

American Ethnicity

The Dynamics and Consequences of Discrimination

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distinctive cultural features and patterns of social organization, even if this means that they conflict with the Anglo-Saxon core. The resulting tension and conflict engenders questions such as the following.

1. How flexible can the Anglo-Saxon core be in accommodating the key elements of other cultures and remain the core? Many argue that America must become pluralistic, but to what degree and at what expense? If a society has no clear cultural or institutional core, is such a society viable?
2. Has the existence of blatant and established discrimination in America forced ethnic groups to discard assimilation as an option? If so, has the United States passed the critical point after which accommodation is less likely than ethnic conflict? If this is so, what is to be done? What is the future of the United States if ethnic subpopulations polarize around distinctive cores?
3. Has the Anglo-Saxon core been inflexible, as is often charged by the victims of discrimination? There are clear signs that considerable change has occurred, as reflected in the massive contributions of all ethnic groups that have culture and structure of American society. Even those populations of their experienced severe discrimination have assimilated some elements of their culture. There are two important questions: Can the Anglo-Saxon core absorb more? Are ethnic groups willing to give up more of their own cultural and institutional core in order to decrease the polarization between cores? If the answer is no to both questions, what is America's future?

KEY TERMS

Anglo-Saxon, 60
ascetic Protestantism, 62
Puritanism, 62

states' rights, 64
WASP, 60

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White Ethnic Americans

It is often noted that America is a land of immigrants. The largest waves of immigration occurred in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when vast numbers of non-Protestant white Europeans entered the United States. The southern Irish were the first non-Protestants to enter in significant numbers in the early 1800s. In the final decades of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century, additional masses of Catholic Italians and Poles as well as Jews immigrated. This influx posed a threat to the Anglo-Saxon Protestant core, setting in motion the dynamics of discrimination.

These white ethnic populations eventually overcame Anglo-Saxon Protestant discrimination and moved up the socioeconomic ladder. Their success—often used to condemn Native Americans, African Americans, and Latinos for not doing as well—has ironically contributed to present-day negative stereotypes about other ethnic groups and to persistent patterns of discrimination against them. Although the history of these white subpopulations does provide an example of what is possible for other ethnic groups, the greater identifiability of the currently unassimilated makes them targets of prejudice and discrimination that typically inhibit full movement into the American mainstream made up of the Anglos plus the white immigrants who overcame discrimination.

As we emphasized in the last chapter, the Anglo-Saxon core consists of immigrants from the British Isles (England, Protestant Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales), northern Germany, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden; these populations now inhabit what were historically the regions of the Angles and Saxons. Of course, the early European settlers to North America also included French, Dutch, Portuguese, and Russians. Later, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, other European ethnics, such as Italians, Poles, and Catholic Irish, migrated to the United States and, after a period of intense discrimination against them, were incorporated into the Anglo-Saxon core. Surprisingly, it is difficult to get timely data on these diverse white ethnics of European ancestry; the data are collected during the census and the surveys between the full census every ten years, but they are not always reported. As we saw in Table 3.1 on page 66 in the last chapter, 52 percent of Americans who are willing to state their ancestry report that their ancestors were Europeans, with 30 percent of these seeing themselves as descendants of the early European core (or the core of ethnics inhabiting those areas of northern Europe where the Angles and Saxons once lived).

RESOURCE SHARES OF WHITE ETHNICS

Table 4.1 assembles data from the 2006 American Community Survey and other sources on the resource shares of non-Hispanic whites, comparing these shares with other ethnic subpopulations. Earlier data that broke out specific white ethnic ancestries are now almost 20 years old, so they are no longer fully reliable. Hence, in the absence of data on the specific ancestry of the European-origin population, we are forced to use as a proxy the category *non-Hispanic whites* and compare their resource shares with those of other ethnic subpopulations. As we emphasized in Chapter 1, resource shares tend to be cumulative. The amount of education that people acquire in a post-industrial society determines the kinds of jobs they can secure, which in turn affects their ability to remain employed and earn incomes that keep them out of poverty.

Thus, reading across Table 4.1, we begin with a simple breakdown of educational attainment: high school and college graduates. As is evident, less than 60 percent of Latinos have a high school diploma, whereas over 90 percent of non-Hispanic whites, 81 percent of African Americans, 71 percent of Native Americans, 87 percent of Asians, and 79 percent of Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders are high school graduates. Variations across ethnic subpopulations are even greater with respect to college education, with 50 percent of Asians and 30 percent of non-Hispanic whites holding a college degree. Latinos, Native Americans, and Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders have somewhat higher numbers with college graduation. African Americans have somewhat higher numbers with college degrees but still considerably less than white ethnics. These educational differences enable white ethnics (and Asians) to secure better-paying managerial and professional jobs that offer more employment security. As Table 1.3 on page 18 reports, close to 39 percent of whites hold such jobs, while 49 percent of Asians do. Only about 19 percent of Latinos and 28 percent of African Americans find themselves in these better-paying and more secure managerial and professional occupations. From older census figures from 1990, it was clear back then and certainly is still the case today that much of this employment advantage among white ethnics remains with the descendants of the original Anglo-Saxon core. For example, 40 percent of British Isle descendants held managerial and professional jobs. The highest percentage is for Russians, but these are mostly Russian Jews who have migrated to the U.S. to escape persecution, and given the emphasis of Jewish culture on education, it is not surprising that back in 1990 (and no doubt today as well, if data were available), 57 percent of Russian-origin Jews are in managerial and professional occupations.

The advantage of white ethnics from northern Europe is that they came early and could kill off and displace the native populations (onto reservations) and thereby impose the culture that dominates the United States today. Those white Europeans who came during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries experienced a great deal of discrimination but had one advantage that many other ethnic populations lacked: They were white and European, and within three generations, they could assimilate into the dominant culture and secure resources. Even darker-skinned southern Europeans were able to do so, and in many ways,

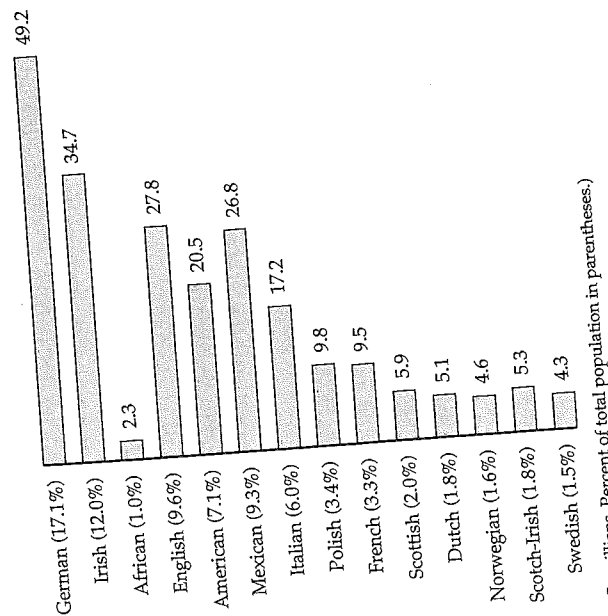


FIGURE 4.1 Largest reported ancestries in the U.S., 2005.
Source: 2005 American Community Survey, People Reporting Ancestry.

