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Diversity in America: A Sociohistorical Analysis

Vincent N. Parrillo¹

Multiculturalism, while a fairly new term, is not a new social phenomenon despite prevailing beliefs that the United States was culturally homogeneous at its formation. A new concept, the Dillingham Flaw, can explain many misconceptions about the nation's past. Cultural pluralism in the colonial and early national periods was extensive, in many ways surpassing that of the 1990s. Through conceptualization of mainstream/outgroup population proportions and comparative analysis of immigration rates, foreign-born percentages, and racial composition, the diversity of American society is shown to be less today than in past generations. Future projections suggest greater diversity by the mid-21st century, but the nonwhite population has not yet returned to its dimensions of 200 years ago.

KEY WORDS: multiculturalism; cultural pluralism; diversity; Dillingham Flaw; immigration rate; mainstream American.

INTRODUCTION

“Multiculturalism” connotes different meanings and sparks varying emotions in debates over integrationist vs. separatist issues with regard to curriculum, immigration, politics, and social policy. Because this 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. Although the current debates do contain some new elements, the fact is that multiculturalism 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

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new nation is steeped in the historic myth that the 13 colonies were almost entirely populated by immigrants and their descendants from the British Isles. Such was not the case. As I shall discuss throughout the paper, this “historic reality”—this fallacy of cultural homogeneity—changes under careful sociohistorical review and analysis.

That we are a nation of immigrants is an incontrovertible fact, but often not connected to the current multicultural picture. Contemporary public views on multiculturalism are based on the erroneous assumption that what occurred in the past were fleeting moments of heterogeneity that yielded to fairly rapid assimilation. The cultural diversity that exists in America today 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 American society (Boorstin, 1993; Ravitch, 1990; Schlesinger, 1991).

Are we witness to a new social phenomenon? Is the land of *e pluribus unum* disintegrating into *e pluribus plures*? (Ravitch, 1990). An important starting point is to note that “multiculturalism” is simply a newer term for what we once called cultural pluralism (Glazer, 1993:123). Publicly cloaked in the romanticism of the melting pot myth by assimilationists, cultural pluralism was redefined and often depicted in 20th-century analysis as a temporary social phenomenon involving convergent ethnic subcultures (Davie, 1936:489–563; Jenks and Lauck, 1926).

This approach conveniently ignored racial minorities, continuing the legacy of omission initiated by Crèvecoeur (Parrillo, 1994:58, 1980:98). In a passage in *Letters from an American Farmer* (London, 1782) that Philip Gleason asserts is “quoted more than any other in the history of immigration,” this French immigrant defined an American as a multigenerational amalgamation of various European nationalities (Gleason, 1980:33). Even in that claim of white ethnic exogamy, Crèvecoeur was not accurately portraying the reality of his times, since most ethnics did not intermarry.

Crèvecoeur’s single-race definition of an American was buttressed a century-and-a-half later by Horace Kallen in his seminal work on cultural pluralism, *Culture and Democracy in the United States*, which contained only incidental references to racial groups (Kallen, 1924). As a foreshadowing of 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.

Among its proponents and analysts (Adamic, 1938, 1940, 1944; Adams, 1914; Kallen, 1915, 1924; Newman, 1973:67–70), cultural pluralism has always meant the preservation and appreciation of ethnic cultures and identities, as well as peaceful coexistence between groups, goals akin to

those of the multiculturalists. Such early pluralist advocates as Jane Addams and Horace Kallen would no doubt be assailed today as “polarizing particularists” or “subversive separatists” for promoting what Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., calls a “cult of ethnicity” (Rose, 1993:201; Schlesinger, 1991:70).

With its single racial focus, cultural pluralism served in the past 30 years as a “way-station-on-the-road-to-assimilation” explanation. It functioned as an illustration of how *e pluribus unum* worked rather than as a framework to understand the past and present reality of American diversity. Today, with massive Third World immigration, bilingual/pluralist government policies, and minority-group assertiveness, 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 (Parrillo, 1994:553–556).

Multiculturalism, however, is a new term and not a new social phenomenon. Whether it is language retention, allegations of clannishness, or other pluralist realities supposedly mitigating against the “cultural homogeneity” that alarmists fear we are in danger of losing, American society is in some ways less multicultural today than in the past. However, this clearly is not the general perception.

What follows is not an exercise in revisionist thought, but a sociohistorical analysis of this nation’s multicultural past that challenges the currently accepted myth of bygone cultural homogeneity. Today, technology and telecommunications enable each of us to bear witness to 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. Though never before presented in this comprehensive form, enough data exist to peel away the layers of nationalist myth building to get at the sociocultural actualities about our past multicultural society.

