

Nature of the Melting Pot: Acculturation in America

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These books—**Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City** (M.I.T. Press and Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1963. 368 pp. \$5.95), by Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and **Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins** (Oxford University Press, New York, 1964. \$5.25), by Milton M. Gordon—deal with essentially the same problem, although the authors of the first limit themselves mainly to the five groups that comprise about 70 percent of New York City's population, whereas Gordon takes a more nationwide view of the ways in which immigrants have been incorporated in American society. The present tide of events touched off by desegregation activities give a special poignancy to both volumes. And a scientific reviewer must say that, in the light of our "isms," exhortations, slogans, and partisan literature, every bit of enlightenment about what is happening rather than what should happen is encouraging.

Both books are addressed to the basic question of whether and in what way America is a "melting pot." This theme has long been the popular credo, based upon fiction, prejudice, and misunderstanding. Although disposed of in somewhat different ways in the two volumes, there is reason to hope that the nature of the United States may henceforth be viewed in scientific terms more than as a fictitious stereotype.

Beyond the Melting Pot is primarily concerned with eliminating the long-standing, popular misconception that immigrants are and should be fused in our national crucible and recast in the

mould of the early Anglo-Protestants. Glazer and Moynihan flatly state at the outset that "The point about the melting pot . . . is that it did not happen" (p. v and p. 136). In view of the mounting literature on acculturation of immigrants, it may seem incredible that this is still a major issue. However, it was virtually a national doctrine until near the turn of the present century, and it continues to be so deeply rooted, despite evidence to the contrary, that in several places Gordon refers to Americanization movements aimed at "Anglo-conformity."

Glazer and Moynihan restrict their enquiry to the Jews, Irish, Italians, Negroes, and Puerto Ricans of New York City. They do not attempt to analyze the totality of this metropolis, a task that has intimidated the many, highly competent sociologists of New York City, but they do sketch the changes in these groups and their role and status in the city. They conclude (p. 313) that "except where color is involved . . . the specifically *national* aspect of most ethnic groups rarely survives the third generation in any significant terms." The Negroes are unmistakably of a distinctive race; the Puerto Ricans partly so. The latter, moreover, have been freely moving between their Island and New York, but their predominant movement to New York has largely been so recent that they retain much of their original hispanic tradition, including the Spanish language.

Perhaps it was their analysis of why the Negroes (and Puerto Ricans) have not at all been fused in the American crucible that won for Glazer and Moynihan the Anisfield-Wolf Award in Race Relations given annually by the *Saturday Review*. But the Irish, Italians, and Jews are white, and even after several generations and for other reasons they have failed to conform to the Anglo-Protestant stereotype. The Irish and Italian immigrants came

predominantly from rural peasant families in the home country and initially were incorporated as unskilled laborers in America. But today their grandsons or later progeny have obtained the necessary education and skills to move into most areas of American life, excepting, perhaps the still closed circles of Wall Street and Madison Avenue. What remains unmelted about them, according to the authors, is a sense of ethnicity and their adherence to Catholicism.

It is important to note, however, that "ethnicity," in this context signifies a sense of identification with some larger group—for example, affiliation with a church and a continued awareness of ancestry. It does not mean that any substantial amount of the culture of the Old Country has been preserved. Catholicism seems to imply mainly a contrast with Protestantism, and it is interesting that in America the Church has acquired new functions which have attracted men to it in greater numbers than in Ireland or Italy. The importance of Catholicism in America leads Gordon to discuss Church members as a whole without regard to national origins. The problem of assimilating the Jews seems always to be unique and almost unanswerable. Religiously, Americans are little interested in the sects into which the Jews have split, or, indeed, in whether a Jew has completely given up his religion. Unlike the Irish and Italians, the Jewish immigrants arrived in New York with considerable literacy, with skills which led them first to dominate the garment industry, and with socialistic political views. Subsequently, however, Jews have moved on a massive scale into merchandizing and other businesses, into the intellectual world, and into the entertainment industry. And yet, they are still subject to discrimination in some quarters, and persons who are removed by several generations from religious affiliation rarely rid themselves of a certain identification with their ancestors and group. *Beyond the Melting Pot* does not explain this peculiar phenomenon. The question is beyond the purview of the book, and it is no doubt deeply rooted in the long history of the Jewish people.

Clearly, the pot has not melted in the sense of making everyone an Anglo-Protestant, and, in view of Gordon's much more scientifically oriented analysis of America as a whole and his extended comments on assimilation,

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acculturation, subsocieties, and plural societies, together with his emphasis on a new concept, structural societies, one wonders why the old American ideal has lasted so long. Gordon shows very clearly that there has been much melting in America, but he pictures several pots rather than one, each having distinctive effects. Gordon's inquiry is not about whether foreign immigrants have been changed in America, a matter which Glazer and Moynihan admit at the outset, but about what processes are involved in change and what concepts are needed to understand these processes. Gordon clearly implies that the acculturation and assimilation of alien races into a white community, for example the assimilation of the Negroes into a white community, involves a different rationale than the ultimate status and role of the third or fourth generation of white Irish or Italians. Scientifically, the problem cannot be so stated that people of all kinds can facily be subsumed in a category of minority groups and meaningful hypotheses about assimilation and change drawn therefrom.