Figure 4.1 reports the number (and percentage) of the most frequently stated ancestries. As is evident, the largest reported ancestry is German. If we add up the British Isle ancestries, another 25.4 percent of the population see themselves as coming from northern Europe. Thus, to be a white ethnic means to see one's origins as European. (Of course, in many ways the "other white ethnic groups" reported by the census—for example, white Latinos—also have more indirect European origins, not only linguistically but culturally.) But, despite the fact that the language and other cultural traditions of Latinos have European origins (mixed, obviously, with the indigenous peoples of the Americas), they are still generally viewed as culturally distinct from non-Hispanic whites. Indeed, despite the mixing of indigenous south American and European cultures, white Latinos are threatening to white ethnics. Because non-Hispanic whites have dominated American society, receiving the most resource shares and holding power to sustain the Anglo-Saxon core by forcing all who immigrate to assimilate, larger migrations of Latinos pose a threat to those vested in the Anglo-Saxon core, as we will come to see. Moreover, ethnic subpopulations whose ancestry does not trace back to Europe and who are not defined as "white" have also posed threats to the guardians of the northern European culture and to the institutional systems that dominate the United States. Threat inevitably leads to prejudicial beliefs and discrimination against those who can be identified as "different." As we explore in this chapter, even those who were clearly "white" and who came from Europe were also victims of prejudice and discrimination when they first arrived, because they also posed threats to European-origin white ethnics.



Families await processing at Ellis Island, through which most European immigrants of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had to pass.

Latinos today may be able to take the same path as southern Europeans to full assimilation into the Anglo-Saxon core. There is, however, a major difference between Latino immigrants today and those from southern Europe a century ago: Latinos are coming in far greater numbers and from nations that are much closer to the United States, with the result that they often sustain their culture as they move back and forth between the United States and their country of origin. This combination of mass immigrations and maintenance of cultural traditions poses threats to the Anglo-Saxon core and to those later-arriving European whites who had assimilated into this core.

The history of white ethnics in the United States is thus one of European conquest of Native Americans, importation of Africans as slaves, and intense discrimination against Indian aboriginals and African-origin slaves. But it is also a history of successive waves of white immigrants who posed threats to those who had come earlier. When threatened, earlier white immigrants propagated intensely prejudicial beliefs about new white arrivals and engaged in equally intense discrimination. Let us tell this story before moving on to explore other forms of discrimination against ethnics of non-European origin.

IRISH AMERICANS

Irish Americans constitute approximately 18 percent of the population in the United States, which makes them the third largest ethnic group behind the English and Germans (Lieberson and Waters, 1988:34). The first major wave of

TABLE 4.1 Resource Shares of Non-Hispanic Whites* Compared to Other Ethnic Subpopulations, 2006

Ethnic Subpopulation	Educational Attainment			Median Family Income	Unemployment Rate	Individuals Living in Poverty
	High School Diploma	College Degree				
Non-Hispanic Whites	90.1%	30.6%	\$52,375	5.2%	9.3%	
Latinos	58.5%	12.0%	\$38,747	7.5%	21.5%	
African Americans	81.1%	17.6%	\$32,372	12.6%	25.3%	
Native Americans/ Alaskan Natives	72.0%**	11.7%**	\$33,762	12.0%	26.6%	
Asians	87.6%	50.2%	\$63,642	5.1%	5.1%	
Native Hawaiians/ Pacific Islanders	79.0%**	13.8%**	\$49,361	8.0%	8.0%	

*We are using non-Hispanic whites as a proxy measure of European-origin white ethnics; obviously this is problematic, but unfortunately, the Census Bureau has not yet provided data on the Anglo-Saxon core ethnics. The latest data available are from the 1990 Census. We have, however, made reference to some of these data in the text.

**These figures are extrapolations from the 2000 census. The 2006 American Community Survey does not provide a breakdown of these ethnic subpopulations with respect to their levels of educational attainment. Even the raw data available do not now allow us to calculate the percentages.

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Irish immigrants arrived in the 1700s, but the exact national heritage of these immigrants is subject to debate. Most were Protestant Scots-Irish, who had immigrated to northern Ireland after the British conquest of Ireland (Leyburn, 1962), but many southern and Catholic Irish also immigrated—perhaps as many as a third of the total in this first large influx (Dickson, 1966:60–70). Because of prejudice against papists, many of these Catholics were forced to convert to some form of Protestantism to avoid persecution. By the end of the Revolutionary War, 10 percent of the colonial population was Irish (signaling that the American legacy of the Irish coincided with American society at its founding).

The next wave of immigration began in the 1830s owing to several factors (Shrier, 1958): the potato famine of the 1840s, persistent British persecution of poor Irish, and British encouragement of emigrants who came in search of more opportunities, many of these southern and Catholic migrants saw themselves as banished to America by the British, which perhaps accounts for their intense loyalty to their homeland (Miller, 1985).

As the first of the non-Protestant white ethnic groups to immigrate to America in large numbers, the Irish were targets of vicious prejudice and sustained discrimination. Two generations later, however, most Irish Americans had overcome these disadvantages.

Identifiability of Irish Americans

As with all white ethnic groups, the Irish could be identified only in terms of distinctive cultural, behavioral, and organizational patterns. In the nineteenth century, very conscious efforts were undertaken to portray mainly southern Catholic Irish as a distinct "race," thereby imputing biological differences where none existed. During this time "Scots-Irish" became a popular label, as Protestant northern Irish sought to distance themselves from southern Catholics. Before the efforts to identify southern Catholics, Scots-Irish simply had considered themselves Irish, but with the emerging hostility toward the southern Irish, these northerners sought to differentiate themselves in order to avoid discrimination.

Underlying prejudicial stereotypes of the southern Irish were objections to their Catholicism, their poverty, and their willingness to work for wages lower than those accepted by earlier immigrants. Prejudicial stereotypes perpetuated the perception of the southern Irish as identifiably different and, hence, legitimate targets of discrimination.

Negative Beliefs about Irish Americans

As early as the eighteenth century, southern Irish were subject to negative stereotyping because of their Catholicism. This religious stereotyping became the basis on which some questioned Irish American political loyalty. Indeed, the suspicion that an Irish American politician would be governed by the pope was articulated when John F. Kennedy—an Irish Catholic—ran for president.

The most vicious stereotypes emerged with the large-scale Irish immigration of the nineteenth century. Fueled by the threat of so many non-Protestant, low-wage workers, white Protestants stereotyped the Irish as immoral and unintelligent, and Irish Catholics in particular as wicked, ignorant, and temperamental (Knobel, 1986:27). All subsequent waves of Catholic white ethnic groups were similarly stereotyped, especially those, such as the Italians and Poles, who immigrated in large numbers to the United States.

In particular, stereotypes of the Irish were perhaps as vicious as against blacks; that is, they were portrayed as less than human. English prejudice against the Irish was imported to America and intensified; and in the context of evolutionary theories and the plight of African Americans, the English prejudice against the Irish imported to America amplified into vicious stereotypes of the Irish as subhuman, apelike, drunk, hostile, and immoral (Curtis, 1971). The Irish were described as a "missing link" between apes, Africans, and the English. Today these extreme stereotypes have diminished, but at times the Irish are viewed as tending toward drunkenness, pugnaciousness, and corruption. Thus, although the Irish have largely overcome prejudice and discrimination, muted forms of the old stereotypes persist.