THE DILLINGHAM FLAW

Polemics about multiculturalism often contain what we shall identify and define as the “Dillingham Flaw.” Senator William P. Dillingham of Vermont chaired the Congressional Commission on Immigration (1907–1911), which conducted extensive hearings and issued a 41-volume report supposedly based on social science research and statistics. In fact, the report was flawed by its use of simplistic categories and unfair comparisons of the “old” and “new” immigrants, thus ignoring differences of technological evo-

lution in their countries of origin. It also erred in overlooking the longer time interval that immigrants from northern and western Europe had in which to adjust, as well as the changed structural conditions in America wrought by industrialization and urbanization (Higham, 1971:14–15, 88, 159; Jones, 1960; Olson, 1994:176).

The Dillingham Flaw is then any inaccurate comparison based upon simplistic categorizations and/or anachronistic observations. By the latter term I refer to the tendency to apply the connotation of modern classifications (e.g., “British”) or sensibilities (e.g., ecumenicism) to an earlier period in time when either they did not exist or had a very different form of existence. Generalizing about 18th-century Americans from the British Isles, for example, fails to address and include the geographic segregation, social distance, even hostility, that existed between English Anglicans and Scots–Irish Presbyterians. They were not a single cultural group called “British”; a great cultural abyss existed between them.

Even among the English themselves, divergent religious beliefs created numerous subcultures whose shared sense of identity, social insulation, and endogamy resulted in limited outgroup social interaction. Religion was a far more meaningful component of everyday life in the 18th century and a cause for outgroup prejudice and avoidance. Its impact upon intergroup relations must not be overlooked. To avoid the Dillingham Flaw, we must overcome the temptation to use modern perceptions to explain a past that its contemporaries viewed quite differently.

It is also misleading to speak broadly either of African slaves or Native Americans as single entities. In a period of white dominance and racial exploitation, generalizations such as these failed to pay heed to the fact that these groups consisted of diverse peoples with distinctive cultures.

Another manifestation of the Dillingham Flaw is to suggest that today’s steadily increasing ranks of Asians and Hispanics present an unprecedented challenge to an integrative American society. The undercurrent of this thinking includes numbers, physical appearance, and alleged nonassimilationist patterns. Yet these have always been factors in native–newcomer interaction and current concerns are echoes of those raised about earlier groups, such as racist responses to southern Europeans’ darker hair, eyes, and complexion, or 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.”

Linguistic diversity has been the bane of nativist existence from colonial times to the present. Yet the persistence over generations of Dutch, French, German, Navajo, and other languages has always been a normal

fact in American life (Fishman, 1966). Though always a multilingual society, the United States has nonetheless provided a variety of choices and constraints that promote English usage by non-English language Americans (Stevens, 1992). With some exceptions among Native Americans, particularly the Navajo, this language shift to English has usually been a two-to-three-generation phenomenon (see Veltman, 1983).

Understanding the sociohistoric reality of the cultural, linguistic, and racial diversity of America's past allows for a more accurate comparison with today's multicultural society without falling victim to the Dillingham Flaw. An appreciable amount has been written about the influx of 5 million immigrants in 1820–1860 and of the 26 million between 1870 and 1920, and therefore need not be detailed here. However, debunking the cultural homogeneity myth requires a delineation of the precolonial through early federal periods prior to making any comparisons. It is essential to know truly what we were if we are to comprehend what we are and what we are becoming.

COLONIAL DIVERSITY

Considerable cultural diversity in colonial America existed among the African slaves, who came from different tribal backgrounds and spoke about a hundred languages or dialects. No tribe or language group predominated due to the slaveowners' deliberate cultural mixing of slaves from all parts of western Africa — particularly Angola, the Gold Coast, Nigeria, and Senegambia — to reduce the threat of rebellion.

Shortly thereafter the tribal barriers faded under the process of ethnogenesis (Alba, 1985; Greeley, 1977; Parrillo, 1994; Singer, 1962). The Africans became bilingual, even trilingual, conversing in their native tongue to members of their tribe or language group, and in broken English to their owners. To converse with other slaves in the Carolinas, the Africans created Gullah, a dialect amalgamating some English and many African words into an African grammatical structure (Bridenbaugh, 1952; Wood, 1974).

By the 1730s an African–American culture began to evolve, and it became more cohesive after the end of the legal slave trade in 1808. In a harsh, arbitrary world separated along racial lines, enslaved blacks developed a peasant-like culture (Henretta *et al.*, 1987:252). Like European peasants, they too formed close-knit communities based on family and kinship, with religion as an important center of their lives.

Although Gullah gradually faded away, many elements of African origin remained in music, dance, marriage rituals, housing floor plans (front-

to-back rooms instead of two rooms side by side in front), and the incest taboo. Rarely did marriage occur between cousins, unlike such commonality among white slaveowners, usually to maintain inherited property and power (Blassingame, 1972; Genovese, 1974; Isaac, 1983).

