Assimilation and Pluralism
Theoretical Models of Ethnic Relations
2 options: societies either blend together or remain segregated

A. Assimilation: groups become more alike culturally and interact with one another more freely
   1. “a process of boundary reduction” (Yinger 1981:246)
   2. No longer prevailing assumption: that multi-ethnic societies inevitably move toward fusion
   3. Assimilationist bias: has been undermined by U.S. and global patterns of ethnic conflict (M:81)
   4. Assimilationist societies: no recognized obligation or objective in protecting the retention of ethnicity; most groups retain only expressive aspects of their ethnic cultures beyond two or three generations; however much social interaction at primary level continues to take place within ethnic sub-societies; racially distinct are more segregated and the least structurally assimilated; stratified more by class than by caste; racist ideology is officially denied and more commonly expressed informally and subtly; nonetheless, competition—as opposed to colonial society in which people “know their place”—may lead to more low-grade interethnic and racial conflict than in pluralist societies

B. Pluralism: groups remain culturally distinct (cultural pluralism) and socially segregated (structural Pluralism) (M:80,92)
   1. Equalitarian pluralism: multiculturalism with groups participating equally within common political and economic institutions; relations among ethnic groups are not “hierarchical and invidious;” group differences are encouraged but within the framework of agreed-upon principles (M:92)
      a. Corporate pluralism: formally declared equalitarian pluralism in which structural and cultural differences are protected by the state; examples are Switzerland, Belgium, Malaysia, and to some extent Canada; power is allocated on basis of ethnic formula with benefits (jobs/income) distributed proportional to population; cooperation among all leaders of all significant ethnic groups; political autonomy for each group locally

      i. Multilingualism is officially sanctioned: e.g., Switzerland’s 4 official languages—German, French, Italian, and Romansh—is the “most obvious and successful” system (McRae 1983); Canadian bilingualism (English, French) has been very divisive
      ii. Territorial basis: ethnic groups are concentrated in native areas in which they have historic roots; became part of larger nation through conquest or voluntarily to secure benefits; not like U.S. where most immigrants are voluntary, dispersed geographically, and sever most native roots
         a. Example: 80% French-speaking people in Canada are in one province—Quebec (M:94); different from ethnic concentrations in urban pockets or neighborhoods in U.S.
   2. Inequalitarian pluralism: state uses coercion rather than consensual legitimacy to hold ethnic groups together; state protect interests of dominant ethnic group; sustained or increased inequality is built into the system; high levels of prejudice and discrimination; interethic interaction limited to functional contacts such as work and government administration; Kuper and Smith (1969:1) characterization: “Economic symbiosis and mutual avoidance, cultural diversity and social cleavage;” each group has its own schools, churches, and businesses (institutional separation and duplication)
      a. Economic interdependence: dominant group needs subordinate ethnic groups for menial labor
      b. Ideological legitimation: dominant group sees subordinate group as “childish, immature, irresponsible, exuberant, improvident, fun-loving, good-humored, and happy-go-lucky; in short, as inferior but lovable as long as they stay in their place” (van den Berghe 1978:27)
      c. Resembles caste system: strict segregation enforced in all areas of social life
d. Paternalistic race relations: all people understand social place; stability assured if no deviation from ascribed roles;
e. Competitive race relations replace paternalistic relations: when agrarian systems evolve into industrial societies, social roles must be assigned through competition rather than through ascription
   i. Requires physical segregation to become more rigid: because norms of social distance and “master-servant” relations, so well institutionalized in the paternalistic condition, break down
f. Classic colonial systems: realize inequalitarian pluralism in most extreme form
g. Expulsion or annihilation of subordinate ethnic groups: e.g. deportation of Chinese from U.S. in mid-19th century, detention of Ukrainians in Canada during WWI, Japanese internment in U.S. and Canada during WWII, Nazi treatment of Jews in 1930s and 1940s, ethnic cleansing by Serbs against Muslims in Bosnia and ethnic Albanians in Kosovo—all are one outcome of inequalitarian pluralism
h. Most characteristic of agrarian or pre-industrial societies: labor-intensive economies require large supply of unskilled labor—subordinate ethnic groups fulfill this need; rules of interaction explicitly defined and are enforced by both tradition and law; ethnicity and class overlap with no mobility; dominant group ordinarily entered as conqueror; prime examples are colonial and slave societies of 17th-19th centuries. Only example in modern age is South Africa’s former apartheid system, which unraveled starting in mid-1980s and was formally ended in 1994.

Dimensions of Assimilation

A. Cultural assimilation: ethnic group adopts another’s cultural traits—language, diet, religion, etc.
   1. Can be additive rather than substitutive: if groups are not highly antagonistic or very disparate
B. Structural assimilation: increasing degree of social interaction among different ethnic groups; members of subordinate ethnic groups are dispersed throughout society’s various institutions and increasingly enter into contacts with members of the dominant group
   1. Primary (or informal): interaction within relatively small and intimate groups such as family and friendship cliques (emotional or “affective” relationships; face-to-face interaction; enduring ties); the degree to which friends and marital partners are chosen without regard to ethnicity or race
   2. Secondary (or formal): interaction within large, impersonal groups such as in schools, workplace, etc.
      a. Equality of access to power and privilege within major institutions: jobs, housing, schooling, political office, income, wealth, life chances, etc. are distributed without regard to race or ethnicity
      b. Measurement: degree of parity with the dominant group’s income, wealth, education, and power
      c. Synonymous to integration: participation in social institutions is unconstrained by ethnicity
d. Generally precedes primary structural assimilation: formal relations precede intimate relationships
C. Psychological assimilation: change in self-identity so that ethnicity is no longer defining “who am I”
   1. Implies not only change in self-identification: but also a change in identification by others (M:84)
D. Biological assimilation: accomplished through intermarriage (exogamy)
   1. Progress toward long-range goal: Mexico most progress (Van den Berghe 1978) and Brazil some

Segmented Assimilations
(Portes and Zhou 1993, 1994)

Assimilation to a culture outside mainstream

A. Structural barriers today: economy no longer provides immigrant upward mobility via manufacturing
B. E.g., West Indian (Haitian, Jamaican, etc.) Immigrants: drift to black culture, not white middle class
C. Immigrant Asians resist: emphasize traditional ethnic values/identity to get children to excel in school

Factors facilitating or inhibiting assimilation

What factors affect whether, to what extent, and the rate at which the members of a given group are included into dominant society?

View Video

A. Voluntary Entrance: makes for less conflict-ridden adjustment; conquest or involuntary migration leaves few options
other than resistance.

View Video (Ignore references to chapter 1 in video)

B. Race: resistance of dominant group will be stronger in the case of a racial distinction and visible physical differences; 4th generation Asian-Americans get questions like “Where do you come from?” and comments like “You speak English so well.”

C. Size: rejection by dominant group more if subordinate group is relatively large or has grown rapidly; smaller groups have fewer resources and interact more frequently with out-group members

D. Similarity to dominant culture: will expedite assimilation.

E. Timing: earlier arrival (more time here) increases chance of assimilation. Lieberson and Waters found that among those describing ancestry as "American" in census of 1980, 98 percent had at least 3 generations' residence in U.S. (1988:43). Also important is possibility of finding work, for example during periods of economic expansion when immigrants are welcomed. When unemployment is high, there is fear that they are taking American jobs.