The Dynamics of Discrimination against Irish Americans

Economic Discrimination Like most white non-Protestant ethnic groups who migrated to the United States in the nineteenth century, the Catholic Irish were forced to take low-wage jobs. Earlier Protestant Irish, most of whom were "Scots-Irish," had penetrated business and professional positions, but those who came later were less educated and skilled; as a result, they began their experience in America with jobs in manufacturing, mining, construction (of railroads and canals), textiles, and domestic service. Because many women immigrated alone, domestic service offered these women a place to live. Earlier pre-Revolutionary northern Irish had also done much of the menial and domestic labor, often as indentured servants, but by the 1830s and 1840s, when the southern Irish began to come in large numbers, the Scots-Irish had begun to be economically mobile.

The exclusion of the migrating Catholic Irish workers from anything but unskilled work by Protestant employers was legitimated by beliefs in their "racial" inferiority, low intelligence, general pugnaciousness, and unreliability. Employers used even lower-wage black workers to threaten the job security of Irish workers, generating black-Irish tension that persists to this day in many northeastern cities (Roediger, 1991; Bonacich, 1976). Because Irish children were forced to go to work early in life, the second generation frequently did not acquire the educational credentials necessary for mobility out of low-wage jobs.

By the turn of the twentieth century, however, both the northern and the southern Irish were becoming economically mobile (Dinnerstein and Reimers, 1988). The industrial expansion in the East and Midwest created new opportunities for more skilled workers, and since the Irish had arrived several decades before the large influx of Italians, Poles, and other white ethnic groups, they

were more assimilated and advantaged. Economic mobility also came through political success. In many cities, Irish Americans created and controlled the "big-city political machine." For all their corruption, political machines could provide government jobs to individuals and contracts to Irish-owned businesses. During this time, many Irish American workers overcame discrimination by unionizing; their efforts were so successful that they dominated many local unions, especially in mining, construction, and dock work. Although Irish Americans remained dramatically underrepresented in high-skill and professional jobs, they were establishing a more secure economic base from which subsequent generations could move into higher-skill blue-collar jobs, white-collar positions, and an expanding array of professions. Today most Irish Americans have overcome earlier discrimination, as revealed by their higher incomes, jobs, and educational credentials (Lieberson and Waters, 1988).

Political Discrimination One of the enduring stereotypes about Irish Americans is their involvement in corrupt big-city political machines. Political machines in large cities had, of course, emerged and prospered before the Irish were able to penetrate them, but the massive immigration of southern Catholic Irish to the cities created a new constituency for these corrupt political machines. Large pools of poor, ill-housed, and unemployed individuals sustained the machines, and despite the graft and corruption, the machines provided food, jobs, and housing to people in desperate straits in a national political and economic climate where the role of the federal government in addressing urban problems was minimal.

Not only did the political machines provide needed services, but they became an early path to upward mobility for many Irish Americans as well as for large numbers of Italian, Polish, and Jewish immigrants. The corrupt issuance of city contracts to private businesses created jobs in a government-supported private sector. Moreover, the machines generated networks of ties among political, business, religious, and philanthropic leaders who, in turn, controlled vast arrays of employment opportunities for poor immigrants. Although the machines in Brooklyn, New York, Boston, New Haven, Philadelphia, Chicago, and various smaller cities in the Northeast and upper Midwest often extracted a high price in misuse of tax revenues and in subsidies for unneeded or inefficient workers, early generations of white immigrants would have suffered even more without them.

Big political machines could not endure forever, since their corruption and inefficiency were all too obvious. As white ethnic groups became more secure, the need for these corrupt networks diminished, leading to a series of reform movements that established new structures of city government. However, it was not until the 1970s that the Chicago political machine began to fall apart, which shows how a network of power can exist long after it has ceased to serve useful functions.

Success at the local level of politics did not translate into positions of power for Irish Americans at the national level, however. Prejudicial attitudes toward Catholics in an Anglo-Saxon Protestant society excluded Irish Americans from

appointments in the judiciary and executive branches of government and limited their success in statewide and national electoral politics. Only in the 1920s did the Catholic Irish begin to enjoy some success in national politics when Alfred E. Smith became the Democratic candidate for president. It was not until the administration of President Roosevelt in the 1930s that Irish Americans were appointed to visible positions in the judiciary, the White House, and other executive branches of government. President Truman continued Roosevelt's pattern of appointing Irish Americans to powerful government positions. When John F. Kennedy ran for president in the 1960s, many of the old fears about papists were revived, although Kennedy's subsequent election appears to have broken the last discriminatory barriers to full political participation by Irish Americans. Today, the fact that a political candidate is Catholic or Irish is not important unless it influences that candidate's views on such emotionally charged issues as abortion.

Educational Discrimination Irish Americans have educational achievement scores above the national average. Many Irish American children were educated in Catholic schools, many of which were created to counteract discrimination in the mid-1800s as well as to retain Irish ethnicity in the face of intense efforts of the public schools to "Americanize" Irish Catholics. A vast system of Catholic primary and secondary schools, Catholic universities, hospitals, charities, and community service organizations emerged as a result.

The Catholic school system enabled early generations of Irish (and eventually other Catholic immigrants like Italians and Poles) to overcome discrimination against all non-Protestants in the public schools and to sustain important elements of their ethnicity. As this system of education has evolved, it has provided opportunities for Irish Americans to acquire credentials that have facilitated the movement of the last two generations of Irish Americans into higher economic, political, social, and educational positions. Today the educational component of Catholic parochial schools serves many non-Irish Catholics, such as Mexican Americans, Italian Americans, and significant numbers of African Americans. These schools are no longer sustained by reaction to discrimination in public schools, as in the 1880s, but by the desire to maintain or promote religious affiliation and, simultaneously, to ameliorate the problems of decaying public school systems in many urban areas.

Stratification of Irish Americans

Because the Irish were the first non-Protestant population to immigrate to Protestant America, conflict with the Anglo-Saxon core was inevitable. Large numbers of very poor Catholics, willing to work for low wages and settling in cities where their numbers upset old balances of power and social mores, were threatening to indigenize, Protestant residents. The resulting conflict occurred on several fronts: between higher-wage English workers and lower-wage Irish, between Anglo-Saxon employers in industry who tried to destroy unions and Irish workers who sought the protection of unions, between Anglo-Saxon

incumbents in political machines and Irish aspirants to power, and between residents of Anglo-Saxon Protestant neighborhoods and Irish Catholics who desperately needed housing. Conflict led to discrimination; education levels, employment profiles, and residence patterns of the first two generations of Irish Catholics indicate that this discrimination was effective (Lieberson and Waters, 1988). For these early immigrants, poor housing, low-wage employment, and low levels of education were typical.

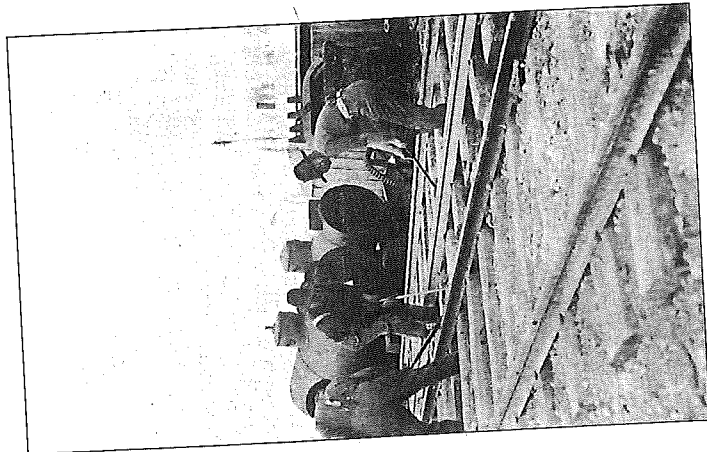
When Irish Americans gained local political power, as the Catholic system of schools and service organizations developed, and as patronage jobs to workers and contracts to Irish-run businesses increased, Irish Americans began to move forward economically, educationally, and socially by the turn of the century. Today, Irish Americans are highly assimilated, retaining their ethnicity through Saint Patrick's Day celebrations, expressions of loyalty toward their homeland, and vestiges of their old neighborhoods and local political power.