Analysis of the white ethnic colonial population is essential to understanding our multicultural past, for it is here that the cultural homogeneity myth rests. Each settlement was typically a separate ethnic enclave, demonstrated by names such as New England, New Belgium, New Netherland, New Sweden, New Smyrna, New Hamburg, New Iberia, or New Orleans. Despite their dissimilarities from one another, as separate entities most colonial settlements during their formative years were culturally homogeneous, although many quickly became multicultural. Jamestown, for example, experienced a strike in 1619 by its small number of Armenian, German, and Polish workers seeking political rights denied them as "inferiors" (Adamic, 1944:287–288).

The greatest concentration of cultural diversity was in New Amsterdam, where 18 languages were spoken on Manhattan Island as early as 1646 (Wittke, 1967:15). Dutch, Flemings, Walloons, French, Danes, Norwegians, Swedes, English, Scots, Irish, Germans, Poles, Bohemians, Portuguese, and Italians were among the settlement's inhabitants. Philadelphia offered another example of cultural pluralism. Still a small village in 1700, its population nonetheless included Danes, Dutch, Finns, French, Germans, Irish, Scots, and Swedes (Sutherland, 1936; Green, 1965).

Throughout the New York–New Jersey region, the Dutch remained socially insulated and maintained ethnic solidarity. Buoyed by their numbers (1 in 6 residents in New York and New Jersey was Dutch), their culture flourished. Dutch endured as an everyday language, with English not even introduced into Dutch schools until 1774 (Koningsberger, 1968:20). Endogamy was the norm, as illustrated by this comment of Martin Van Buren that his family was

without a single intermarriage with one of different extraction from the time of the arrival of the first emigrant to that of the marriage of my eldest son, embracing a period of over two centuries and including six generations. (Fitzpatrick, 1973:9)

Van Buren's comment could have applied to most of the Dutch families and other ethnics of his time (Cole, 1984:32 Niven, 1983:5).

At one point the English clearly dominated all 13 colonies. By 1689, the population of colonial America had reached an estimated 210,000 Europeans, about 80% of them "transplanted Englishmen." Between 1689 and 1775, however, the population increased twelvefold to about 2.6 million, with little of it due to natural increase. Rather, the rapid growth of African slavery and the influx of hundreds of thousands of non-English

immigrants in the mid-18th century significantly changed the character of the colonial population (Barck and Lefler, 1958:271–280; Henretta *et al.*, 1987:105–108).

While the New England colonies remained predominantly English, the southern colonies experienced an inflow of thousands of Germans, Scots–Irish, French Huguenots, and others to account for about one-fourth of the total white population. It was in the middle colonies, however, where the greatest cultural diversity existed on the eve of the Revolution. Pennsylvania colony, its Quaker-inspired religious tolerance and liberal land policies serving as important lures, superseded all others in attracting a mixed group of non-English immigrants. In 1766 Benjamin Franklin reported to the House of Commons that the Germans and Scots–Irish each comprised one-third of Pennsylvania's total population of over 200,000 (Wittke, 1967:51, 71).

Some, like the French Huguenots, were quickly absorbed into the dominant Anglo–American mainstream but others, like the Germans and Scots–Irish, created separate and distinct communities for themselves where they maintained linguistic and cultural cohesiveness, despite their close proximity to other ethnic groups nearby. United by their strong cultural ties, they practiced a voluntary allegiance to their own distinct social groups. The Scots–Irish would eventually assimilate more quickly than the Germans, who remained clustered within a vibrant, persistent subculture for several more generations.

To date, statistics about colonial America have not been presented in a comprehensive format that included both race and ethnicity. Bits and pieces are dispersed throughout the censuses conducted in the colonies or in estimates of anthropologists, historians, or demographers at the Census Bureau. From these various sources with their varying numbers, Table I has been constructed, adopting either census and/or consensus figures, or midrange numbers when estimates fluctuated significantly. One revelation from this statistical portrait of a truly colonial mosaic is the significant representation of non-English peoples on the eve of the American Revolution.

Population composition was varied among the New England, Middle, and Southern Colonies. In the New England Colonies, the heavy domination of the English at 70.5% (see Table I) was skewed by their large numbers in Massachusetts, which was the most populated colony in this region. In contrast, the Middle Colonies were the most diverse, with the English comprising only 40.6% of the population. At that time Pennsylvania was the most populous colony in this region and Philadelphia the largest city on the Eastern seaboard. Over one-third of the population in the Southern Colonies were English, less than the 43% nonwhite population. Virginia

Table I. Approximate Colonial Population in 1776^a

Ethnic group	New England	%	Middle	%	Southern	%	Total	%
English	461,400	70.5	369,700	40.6	382,400	37.4	1,213,500	46.9
Scots	26,100	4.0	60,700	6.7	71,400	7.0	158,200	6.1
Scots-Irish	18,100	2.8	59,200	6.5	39,200	3.8	116,500	4.5
Irish	9800	1.5	31,100	3.4	30,500	3.0	71,400	2.8
German	2400	0.4	138,700	15.2	36,100	3.5	177,200	6.8
Dutch	1600	0.2	57,700	6.3	2100	0.2	61,400	2.4
French	5200	0.8	17,000	1.9	11,100	1.1	33,300	1.3
Swedish	—	—	12,100	1.3	2500	0.2	14,600	0.6
Unassigned	110,700	16.9	24,900	2.7	6400	0.6	142,000	5.5
African	14,800	2.3	113,200	12.4	401,100	39.2	529,100	20.5
Indigenous ^b	4000	0.6	26,000	2.9	40,000	3.9	70,000	2.7
Total	654,100	25.3	910,300	35.2	1,022,800	39.5	2,587,200	100.0

^aSource: Figures result from a compilation and extrapolation of data from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Colonial and Pre-Federal Statistics*, Series Z 1-132.

