and that this will not happen, politically or socially, unless certain established traditions are adhered to by most citizens” (ibid.)

Paradigm III: Ethnic nationalism

- “each ethnic group, regardless of origin, should preserve its unique character, customs, languages, and ways of knowing without being assimilated” (Janzen: 38)
- Cultural pluralism: seeks to preserve special cultural and linguistic understandings and customs; the importance of retaining closed ethnic enclaves within American society (ibid.)
- Example: Afrocentric curriculum movement

Extremist Ethnic Nationalism:

- the marginal voices of separatism, “extremist” views
- a maximum in-group-out-group separation
- Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazi, Skinheads: commitment to racial purism (Kim)

Literature:

Janzen, Rod. “Five Paradigms of Ethnic Relations.” In Samovar, Larry A., Porter, Richard, E. (eds.) *Intercultural Communication*. Belmont, USA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003, pp. 36-42.

Kim, Young Y. “*Unum* and *Pluribus*: Ideological Underpinnings of Interethnic Communication in the United States.” In Samovar, Larry A., Porter, Richard, E. (eds.) *Intercultural Communication*. Belmont, USA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003, pp 108-119.