When Irish Americans moved up the socioeconomic ladder, they came into conflict with more recent white immigrants and with African Americans who had migrated northward in the first two decades of this century. These new immigrants began to pose a threat not only to the Anglo-Saxon core but also to the more established Irish Americans. In particular, African Americans were viewed as a threat because industrialists used them as strikebreakers in efforts to destroy the unions of the Irish and other white ethnic groups. Today, African Americans still suffer from the legacy of this hostility (Bonacich, 1976).

Because they are white, the Irish who immigrated to the United States were more easily assimilated into the mainstream of American society than were members of darker-skinned ethnic groups. Today, Irish Americans are almost indistinguishable from the descendants of the Anglo-Saxon core in terms of their place in the American socioeconomic hierarchy.

ITALIAN AMERICANS

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, some northern Italians began to migrate to South and North America in a steady trickle that continued for the rest of the century (Schiavo, 1994; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975a). The large-scale immigration of southern Italians began in the 1860s and peaked in the first decade of the twentieth century. In contrast to earlier northern Italians, who tended to be more educated, affluent, and able to enter professions and small businesses, the southern Italians were more likely to be poor, uneducated, and agrarian peasants. Moreover, southern Italians tended to sojourn, staying for short periods, making some money, and returning to Italy. Indeed, perhaps as many as one-third of these later Italian immigrants did return to their homeland, a rate of repatriation far surpassing that of any other ethnic group during this period (Lears, 1954). In all, some 4 million Italian migrants poured into the United States between 1880 and 1920, with close to 90 percent coming from southern Italy or the island of Sicily (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975a). These peasant immigrants were fleeing poverty, low wages, unemployment,



Immigrant workmen laying track.

economic and political domination by elites, governmental neglect, and declining agricultural productivity (Lopreato, 1970). Soon after entering the United States, they formed "Little Italys" in various cities, primarily in the Northeast but also in the Midwest and somewhat later in the West. From these locations they sought relatively unskilled jobs in public works projects, such as building of canals, sewer systems, and roadways, and in similar labor-intensive sectors of the economy.

Identifiability of Italian Americans

Like the Irish, southern Europeans were portrayed as a distinct "race" that was inferior intellectually and morally. Both the media and intellectuals depicted Italians as incapable of assimilating into Anglo-Saxon society. Fear of their intermarriage with Anglo-Saxons was expressed routinely. Underlying these attitudes were Protestant prejudices against Catholics, as well as other cultural differences between northern and southern European ethnic groups (Gambino, 1974; Higham, 1963). Moreover, because Mediterranean Italians have somewhat darker skin tones than northern Europeans, their identifiability by skin color made them seem a different "race" to northern Europeans.

Negative Beliefs about Italian Americans

The early use of intelligence tests was particularly harmful to Italian Americans because the tests were highly biased against people who were unacculturated and uneducated (Tomasi and Engel, 1970). Italian American schoolchildren (and other newly arrived white ethnic children as well) and enlisted personnel in the army tended to score poorly on these tests, and these results were used as "scientific proof" of Italians' inferior intellect (Kamin, 1974:1-20). When a group is portrayed as inferior in any way, discrimination follows.

Along with early portrayals of intellectual inferiority came a more persistent "mafia" stereotype portraying Italians as people involved with crime and having little integrity. Up to the prohibition period, Irish and Jewish Americans controlled most organized criminal syndicates. When a number of visible and infamous Italians moved into these criminal syndicates, the Italian gangster stereotype emerged and stuck. For some Italian Americans, crime was a means of upward mobility in a hostile society, but the general crime rates for Italians during this period were actually low (Lopreato, 1970:124-26). The mafia stereotype remains today in American culture—defined, and perhaps perpetuated, by movies such as *The Godfather* trilogy, *The Untouchables*, *Prizzi's Honor*, and many others, often produced by Italians themselves as if the stereotype were being reversed, glamorized, and exploited for economic gain.

Perhaps even more pernicious are media portrayals of Italian males as somewhat ingratiating but tough, dim-witted, and oversexed womanizers ("The Fonz" in television reruns of *Happy Days*). Italian jokes are still uttered with relative impunity, along with ethnic labels such as "dago" and "wop." Images of Italian Americans as overly emotional, jealous, oversexed when young, as fat mannas when old, and as physical, tough, racist hard hats persist (Cambino, 1974:352). Thus, far more than the Irish and Poles, Italian Americans still suffer from negative stereotyping, despite their success in fighting the effects of economic, political, and educational discrimination for over two generations.

The Dynamics of Discrimination against Italian Americans

Economic Discrimination Today, Italian Americans have incomes and employment histories approximating those of other whites. Yet, despite the high visibility of a few individuals, Italians are still underrepresented in top administrative positions of government and private industry, even as Italian American workers occupy rank-and-file positions proportionate to their numbers in the general population. Italian Americans are thus just beginning to reach full economic mobility, as their levels of educational attainment and income have surpassed national averages.

The previous one hundred years have seen considerable economic discrimination against Italians. From the beginning, many came as indentured workers to bosses who provided low-wage work, overpriced food, and expensive slum housing. Under such a system it was difficult for migrants to escape poverty,

but eventually this system began to collapse. Even under less oppressive conditions, early Italian immigrants faced a number of barriers: language, few vocational skills, little education, and isolation in Italian ghettos away from job networks. Blatant discrimination also hindered upward mobility for these immigrants who were paid lower wages and excluded from unions. These practices subsided by the turn of the twentieth century, when Italian Americans became very active in the union movement.

Southern Italian immigrants became upwardly mobile during the first decades of the twentieth century. Union involvement provided jobs of increasing skill; the sons of many unskilled and semiskilled workers moved into higher-skill craft occupations; and entrepreneurial activity among Italian businessmen increased, with many achieving considerable economic success. The Great Depression curtailed some of this progress, but the post-World War II period saw continued Italian American upward mobility into white-collar jobs, professions, and businesses (Greeley, 1977). Some scholars predict that fourth-generation Italians may achieve parity with British and German ethnic groups in levels of education, income, and employment (Alba, 1985).

Political Discrimination Early Italian immigrants had relatively low voter participation rates, a pattern attributed to the distrust that many southern Italians felt toward government and to the dampening effects of low socioeconomic status on political activity (Lopreato, 1970). At the local political level, Italian Americans became allied with the Democratic political machines in northeastern and midwestern cities. Later, anti-Catholic prejudices among the broader population prevented Italian Americans from holding national political office. It was not until 1950 that an Italian American was elected to the Senate. As late as the 1940s, fewer than a dozen Italian Americans served in the House of Representatives. Only in 1962 did an Italian American hold a cabinet post in the federal government. The first Italian American vice presidential candidate was nominated in 1984; two years later the first Italian American was appointed to the Supreme Court.

Although the Protestant reform movements that curtailed the activities of big-city political machines temporarily loosened the Italian American foothold in the halls of local power, upward mobility and a declining distrust of government increased Italian American voter participation to a point where many cities with significant Italian American communities elected Italian mayors and city council members. Thus, even before World War II Italian Americans exhibited a significant presence in local politics, despite the fact that anti-Catholic prejudice prevented Protestant voters from voting for Italian Americans as state and national candidates.