^bData for indigenous tribes include only those living east of the Mississippi. Some anthropologists and historians give higher estimates.

was the most populated colony and had about two-fifths of all slaves in the region, but in South Carolina the Africans outnumbered the Europeans.

English Americans may have held political power in the Middle and Southern Colonies, but they were decisively outnumbered by the combined racial and ethnic groups. Even in total numbers throughout all 13 colonies, the English comprised less than half. (The Scots–Irish were still too culturally distinct to allow for the general classification of “British.”) With so much diversity, why the present-day belief in past cultural homogeneity? The answer lies partly in the Dillingham Flaw, and also in the predominance of English American leaders, historians, and literary figures whose writings and/or actions cast a long shadow across subsequent generations.

As the colonial period drew to a close, 53% of the population in the 13 colonies belonged to racially and culturally distinct minorities, more than twice the proportion in 1990. The 1990 census tabulations showed Asians at 3%, blacks at 12%, Hispanics at 9%, and Native Americans at 1% for a total of 25%. In 1776, just African and Native Americans equalled that figure. Racial and ethnic outgroups thus comprised a greater portion of the total population than in the 1990s.

Religious diversity was another significant component of cultural pluralism in colonial America. Estimates of the number of denominational places of worship in 1775 are Anglican: 480; Baptist: 498; Catholic: 50; Congregational: 658; German and Dutch Reformed: 251; German Pietist: 250; Jewish: 2; Lutheran: 151; Presbyterian: 543; Quaker: 295 (Barck and Lefler, 1958:398; Henretta *et al.*, 1987:130; Perkins and Van Deusen, 1968:89–90).

Deep religious loyalties among the members of these variegated faiths induced social distance gulfs that extended beyond avoidance and social isolation. In the 17th century many colonies had enacted discriminatory legislation against Catholics and Jews, usually by banning their immigration or right to vote. Later, the Great Awakening of the 1740s generated much bitterness between traditionalists and the rapidly growing evangelical Protestant sects.

Concerned about preserving its faith and transmitting its values and beliefs to future generations, every major Christian sect took steps to ensure its survival. Each established its own college to educate new clergy and, as Daniel J. Boorstin states, “to save more Americans from the untruths of its competitors” (Boorstin, 1958:179).

Just prior to the American Revolution, clashes in the Chesapeake colonies between Anglicans and Baptists, and between Anglicans and Scots–Irish Presbyterians, were not uncommon. The latter group, living along the western frontier from Maine to Georgia, where they frequently

fought the Native Americans, also came into dispute often with the pacifist Quakers and German sectarian groups.

There were other problems:

The New England sects were jealous and fearful of Anglican inroads and the Anglicans were scornful of the New England church system, since it was not founded, like their own, on the apostolic succession. The Presbyterians, Baptists, Quakers, German Reformed, and Lutherans of the back country were intolerant of one another, and especially of the Church of England. All the Protestants disliked Catholicism and favored political restrictions for Catholics. (Perkins and Van-Deusen, 1968:91)

No single religion dominated, and the proliferation of sects and the growth of religious enthusiasm in 18th-century America produced “an unpredicted and unplanned (often an undesired) religious tolerance” (Boorstin, 1958:180). Religious pluralism slowly, sometimes painfully, led to tolerance since no one group was powerful enough to coerce the others.

United by their nationalism, the colonists put aside their prejudices by institutionalizing that tolerance and establishing a bedrock principle of American culture: separation of Church and State. Freedom of religion was more an act of practical necessity than of democratic ideals. It is one legacy from America’s multicultural past.

By 1776, the embryonic nation was “a cultural kaleidoscope of three races and dozens of ethnic and religious groups” (Olson, 1979:51). United by fear and defense against foreign threats—from the French in Canada, the Spanish in Florida, the indigenous tribes in the west and the British Empire east—they put aside their differences to fight for their freedom and to maintain their rights through local politics. However, for the most part, each European ethnic group went its own way. Their cultural differences remained for another century, retreating only with the onslaught of the massive new European immigration.