In effect, Gordon shifts the focus from the melting pot to acculturation. The various pots have melted in their own ways and in various degrees. As Gordon stresses throughout his book, Americanization has affected immigrant groups in different ways and for different reasons. Except where racial discrimination is strong, recent generations of white immigrants have increasingly moved into areas of business and society earlier reserved for the Anglo-Protestants. Their acculturation toward the American way of life has placed them in many subsocieties and has caused structural pluralism to take the place of cultural pluralism. That is, diversity of behavior stemming from the country of origin is replaced by diverse roles and statuses in the structure of American society. Increasingly, the descendants of immigrants are crossing the barriers of original ethnicity and are being accepted in business, social, and even marriage relationships with other groups, including the Old Americans.

There are no data on how many immigrant families of many generations ago have already "crossed-over" to the extent that they have completely lost their sense of ethnicity. The number may be far greater than we know, for the processes of acculturation analyzed by Gordon show clearly that in

many ways the intermingling of ethnic groups is sharply increasing. The question of racial interrelations and eventual blending is another matter. White immigrants readily changed their ways of life in a few generations. The genetically inherited and ineradicable badge of race does not disappear.

A few postscripts to these volumes may be in order. Since the theme of the melting pot is primary in the book by Glazer and Moynihan and enters Gordon's in some degree, it is worthwhile making one of the assumptions of these authors more explicit. Glazer and Moynihan, especially, seem intent on destroying the myth of the melting pot. Gordon says there are many kinds of melting pots. I think a judicious view of the situation is that masses of people, whether they are immigrants from foreign countries or internal migrants, are necessarily melted and remoulded in some degree. They are not completely remodeled in the old Anglo-American patterns, but they have become strongly Americanized in many ways. They are affected by such national institutions as laws, the countless products of industry, education, the mass media, and the ever-more-pervasive set of American values. On more local levels, they are influenced by state and community laws and institutions. Alien ethnicity has persisted longest where fairly literate and skilled people have introduced whole community institutions—the Chinatowns, the old order Amish settlements, the Greek sponge fishermen of Tarpon Springs, and to a lesser degree many others. The most enduring aspects of ancestral culture are features of the deepest level, which is the family—for example, the Jewish family.

Second, ethnicity means either the ancestral culture or a group with which one can identify. Gordon states (p. 25) that "As though with a wily cunning of its own, as though there were some essential element in man's nature that demanded it—something that compelled him to merge his lonely individual identity with some ancestral group of fellows smaller than the whole human race, smaller often than the nation—the sense of ethnic belonging has survived." In addition to being mainly Catholics, the Irish probably have little in common besides occasional nostalgia for the old sod. But common problems can also create a sense of belonging without ethnic identity. The American Indians are

achieving a sense of oneness, despite their extremely diverse cultures, as the result of their treatment by the whites and their recent efforts to do something about it. The Negroes, although culturally not different from the whites, have developed a sense of belonging owing to discrimination against them.

So far as change away from the ancestral culture is concerned, I suggest a distinction that Gordon has not quite made clear. People have become Americanized owing to living in America, participating in its subsocieties, and relating to other groups in different ways. But their ancestral culture has not changed as a whole. That is, social structure, employment, language, and such miscellaneous items as food preferences have been altered according to different rationales. It has been the attempt to view cultural evolution in holistic terms that has made recent writing on the subject very confusing. Aspects of culture change in their own ways, although I would not now postulate the categories that should be distinguished in studies of assimilation of immigrants.

Finally, I think that more attention should be paid to the heterogeneity within the Anglo-American society, which is used as the reference point for assimilation. There were great differences among the early colonists, and there have remained differences between the Episcopalians, Fundamentalists, and Unitarians and between the industrialists of Wall Street and the now disappearing hillbillies. Moreover, all Americans are presently changing at a dizzy rate. These, of course, are cogent reasons for rejecting the idea of the melting pot.

Plant Distribution

The Natural Geography of Plants.

Henry Allen Gleason and Arthur Cronquist. Columbia University Press, New York, 1964. 420 pp. Illus. \$10.

Each of the 22 chapters in this book begins with a question, a definition, a résumé of a preceding chapter, or with a combination of these introductory gambits. Gleason wrote the first 21 chapters, Cronquist the final one. The authors frankly state that the book