By the 1970s, the political barriers to state and national politics were rapidly coming down. Italian mayors, governors, congressional representatives, and senators became increasingly common. Today, Italian Americans hold office in local, state, and congressional political arenas in numbers approximately proportionate to their numbers in the general population. Third- and fourth-generation Italian Americans have moved rapidly into

Box 4.1

What's Up with the Sopranos?

The Sopranos was an HBO (Home Box Office) cable television series that depicted the life and times of a modern-day organized crime (Mafia) family living in New Jersey. The series focuses on "boss" Tony Soprano and his "family" as they maneuver their way through an underworld thriving on drugs, prostitution, extortion, violence, and murder. It has won numerous awards for being a "critical" and "realistic" view of organized crime in the United States. However, the show has enraged some members of the Italian American community who argue that it portrays Italian Americans as uneducated, low-life brutes and criminals. There is also some concern that the series' success might encourage young people to see the Mafia lifestyle as positive and rewarding.

New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg's decision to invite two cast members from *The Sopranos*—Dominic Chianese, who plays Tony Soprano's Uncle Junior, and Lorraine Bracco, who plays Tony Soprano's psychiatrist—to march in the 2002 Columbus Day Parade drew immediate criticism from the Columbus Citizens Foundation, which plans the annual event. The Foundation turned down requests in the past for *Sopranos* cast members to march in the parade because it regards *The Sopranos* as a negative portrayal of Italian Americans. Parade organizers went to court in an attempt to exclude the cast members from the parade. Asked about the controversy, former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani said, "I'm a big *Sopranos* fan. The show is a terrific show, and I would urge some Italian Americans to be less sensitive. You could spend your whole life wanting to be insulted. . . . Why? Why do you want to be insulted?"

So, how do viewers respond to *The Sopranos*? Do viewers think the show stereotypes Italian Americans as criminals? Do viewers think *The Sopranos* glorifies the Mafia lifestyle?

An opinion poll conducted by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind (www.publicmind.fdu.edu) found that half of adult TV viewers in New Jersey

watched *The Sopranos* at least occasionally, compared with about one-third of adult viewers in other states. Both in New Jersey and in other states, viewers of *The Sopranos* were most likely to be men. A comparison of viewers of *The Sopranos* with nonviewers indicates that viewers are more likely to believe that New Jersey has more crime, dishonest politicians, and pollution than other states, and that New Jersey is a worse place to live than other states. In general, it appears that viewers of *The Sopranos* are more likely than nonviewers to have negative opinions of New Jersey.

The majority (63 percent) of poll respondents living in New Jersey knew that *The Sopranos* took place in New Jersey, whereas the majority (57 percent) of poll respondents living in other states did not know, or were unsure. The majority (62 percent) of poll respondents think of *The Sopranos* as "just a story," whereas only 26 percent of respondents think the show "tells the truth." The majority of poll respondents disagreed with the criticism that *The Sopranos* "glorifies organized crime" and that it "portrays Italian Americans in a negative way" (57 percent and 65 percent, respectively).

There appears to be a good news/bad news context for *The Sopranos*. The good news is that it is not regarded as portraying Italian Americans in a negative light nor is it seen as glorifying organized crime. Enhancing the good news is the poll result that *The Sopranos* is more likely to be regarded as "just a story" than as "telling the truth." The bad news is that viewers of *The Sopranos* are more likely than nonviewers to have negative views of New Jersey: views that suggest that viewers may think New Jersey serves as an opportunistic context for the Mafia lifestyle. What do you think?

Sources: "New Jersey and The Sopranos: Perfect Together?" (available at: www.publicmind.fdu.edu/badabing/index.html); Michael Regan, "Sopranos Raises Curiosity about Real-Life N.J. Mob" (January 15, 2000), available at www.beachbrowser.com; Jennifer Steinhauer, "Object to 'Sopranos' Actors in Parade? What Are You Gonna Do?" *New York Times*, October 10, 2002, p. C16; Jennifer Steinhauer and Robert Worth, "His 'Sopranos' Guests Excluded, Mayor Will Skip Columbus Day Parade," *New York Times*, October 12, 2002, p. B16; Michael Wilson, "Columbus Day Parade Goes On, as Mayor and Sopranos Dine in the Bronx," *New York Times*, October 15, 2002, p. C16.

schools or dropped out. These high dropout rates hindered the second generation's economic mobility.

By the 1920s, Italian Americans had begun to make significant progress in education, a trend that has continued into the present. Today, the average number of years of education completed by Italian Americans surpasses that of many other white ethnic groups and of the white population as a whole. Thus, the third and fourth generations of Italian American immigrants have overcome the effects of discrimination against the first and second generations. As levels of education have increased, upward economic and political mobility has ensued.

Legal Discrimination The passage of the Immigration Act of 1924 limited immigration to the United States, especially for eastern and southern Europeans. The quota set for Italians was less than a tenth of the quota for the

politics, proving that they have overcome anti-Italian and anti-Catholic prejudice and discrimination (see Box 4.1).

Educational Discrimination The first wave of southern Italian migrants to the United States tended to be illiterate and impoverished. Their children went to school for short periods of time to acquire basic skills, then dropped out to help support the family. The high dropout rates were also caused by the pervasive culture in the public schools, which sought to "Americanize" Italians. Children were put under enormous pressure to change their look, their speech, their dress, and their demeanor to conform with a more Anglo-Saxon profile.

The Catholic school system was not a readily available alternative to the first waves of southern Italian immigrants because of conflict with Irish Americans, who dominated this system, and because of their inability to pay for tuition and books. As a consequence, Italian youth either endured the public

British and one-fifth the quota for Germans. Clearly the intent was to favor Anglo-Saxons and northern Europeans over all other ethnic groups, with the result that many Italians were prevented from immigrating to the United States. Although the laws were changed several times, only the **Immigration Act of 1965** enabled more Italians to immigrate by using the unfilled quotas of other ethnic groups from northern Europe. However, the earlier restrictions on immigration sent a not-too-subtle message to Italian Americans: You are inferior and undesirable. Such messages supported existing negative beliefs about Italians in the United States and, no doubt, perpetuated discriminatory practices up to World War II.

Stratification of Italian Americans

As the second-largest Catholic population to enter the United States, Italian immigrants threatened the Anglo-Saxon Protestant core. This threat was reinforced by other large influxes of Catholic Poles and of Jews. Nativist sentiments ran high within the Protestant white community. Much like the Irish, Italians were portrayed as an inferior "race" that could potentially "mongrelize" America through intermarriage. Italians constituted the first wave of immigrants from southern Europe to the United States, which made them seem doubly different and, hence, threatening.

In addition to white Protestant hostility, Italians faced, at least initially, Irish fears about the presence of yet another disadvantaged immigrant population. Such fears were aggravated when employers used Italians as strikebreakers against unions heavily populated by Irish workers. The problems that Italians initially had in enrolling their children in Catholic schools attest to the tension between Irish and Italians—a tension that was aggravated by the wave of poor Catholic Polish immigrants.

Their lack of education and job skills, coupled with Protestant and Irish discrimination, ensured that first- and most second-generation Italian Americans would be at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. Like all white ethnic groups, however, Italians had some distinct advantages: They were white and possessed organizational resources in family and church; over time these resources could be used to penetrate unions, skilled workplaces, white-collar jobs, professions, and schools. By the third generation, rapid upward mobility was occurring. Today, Italian Americans are above the national average in educational attainment and income. Lingering stereotypes and informal discrimination against Italian Americans persist. The final phase of assimilation is yet to be completed, although it is imminent.