THE EARLY NATIONAL PERIOD

The first census also reveals a society considerably less homogeneous than popular historic myth espouses. The English, Scots, and Scots-Irish comprised 74.2% of the white ethnic population, leading many observers to identify this classical white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) collectivity as the dominant group. Those Americans may have forged themselves into a collective new national identity by putting aside their religious prejudices and ethnic differences, but their perceptions of cultural dissimilarities among themselves remained, thereby lessening the likelihood of social in-

teraction. Instead, these ethnoreligious groups coexisted while maintaining their own subcultures (see Table II).

While 74% of the white population were Anglo-Saxon Protestants, 26% were not. In a time of sharply drawn ethnoreligious lines, one in four whites — almost 800,000 out of 3.1 million — belonged to an outgroup minority category. When we also add the 757,208 African Americans (about 60,000 of whom were free), the result is that over 1.5 million of a 3.9 million total, or 38% of the total population were not WASPs. Still excluding the indigenous peoples almost entirely living away from the “settled” areas, approximately two in five Americans in 1790 were not WASPs. Clearly a notable segment of American society in the 1790 census did not culturally or racially belong to the dominant cultural group.

Table III offers a detailed breakdown of the 1790 census among whites only. The Irish figures break down to about two-fifths Free State Catholics and three-fifths Ulster or Protestant Irish. The unassigned category includes those of mixed or unknown nationality and/or living in the back country. The Northwest Territory includes the future states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Even a cursory look at this table reveals varying multicultural realities in each locale.

IMMIGRATION RATE

One important indicator of the impact of immigrants upon a society is the immigration rate. This measurement tool allows for comparisons of different eras while enabling us to specifically address vague nativist fears that America is being overwhelmed by a large influx of foreigners. It thus

Table II. U.S. Population in 1790^a

Nationality	Total	Percent
English	1,932,000	49.2
African	757,000	19.3
Scots-Irish	454,000	11.6
German	276,000	7.0
Irish	117,000	3.0
Dutch	108,000	2.7
French	54,000	1.4
Scandinavian	41,000	1.0
Other	190,000	4.8
Total	3,929,000	100.0

^aSource: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Table III. 1790 White Population Distribution By Percent^a

	English	Scots	Irish	German	Dutch	French	Swedish	Spanish	Unassigned
Total	60.9	8.3	9.7	8.7	3.4	1.7	—	—	6.6
Maine	60.0	4.5	11.7	1.3	.1	1.3	.7	—	21.1
New Hampshire	61.0	6.2	7.5	.4	.1	.7	—	—	24.1
Vermont	76.0	5.1	4.1	.2	.6	.4	—	—	12.6
Massachusetts	82.0	4.4	3.9	.3	.2	.8	—	—	8.4
Rhode Island	71.0	5.8	2.8	.5	.4	.8	.1	—	18.6
Connecticut	67.0	2.2	2.9	.3	.3	.9	—	—	26.4
New York	52.0	7.0	8.1	8.2	17.5	3.8	.5	—	2.9
New Jersey	47.0	7.7	9.5	9.2	16.6	2.4	3.9	—	3.7
Pennsylvania	35.5	8.6	14.5	33.3	1.8	1.8	1.8	—	3.9
Delaware	60.0	8.0	11.7	1.1	4.3	1.6	8.9	—	4.4
Maryland	64.5	7.6	12.3	11.7	.5	1.2	.5	—	1.7
Virginia	68.5	10.2	11.7	6.3	.3	1.5	.6	—	.9
North Carolina	66.0	14.8	11.1	4.7	.3	1.7	.2	—	1.2
South Carolina	60.2	15.1	13.8	5.0	.4	3.9	.2	—	1.4
Georgia	57.4	15.5	15.3	7.6	.2	2.3	.6	—	1.1
Kentucky/Tennessee	57.9	10.0	12.2	14.0	1.3	2.2	.5	—	1.9
Northwest Territory	29.8	4.1	4.7	4.3	—	57.1	—	—	—
Spanish United States	2.5	.3	.3	.4	—	—	—	96.5	—
French United States	11.2	1.0	1.8	8.7	—	64.2	—	12.5	—

^aSource: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Part II, Series Z 20-23*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976, p. 1168.

serves as a concrete aide in objectively describing a reality that may or may not differ from perceptions.

The annual immigration rate per 1000 persons in the general population is computed by dividing the sum of the annual immigration totals by the sum of annual U.S. population totals for the same number of years. Collection of such data began in 1820 when new regulations required shipmasters to submit passenger lists to customs officials.

As can be seen in Table IV, the 1980s were the second highest decade in total number of immigrants arriving. However, in terms of immigration rate, the 1980s—which also include undocumented aliens granted permanent residence under the 1986 amnesty program—actually rank 11th out of the 17 decades. Immigrants in the 1980s were less than one-third the proportion found in 1901–1910 and numerically less as well.