JEWISH AMERICANS

Jews have been the most persistently persecuted minority group in history. Massacres of Jews have occurred since Rome's occupation of present-day Israel in the period before and after the birth of Christ. The intensity of this persecution

is etched in the modern conscience by the death camps of Nazi Germany. Indeed, many American Jews are the descendants of those who sought refuge from more recent persecution. The first Jewish immigrants to the United States, the Sephardic Jews, arrived in the 1640s to escape massacres and expulsion from Spain and Portugal; their numbers did not exceed a few thousand. The second group of Jewish immigrants began to enter the United States in the 1840s in an effort to escape widening persecution in Europe. Most of these immigrants came from what is now Germany and settled in the Midwest, causing the Jewish population to grow from 15,000 to more than 250,000 in the early 1880s (Herberg, 1960:176). The third wave of immigration, beginning in the 1880s and lasting until the 1920s, led to the significant presence of Jews in America. Coming from areas of eastern Europe controlled by the Russian czar (and later the communists of the former Soviet Union), some 2 million Jews settled in the United States, primarily in urban areas of the Northeast (Lestschinsky, 1955:56). While many sought refuge from persecution, the vast majority came voluntarily in search of opportunities in a new land (Sklare, 1971; Lears, 1954). Yet even as the Immigration Act of 1924 curtailed the mass immigration of all ethnic groups to the United States, some 400,000 more Jews immigrated, in most cases to escape Nazi persecution. By the eve of World War II, however, immigration policy had become so strict that many hundreds of thousands of Jews who desperately sought refuge in America were forced to stay in Europe and suffer the consequences of Hitler's death camps. Some 150,000 were able to enter the United States as political refugees; among these were many of the great scientists and intellectuals of modern times—Albert Einstein, Edward Teller, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, and Bruno Bettelheim.

In more recent decades, immigration statistics for the American Jewish population are inaccurate because the Immigration and Naturalization Service no longer identifies immigrants by religion; estimates run as high as 500,000 recent immigrants. Today, around 6 million Jews live in the United States, a figure that comes close to 50 percent of the world's Jewish population. The rest live primarily in Israel, the recently independent states of the former Soviet Union, and various European and South American countries. The majority of Jewish Americans live in the Northeast, although the number residing in the West and South is increasing rapidly—mirroring the trend in the general population. Jewish Americans represent about 2 percent of the American population; yet their massive immigration in the 1880s activated the same dynamics of discrimination experienced by other white ethnic groups, such as the Irish, Italians, and Poles.

Identifiability of Jewish Americans

Throughout history, Jews have been considered a "race," but the basis for this designation is social and cultural, not biological. Those who have persecuted Jews in the United States and around the world have used the spurious belief that Jews are biologically different as the basis for extreme forms of discrimination. In reality, there is no distinguishing physical trait that makes it easy to designate someone as a "Jew."

Jews are defined by their religious beliefs, which are based on the texts of the Torah, or the first five books of the Bible. Orthodox Jews adhere to the Torah in strict terms—ritual, food preparation and consumption, and synagogue attendance. About one-fifth of all American Jews are Orthodox. At the other extreme are Reform Jews, who represent perhaps one-third of the American Jewish population and who have modernized and secularized their religious activity. Between these extremes are Conservative Jews, who represent from one-third to one-half of all American Jews.

Being Jewish in a Protestant society makes one different, but many Jews are not outwardly religious. Moreover, synagogue attendance rates tend to be low, rendering this particular indicator of religious affiliation relatively useless (except for some Orthodox Jews, who may be easily identified by dress, demeanor, and ritual practices). Thus, religion does not outwardly distinguish Jews from gentiles.

In many respects, the source of Jewish identifiability is the awareness of a shared history of persecution and the sense among Jews that they constitute a community with a unique set of traditions. Because Jews have historically been treated as a distinct community rather than as a nationality, they have developed organizations, networks, and shared beliefs that have provided them with a sense of identity and that, during historical episodes of extreme discrimination, have allowed them to survive in hostile environments. Thus, unlike other white ethnic groups living in the United States whose identity is tied to their country of origin, Jews have maintained a sense of being a community that has sustained itself within many countries. Consequently, Jews have been able to mobilize resources—primarily organizational but also economic and educational—that make them somewhat distinguishable, *to themselves*, and that enable them to rank high in terms of education and income in the United States (Goldschneider, 1986).

Negative Beliefs about Jewish Americans

Because Jews have persisted as a cohesive and successful community within hostile societies, negative beliefs about them have evolved over time and, under conditions of extreme persecution, have intensified. These beliefs have been, reinforced by the middleman minority positions Jews have historically occupied; as we noted in Chapter 2, middleman minority groups are traditionally targets of hostility.

From the Middle Ages to the present, Jews have been the subjects of persistent prejudicial beliefs and stereotypes. Although Christ was crucified by the Romans, some people believe that Jews were the culprits. In a Christian society like the United States, this belief undergirds hostility toward Jews. In fact, some Catholic and Protestant ministers have in the past promoted this idea, conveniently ignoring all the pertinent historical facts. Jews are also stereotyped as shrewd, crafty, cheap, money-grubbing, materialistic, and sly (Glock and Stark, 1966; Gordon, 1988). Another set of beliefs is based on the "Jewish conspiracy." In the 1920s and 1930s in the United States, people such as Henry Ford actively

promulgated the idea that Jews were involved in an international conspiracy to control all governments. The Ku Klux Klan, the German-American Bund, media personalities such as the Catholic priest Charles E. Coughlin, and even Charles Lindbergh saw Jews as conspiring to control the world. Even as late as the 1970s, a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff could be heard arguing that Jews "own, you know, the banks in the country, the newspapers" (Selzer, 1972). More recent debates over the threat of Zionism and the Jewish lobby in Congress have revived elements of the Jewish conspiracy prejudice.

Most surveys and polls report dramatic drops in negative stereotypes about Jews over the last sixty years (Lipset, 1987). Many Americans hold very positive views of Jews as intelligent, educated, and industrious. Yet often lurking beneath the surface are subtle condemnations of Jews as being too bright, hardworking, and ambitious. Many of the older stereotypes—from "Christ killers" to "money grubbers"—still prevail. People know that it is unacceptable in most public situations, including surveys and polls, to utter these negative beliefs, but the recent increase in acts of vandalism at Jewish cemeteries and synagogues indicates that below the polite surface lurk powerful prejudices against Jews. These beliefs often legitimize discriminatory practices against Jews in the United States.

The Dynamics of Discrimination against Jewish Americans

The comparatively high incomes and levels of education among Jewish Americans are a tribute to their ability to overcome open discrimination in jobs, politics, housing, and education, as well as more covert discrimination in clubs, fraternal organizations, and other social groups. Yet, despite a record of economic and academic success, Jews are underrepresented in many occupations, professions, and high-level positions of power.

Economic Discrimination Early Jewish immigrants assumed middleman minority positions. Although most Jews of German origin arrived with little money, they had entrepreneurial skills that enabled them to start small businesses (primarily in the garment, jewelry, meat, and leather trades) as well as trading and financial positions. By the 1890s, census data report that almost 60 percent of Jews were in trade and finance, 20 percent were in office work, and only 6 percent were in the professions. With centuries of experience in finding economic niches in the hostile environments of Europe, Jews were able to find such niches in the United States (Glazer, 1957).