The year 1991, with its 1.8 million immigrants and 7.2 immigration rate was an anomaly. It includes the greater part of those undocumented

Table IV. Immigration 1820–1992^a

Period	Number	Rate ^b
1820–1830	151,825	1.2
1831–1840	599,125	3.9
1841–1850	1,713,251	8.4
1851–1860	2,598,214	9.3
1861–1870	2,314,824	6.4
1871–1880	2,812,191	6.2
1881–1890	5,246,613	9.2
1891–1900	3,687,546	5.3
1901–1910	8,795,386	10.4
1911–1920	5,735,811	5.7
1921–1930	4,107,209	3.5
1931–1940	528,431	0.4
1941–1950	1,035,039	0.7
1951–1960	2,515,479	1.5
1961–1970	3,321,677	1.7
1971–1980	4,493,314	2.1
1981–1990	7,338,062	3.1 ^c
1991	1,827,167	7.2 ^c
1992	973,977	3.8

^aSource: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1993*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office 1993, Table No. 5, p. 10.

^bAnnual rate per 1000 U.S. population. Rate computed by dividing sum of annual immigration totals by sum of annual population for same number of years.

^cIncludes persons who were granted permanent residence under the legalization program of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986.

aliens already living in the United States who were granted permanent residence under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. In 1992, the total dropped almost 50% to about 974,000 immigrants and a 3.8 rate. This figure serves as a more probable indicator of immigration for the rest of this decade, assuming no changes in immigration laws or patterns.

Legislation in 1990 set a limit of 700,000 immigrants for 1992 to 1994, and of 675,000 thereafter. Since immediate family members are not included in these caps, annual figures will actually be higher, as they were in 1992. If current patterns continue, we can project a total of 10–11 million immigrants arriving in the 1990s, making it the decade with the largest number of immigrants in the nation's history.

Such a projection can provoke alarm among concerned nativists. However, since the population also increases through natural processes, examining the immigration rate provides a more accurate measure of what is really happening. Because Census Bureau projections of the total population in 2000 range from about 273 million to about 285 million, and because annual immigration limits are set by law, we can project the immigration rate for the last decade of the 20th century. By this ascertainment, the 1990s immigration rate will fall somewhere between 3.6 and 4.1, ranking this decade 10th of 18.

Based on these data, the earlier waves of immigrants in each of the decades between 1841 and 1920 had greater significance in their affecting the nation's population composition. Furthermore, the legal limits to immigration and a steadily increasing total population mean that, unless the cap is raised again, the immigration rate should decline, not increase, in the foreseeable future.

FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION

Data on the foreign-born were not gathered until the 1850 census, a year that denotes the close of the first of the higher immigration-rate decades. As such, it serves as an important starting point. The figures in Table V complement those in Table IV, in that they represent the cumulative totals of immigrants residing in the United States. Since immigration rates were higher in the past than in the present, it is not surprising to find that the foreign-born segment of the population has been higher in ten of the past fifteen decennial censuses, consecutively from 1850 to 1940.

In Table V we can see that the percentage of foreign-born living in the United States between 1860 and 1920 was much greater than in 1990. In the 1890 and 1910 census, 1 in 7 was foreign-born; in 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900 and 1920, it was 1 in 8. In 1990, about 1 in 12 was foreign-born, a

Table V. U.S. Foreign-Born Population (in Thousands)^a

Year	Foreign Born	% of Total population
1850	2241	9.6
1860	4097	13.1
1870	5567	13.9
1880	6680	13.3
1890	9250	14.7
1900	10,341	13.6
1910	13,516	14.7
1920	14,020	13.2
1930	14,283	11.6
1940	11,657	8.8
1950	10,431	6.9
1960	9738	5.5
1970	9619	4.7
1980	14,080	6.2
1990	19,767	7.9

^aSource: Data from 1850–1910: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Part I*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976, Series A 105-118, p. 14; from 1920–1990: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1993*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, Table No. 54, p. 50.

decidedly smaller proportion in a time when immigration fears find frequent expression in the media.

At the turn of the century, most cities in the Northeast contained a foreign-born population that comprised two-thirds to three-fourths of the cities' total populations. In contrast the cities in 1990 with the most foreign-born populations were Miami at 33.6%, Los Angeles at 27.1%, and New York at 19.7% (Bureau of the Census, 1992). While these are significant proportions, they pale alongside the data of 80–90 years ago.

From another viewpoint, the approximately 19.8 million foreign-born identified in the 1990 census are the largest numerical total ever, but in proportion to the entire population, that figure ranks 11th among the 15 decades for which this information is available.

Since these statistics do not include American-born children being raised in immigrant family households, the proportion of those living in various ethnic subcultures has been greater, especially among past generations when family size was typically larger than today. Regardless of acculturation and ethnogenesis patterns, different languages, customs, and traditions from the old country have always prevailed to some extent among

a sizable part of American society, more so in the past with no mass media influences than in the present.

At its lowest point in 1960, the foreign-born component has since been moving upward again, reflecting the recent increases in the immigration rate. Similarly, the foreign-born percentages will continue to rise for awhile but will eventually level off and decline, for the same reasons enumerated about for the immigration rate.

MAINSTREAM AMERICANS

Rarely are cultures or societies static entities. In the United States, the continual influx of immigrants has helped shape its metamorphosis. Part of this tempering has been the evolving definition of the mainstream ingroup, or identifying who was “really an American.” In an early conception the WASPs comprised virtually all of this ingroup. Gradually this ingroup expanded to include northwestern Europeans (including the previous outgroups of Dutch, Germans, and Irish). This reconceptualization was triggered by nativist reaction to the new immigration and encouraged by the assimilation of the old outgroups (see Higham, 1971:140).

By 1890, the “mainstream American” ingroup had expanded from English American exclusivity to British American, thus including the Scots-Irish and Welsh. While some multigenerational Americans of other ancestry had also blended into the mainstream, millions had not. These Americans remained culturally pluralistic, their separateness resulting from race, religion, or geographic isolation helping preserve their language and culture. In addition, over 9 million foreign-born — 1 in 7, perhaps 1 in 5 if we include their children — also lived outside the mainstream.

In 1890, the “melting pot” had not yet absorbed the 80,000 Dutch, 200,000 Swiss, or 1.2 million Scandinavians in the Midwest, most of whom had arrived after 1870. Likewise the 150,000 French immigrants, 200,000 Cajuns in Louisiana, and 500,000 French Canadians in New England and the Great Plains remained culturally, linguistically, and religiously separated from the larger society. Six million Irish Catholics in the Northeast, many of the 8 million Germans either in the rural Midwest or concentrated in many large cities, and 300,000 Mexican Americans in the Southwest all lived in social isolation. About 7.5 million African Americans, 248,000 Native Americans, and 110,000 Asians also lived as racial minorities separate from the mainstream (Olson, 1994:101–108). Race, language, and culture clearly shaped group relations in the United States in 1890, keeping the nation a patchwork quilt of cultural diversity.

In the 1890s, the tide of immigration began to change. The turning point came in 1896 when immigrants from northern and western Europe were surpassed by immigrants from the rest of Europe. These “new” immigrants soon caused a redefinition of a mainstream American, bringing those of north and west European origins (including Australian and Canadian) into this classification in contrast to all physically and culturally distinct others.

By 1970 a new turning point in immigration had been reached, with Third World immigrants outnumbering European immigrants. Once again, partly through a reaction to this change and partly due to acculturation, education, and upward mobility, the concept of “mainstream American” expanded, this time including anyone of European origin, thus setting them apart from people of color now arriving in great numbers, as well as the still nonintegrated African Americans and Native Americans.

Table VI illustrates these mainstream American and outgroup classifications. Admittedly, these groupings are somewhat arbitrary. For example, some non-English were clearly mainstream Americans in 1790, such as Welsh Americans William Floyd, Button Gwinnett, Thomas Jefferson, Francis Lewis, and Lewis Morris—all signers of the Declaration of Independence. However, there still were many 18th- and 19th-century segregated Welsh settlements of Quakers, Baptists or Congregationalists scattered in numerous regions where Welsh-language newspapers, even books, helped maintain a distinct ethnic minority group. Similarly, 19th-century German industrialists such as H. J. Heinz, Frederick Weyerhauser, John J. Bausch, and Henry Lomb typify non-British individuals who wielded considerable power and influence; yet most Germans remained socially isolated in rural or urban subcommunities. The 1990 mainstream category is also an arbitrary oversimplification as it overlooks the religious and cultural differences among white ethnics that set them apart from fully assimilated European Americans (see Lieberson and Waters, 1988; Alba, 1990).

Nevertheless, these categories serve a useful purpose. They address the perception, acceptance, social distance, and therefore the basis upon which people react positively or negatively to physically or culturally distinct others. Some people included in the mainstream group may not actually be a part of it and vice versa, yet these groupings offer an approximation of who is seen as “American” and who still remains as an outsider.

One can, of course, create other configurations and numbers. For example, one could introduce social stratification as a variable and make an effective argument for social class designation affecting mainstream acceptance and thereby altering the ingroup–outgroup memberships. Such a position has some merit, although it opens the door for counter arguments involving racism and structural assimilation that would affect acceptance

regardless of social class. Even so, with a smaller proportion of people living in poverty today than in 1890 (Henretta *et al.*, 1987:329–334), the pattern shown in Table VI of an increased proportion of mainstream Americans over the centuries would likely remain, and perhaps be even greater.

These figures serve as a guide to our understanding and not as an absolute identification. Avoiding the Dillingham Flaw and identifying mainstream Americans through the eyes of each period's contemporaries, we find that the expanding American identity has resulted in a greater ingroup totality today than ever before. Despite recently expressed fears about America becoming a polyglot society of dissimilar peoples (an historically recurring anxiety), the nation's mainstream group has expanded, not contracted, and the children of immigrants learn English just as they always have (see de la Garza, 1991).