The eastern European Jews who began to immigrate to the United States in the 1880s tended to be less educated and skilled than earlier German immigrants; as a result, they established an economic foothold in unskilled manufacturing jobs, as did other white immigrants. Men and women worked long hours for low wages in sweatshops; many women did sewing and laundry in the home to help make ends meet. Those eastern European immigrants who had small-business experience were able to find middleman minority niches, as had earlier German migrants. Because education and study have always been

highly valued in the Jewish community, considerable upward mobility was possible for the sons and daughters of these Jewish immigrants. For example, by the early 1900s, Jews in the Northeast were moving into law, medicine, and other professions and assuming middle-level clerical positions in businesses and government.

Immigration was cut off in the 1920s, and those who had made it to the United States continued their economic mobility. When the Great Depression hit in the 1930s, however, this mobility was curtailed by economic discrimination. The success of Jewish Americans was now intensely resented in a tightening job market; signs reading "No Jews need apply" were common. Jews were excluded from many professional positions in banking, teaching, medicine, law, and engineering, as well as more skilled blue-collar and clerical jobs. Jews began to experience systematic, institutionalized discrimination, which forced them to find economic opportunities in risky sectors such as media and small business, and in professional and clerical jobs for which they were overqualified. The legacy of economic discrimination remains today, for Jews are underrepresented in high-level positions in banking, in management positions at savings and loans, utilities, and insurance companies, and the top levels of management in almost all industries. The two exceptions to this pattern are the media and plastics, in which Jews took the early risks.

On average, Jewish Americans are wealthier than non-Jews. This wealth is the result of taking risks in a narrow range of businesses such as clothing, mass communications, jewelry, and merchandising, while overcoming quotas and outright bans in professions such as law and medicine. Jewish Americans exist in what is termed a "golden ghetto," but it is nonetheless a ghetto. In the present, however, the pattern of informal exclusion appears to be diminishing; it is likely that Jewish Americans will move into a broader range of management positions commensurate with their education and skill.

Open exclusion (or token representation) of Jews in country clubs, some fraternal and community organizations, and many elite social circles indicates that informal discrimination and quotas persist even today at the beginning of the new millennium. Because these organizational affiliations are often crucial to the development of informal contacts and networks necessary for economic success and mobility, Jewish Americans will continue to feel the effects of this form of exclusion.

Political Discrimination Unlike many minority groups who have established themselves in economic middleman positions, Jewish Americans have been politically active, voting in large numbers and engaging in volunteer political activity. Yet, despite their economic and academic success, this involvement has not translated into significant political power until recent decades. Jews have become governors of a few northeastern states over the years, and they have been successful in local politics where there is a substantial community of Jewish Americans. Yet Jewish Americans did not gain access to higher-level administrative positions in the federal government until the 1930s; they have had only a handful of Supreme Court appointments, despite the fact that a high

proportion of lawyers and law professors are Jewish Americans; and they reached proportionate representation in Congress only in the 1970s. Jewish Americans are now overrepresented in Congress, holding 8 percent of Senate seats and constituting 7 percent of the House membership.

Although Jewish Americans have become increasingly prominent in politics, their underrepresentation in top management positions in industry and manufacturing limits their ability to use informal economic power to secure top-level appointments in those governmental posts where experience as a corporate manager is considered important (Zweigenhaft and Donhoff, 1982; Alba and Moore, 1982). Yet 90 percent of Americans say that they would vote for a qualified Jewish presidential candidate, whereas less than 50 percent would have done so five decades ago (Marger, 2000:211). Such shifts in attitudes indicate that Jewish Americans will become increasingly assimilated in the political arena.

Legal Discrimination Unlike many other societies, the United States never legally institutionalized anti-Semitism. Before the signing of the Constitution, most states had established "Christian-only" restrictions for public office. Indeed, it is possible that some signatories to the Constitution were anti-Semitic (or anti-non-Christian), yet these prejudices are not reflected in law or in government policy. The closest instances approaching legal discrimination against Jews have been the blue laws of many communities that require businesses to close on Sunday—a day when many Jewish businesses could remain open.

Discrimination against Jewish Americans has been largely informal. Jews have had to overcome informal restrictive quotas in jobs and education, informal restrictive housing practices, and informal restrictive memberships in clubs and social organizations. The law has rarely supported these practices, except in the area of housing, where written restrictive covenants were enforced until the 1960s. Yet legal tolerance of informal discrimination is, in fact, a form of legalized discrimination. Indeed, until passage of the various civil rights acts in the 1960s, the legal system did not attack the injustices of such informal practices of discrimination.

Educational Discrimination It may seem absurd, on the surface, to consider educational discrimination against the most educated ethnic subpopulation in the United States. The long tradition of respect for learning and education in the Jewish community is so powerful that it has been possible to overcome clear patterns of discrimination. One of these patterns was established at the turn of the century, when Jewish American children were segregated in many of the public schools in the Northeast. Despite this segregation, however, Jewish students completed high school in much higher numbers than did non-Jews. Another discriminatory pattern was the informal, but often articulated, quota system for Jewish American high school graduates in American colleges and universities. Particularly in private schools, this system of limiting Jewish enrollment existed well into the 1960s. Also, on college campuses, discrimination in membership within fraternities and sororities was, and is, rampant. Jewish students have responded by forming their own fraternities and sororities.

In private elite schools, the informal contacts and networks formed socially can be crucial to future occupational placement in mainstream corporate America; in this respect, many Jewish Americans are at a disadvantage. However, the magnitude of Jewish academic achievement in a society valuing educational credentials has enabled Jewish Americans to find business and professional niches and, increasingly in recent decades, to penetrate large, elite corporations. Despite their obvious economic success, though, Jewish graduates still encounter invisible barriers and must endure the subtle favoritism given to less educated and skilled non-Jews.

Stratification of Jewish Americans

Because many Jewish Americans have been enormously successful, the fact that many Jews live below the poverty line (but in low percentages compared to the rest of the population) is often overlooked. In spite of their qualifications and credentials and because of language and professional barriers, many recently arrived Russian Jews make their livings as cab drivers, cooks, and waiters. Success has come for Jews despite sometimes intense informal discrimination, legitimized by prejudicial beliefs. Such discrimination has been fueled by perceptions of threat in the minds of non-Jews, perceptions that have by no means disappeared. All immigrants once competed for industrial jobs, especially when the depression diminished the job market. Jewish American skill in running small businesses, in education, and in the professions posed a threat to gentiles. Coupled with long-standing and inaccurate European beliefs (imported to America) that Jews are shrewd and conspiratorial, this sense of threat increased and, in turn, intensified informal discrimination.

Jewish Americans are concentrated in the middle and upper middle socioeconomic strata but still remain underrepresented in elite political and economic spheres. However, because movement into more highly elite positions has become increasingly possible, Jewish Americans are likely to penetrate and achieve parity in this sphere.

SUMMARY

The one hundred years from the early nineteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth century was the first mass immigration of non-Protestant Europeans to America. Their religion and eagerness to work threatened the existing Anglo-Saxon core. The non-Protestant southern Irish arrived in the early years of the nineteenth century, followed in the second half of the century by large influxes of Italians, Poles, and Jews. Because these migrants were white and European, their early experiences with discrimination were more readily overcome than the experiences of those who are more readily identified by surface biological features.