RACIAL COMPOSITION

After increasing proportionately since 1790, and peaking in 1940 at 89.8%, the nation's white population has since been steadily decreasing, as Table VII reveals. Whites now constitute a greater portion of the total population than in 1790, although the Census Bureau projects the non-Hispanic white population steadily decreasing until it reaches 53% of the total in 2050 (Bureau of the Census, 1993a).

Hispanics, who can be of any race, were virtually nonexistent in the United States of 1790. They are expected to constitute 21% of the total population in 2050, having passed African Americans in 2013 as the largest minority group.

African Americans constituted almost one in five residents in 1790, their peak year proportionately. Since 1950, their ratio has been slowly

Table VI. Growing Inclusion in the National Identity^a

Year	Mainstream American	Percent	Racial/cultural outgroup	Percent
1790	English	60.9	All others	39.1
1890	British	36.6	All others	63.4
1920	N & W Europe	63.7	All others	36.3
1990	European	71.3	All others	28.7

^aSource: 1990 percentages are derived from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1990 Census Special Tabulations*, 1990 CPH-L-89, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, p. 1; others are derived from 1790, 1890, and 1920 census data.

Table VII. U.S. Population by Race, 1790-2050 (in Thousands)^a

Year	White	% of Total	Black	% of Total	Asian	% of Total	Native American	% of Total
1790	3172	79.3	757	18.9	—	—	70 ^b	1.8
1840	14,196	81.3	2874	16.5	—	—	400 ^c	2.2
1890	55,101	87.5	7489	11.9	110	0.2	248	0.4
1940	118,215	89.8	12,866	9.8	255	0.2	334	0.3
1990	208,704	83.9	30,483	12.3	7458	3.0	1878	0.8
2050+	274,761	71.8	62,181	16.2	41,091	11.0	4641	1.0

^bConservative estimate only of indigenous peoples living east of the Mississippi where all other Americans were living.

^cConservative estimate of indigenous peoples living within the contiguous states and territories now open to westward expansion.

+ Middle series projections based upon a continuing total fertility rate of 2.119, a life expectancy of 82.1 years, and annual net immigration of 880,000.

^aSource: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Part I*, Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976, Series A 91-104, p. 14; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992, P 25-1092.

climbing from 9.9% to 12.3% in 1990. Census Bureau projections show a growth to 16% in 2050.

Virtually nonexistent in the United States in 1790, Asians have been steadily increasing in numbers and proportion since their first tallies in the 1860 census. Since the liberalization of immigration regulations in 1965, their growth has been dramatic and their visible concentration in certain regions of the country—particularly on the East and West Coasts and in the Chicago metropolitan region—makes their 3% of the total population seem much greater to residents of those areas. The Census Bureau projects a continued growth to about 11% by 2050.

After experiencing a calamitous decline in population from first contact with Europeans until the 20th century, Native Americans are now steadily increasing their numbers. However, their recent population growth only maintains their proportional place in American society. Census Bureau projections show them remaining at about 1% in 2050.

Several points need to be made. First, since the Census Bureau projections are based on an assumption of current demographic patterns continuing, those forecast figures could change significantly with any shift in those patterns. Second, the nation's racial composition is more diverse than ever before but the ratio of whites to nonwhites presently stands at a greater share of the total than in 1790. That ratio is moving downward but, at the moment, this country has not yet attained the nonwhite population dimensions it possessed at its formation.

Also, such projections are problematic in that they might become a reversal of the Dillingham Flaw, projecting contemporary categories forward into the far future. Perhaps new categories will emerge in addition to or in lieu of the present ones. For example, interracially married couples are twice the number they were in 1980, standing now at about 1.2 million. Mixed-origins marriages of Hispanics and non-Hispanics also totaled about 1.2 million in 1992 (Bureau of the Census, 1993b). Another possibility is that Hispanic Americans may not be a minority group, as many European groups no longer are. They may have become absorbed into the collective identity of "mainstream American" or extensively intermarried with other groups by then.

CONCLUSION

Whether one uses the metaphor of an ever-changing mosaic or kaleidoscope to describe its people, the United States continues to manifest a dynamic cultural pluralism that has always marked its existence, even in colonial times. While it has a greater mix of races and nationalities today,

and has become what Ben Wattenberg calls the “first universal nation,” in some ways the United States is less multicultural than in its past. Despite fears about divisiveness, the mainstream group is larger than ever before. Despite concerns over language retention, today’s immigrants want to learn English and do so no slower than past immigrants, and perhaps even more quickly because of the mass media (Parrillo, 1994:551–554). Despite nativist anxieties about nonwesterners not blending in, Asians are demonstrating their desire to integrate by having the highest naturalization rates among all of the largest sending countries. (Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1993:130)

Multiculturalism is neither new nor a threat to the stabilization and integration of American society. It is an old, continuing presence that strengthens not weakens, enriches not diminishes, nourishes not drains, a civilization whose character and temperament have long reflected the diversity of its people.

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