The advantages of white skin in overcoming discrimination in America are revealed in the resource shares of white ethnics today. They secure better jobs,

earn more money, attain more education, and live in less segregated neighborhoods than most non-European ethnics. Thus, while the legacy of negative stereotyping persists and discrimination is still evident, these forces have not prevented white ethnic groups from gaining their share of the resources available in America.

The Irish, who today represent the third-largest ethnic population after those from the British Isles and Germany, were the first of the white ethnics to come to America after the Anglo-Saxon core. The Protestant Irish had arrived in the 1700s, but it was the Catholic Irish immigration beginning in the 1830s that escalated discrimination against the Irish. These non-Protestant migrants came from the heart of rural poverty and were desperate for any work—thereby representing a threat not only to Protestantism as the dominant religion but to the wages and economic security of those already settled in America. These perceived threats fueled prejudicial stereotypes of Irish Catholics as a distinct “race” who were wicked, ignorant, and less than human. Efforts to exclude them from better jobs, centers of political power, public schools, and adequate housing were, in the long run, unsuccessful as the Catholic Irish worked their way up the occupational system. They captured or created the big-city political machines, utilized the Catholic school system to overcome discrimination in public schools, and used their financial and political clout to move into better neighborhoods. This mobility threatened other whites, but it also led to considerable assimilation of the Catholic Irish into the societal mainstream, which reduced the threat experienced by the descendants of earlier immigrants. Indeed, the more successful Catholic Irish became, the more they began to fear the new waves of European immigrants who would threaten their hard-won gains.

Small numbers of northern Italians immigrated to the United States during the early decades of the nineteenth century, but beginning in 1860 large numbers of poor, less educated, rural southern Italians entered the country. As with the Irish, systematic efforts were made to identify these Italians as a separate “race” because of their Catholicism, southern European ways, and Mediterranean skin tones. These characteristics made them different from the Anglo-Saxon core and subject to prejudicial beliefs and blatant discrimination. Initial negative stereotypes of Italian Americans branded them as lacking intelligence and, somewhat later, as having loose morals and a propensity toward violence as well as crime. More recent stereotyping focuses on the presumed emotionality, sexuality, bigotry, and hotheadedness of Italian Americans. Such negative stereotyping was initially used to bolster discrimination in jobs, schools, and politics. Laws were passed to restrict immigration from southern Europe. Yet, as with other white ethnics, Italians’ white skin, strong family structures, commitment to church, and effective use of unions enabled second- and third-generation Italians to move up the stratification system so that today they are above most other ethnics in the shares of resources. Still, there are lingering stereotypes about Italians, often highlighted in the media. These may still serve to support informal patterns of discrimination.

Jews have been persecuted all over the world. As their numbers increased during the 1840s in the United States and especially when immigration

accelerated in the 1880s, discrimination against Jews became as obvious here as elsewhere in the world. Later, in the years preceding and during World War II, more Jews came to escape the ravages of Nazism. Today, a steady stream of Jews still migrates to America, making the United States the place of residence for almost half of the world's Jewish population. Like other white ethnic minorities, Jews were distinguished as a peculiar "race," which made them just "different" enough to justify discrimination. Negative stereotypes could be brutal, such as those portraying Jews as "Christ killers" (an erroneous charge since the Romans performed the execution). More subtle and age-old stereotypes of Jews as cheap, sly, and clannish, coupled with more blatant and paranoid visions of a world Jewish conspiracy, still haunt Jewish Americans, as well as Jews all over the world. Out of necessity, Jews have had to sustain a strong sense of ethnic identity, hence their need to establish a viable set of institutions in a discriminating world. As they have done so, they developed the organizational and financial resources to succeed in educational attainment, business, and professional activity. Yet this success is circumscribed by exclusionary practices in almost all spheres of American life. Ordinary jobs, many professions, business opportunities, and top management positions still remain somewhat closed to the Jewish population. Significant inroads into politics and government jobs have been made by Jews only in recent decades, but informal discrimination persists in housing, social clubs, and non-Jewish businesses.

For all white ethnics—Jews, Italians, Irish, and many others—white skin has made a big difference in their overcoming discrimination. By simply adopting the culture, speech, values, and other characteristics of the Anglo-Saxon core, white ethnics could blend with the general population and move up the educational and occupational ladder. They have realized the "American dream." Many of the descendants of the white ethnic immigrants who blazed an upwardly mobile trail have forgotten—perhaps gratefully—the legacy of discrimination in words like "wop," "Paddy," or "Polack." The descendants of the white ethnic immigrants are often the perpetrators of bigotry and discrimination against people of color.

Their own tenuous economic standing has contributed to the tradition of racism among white ethnics. Discrimination against African Americans emerged full-blown in the early decades of the twentieth century when black workers were used as strikebreakers (Bonacich, 1976; Olzak, 1992). Early Asian immigrants experienced considerable resistance when they were perceived as a threat to the hard-won gains of white ethnics. And Latinos were also viewed as a potential labor pool that would take away the jobs of white ethnic laborers. Recent patterns of increased immigration by Latinos and Asians, coupled with old prejudices against African Americans, sustain the sense of threat among white ethnics over their jobs and culture. Such threats are magnified by global corporate systems that pull jobs overseas. As we have seen, threat is the fuel behind prejudice and discrimination. Competition with empowered people of color makes the success of some white ethnics seem uncertain. The movement of manual labor into the world economy, coupled with the proportional decline

of members of the original Anglo-Saxon core and their white converts, has increased ethnic tensions in America and now represents a major obstacle to peaceful ethnic relations in the twenty-first century.

POINTS OF DEBATE

Caucasians or people with European-looking features are at an advantage in American society. They are able to overcome discrimination by simply assimilating into the Anglo-Saxon core, while retaining a few of their old ethnic traditions that do not threaten this core. By contrast, people of color and those with non-European features must face constant reminders from others about their "distinctiveness." Even with social assimilation into much of the core, they still stand out physically. The unwillingness of white ethnics to accept the efforts at social mobility of members of other ethnic groups toward realizing the American dream makes for many points of debate.

1. Given their different history in the United States, is it possible for white people to understand what it is like to "stand out" and to be vulnerable to the prejudicial beliefs and acts of discrimination nonwhites encounter? Can whites recognize the enormous psychic costs for members of readily identifiable minority populations? What can be done about this situation? Should current efforts to impose a "political correctness" ideology on all others be allowed to continue? If so, who is to decide what is correct? Or, alternatively, is the introduction of sensitivity training in the workplace, school, or community a better path? If so, who decides what will be taught, from what perspective, and by whom to whom? Or is it best to let the forces involved take a natural course? If so, should a society that values equal opportunity permit the continued existence of discrimination that results from a "hands-off" policy toward assimilation?
2. Can white Americans fully understand that the playing field has not been, and is not today, level in a society that values equality of opportunity? The legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, conquest and annexation, reservation life, and many other patterns of discrimination makes it difficult for many, though not all, nonwhites to have the same chance in the society as whites. White Americans tend to be fixated on, and angry over, the reverse discrimination that inevitably accompanies efforts at inclusive affirmative action. Must white Americans suffer the same frustration and anger that many members of minorities have endured over the decades? Is it the same? Or is it possible for white Americans to accept a certain amount of reverse discrimination in order to compensate for past discrimination against specific ethnics? If not, then what is to be done by white America to curb the pathologies inherent in decades, if not centuries, of discrimination—the pathologies of racism, violence, crime, drug use, welfare dependency, and other problems that accompany long-term discrimination?