

# Ethnicity: a Neglected Dimension of American History

Twentieth century sociological literature is replete with notices of the imminent demise of ethnicity in America. In 1945, W. Lloyd Warner declared: »The future of American ethnic groups seems to be limited; it is likely that they will be quickly absorbed.«<sup>1</sup> A decade later, Will Herberg confirmed that ethnicity, if not dead, was rapidly dying.<sup>2</sup> These epitaphs to ethnicity, like Mark Twain's obituary, have turned out to be premature. Recent events have shattered the assumption that the melting pot had worked its cultural alchemy. Ethnicity, by which I mean group consciousness based on a sense of common origin, has demonstrated renewed vitality in the second half of the twentieth century.

Ethnic humor, that venerable American art of group defamation, has taken on a new life in the form of Polish jokes. Madison Avenue is providing employment to countless Jewish mothers. *Cosa nostra* have become household words. Sons of immigrants are in great demand as vice-presidential candidates. Former Senator Joseph Clark can attest to the continuing clout of the ethnic vote. Polish Catholics oppose the efforts of the American-Irish hierarchy to suppress national parishes. Mayor Daly's Chicago massacre reminds us that the »last hurrahs is not yet. A »National Consultation on Ethnic America« meets at Forham University and finds its patient very much alive and kicking.

Clearly this resurgence of ethnic consciousness, this »new tribalism«, springs from deep-seated social and psychic needs. The »Black Revolution« appears to have served as a catalyst, energizing other groups both to defensive and emulative responses. Just as in Canada, the French nationalist movement has spurred Slavs and others to

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<sup>1</sup> W. Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole, *The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups* (Yankee City Studies Vol. III; New Haven, 1945), 295.

<sup>2</sup> Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (Anchor Books Edition; Garden City, 1960), 22—23. This view was echoed by historian Maldwyn Allen Jones, *American Immigration* (Chicago, 1960), 307: »In the middle of the twentieth century ethnic distinctions might still persist. But they were less sharp, less conspicuous than before and they were fading rapidly from view.«

assert themselves, so black militancy has elicited responding ethnic nationalisms. »Black Power» brings forth echoes of »Irish Power,» »Polish Power,» etc. Inspired by the example of black Americans, white ethnics tend to see themselves engaged in an analogous struggle for liberation from the stigma and burden of inferiority.<sup>3</sup>

Only the true believer can any longer sustain his vision of America as a »homogeneous society of undifferentiated men» where race, religion, or national origin do not matter. The inability to transmute twenty million blacks into the »historic American type,» raised questions about how well the country's digestive system had worked in the past. Once the conspiracy of silence was broken, it became quickly apparent that it had worked only imperfectly, if at all. Glazer and Moynihan were the first to say so: »The point about the melting pot is that it did not happen.»<sup>4</sup> As behavioral scientists have renewed their explorations of ethnic America, they have found the historical literature on the subject to be thin indeed. Charging that historians have failed to do their job, social scientists grumble that they have to do their own historical research on ethnic groups.<sup>5</sup>

Sad to say, historians *have* neglected the dimension of ethnicity in the American past. We have been made dramatically aware of our deficiency in this respect by the sudden and widespread demand for minority history courses. The most pressing demand, of course, is for Afro-American history. History departments which would have scoffed at the notion a few years ago are now recruiting black Afro-American historians. Unfortunately, much of the contemporary concern with minority group history is politically inspired, rather than deriving from an honest conviction of its inherent value as a field of study.

Clearly the historical profession has a responsibility to maintain the

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<sup>3</sup> American Jewish Committee, *The Reacting Americans* (New York, 1968); Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, *Report: Book I The Official Languages* (Ottawa, 1967). In a letter to the editor, a Finnish American wrote as follows: »Stridestoward freedom can only come through being proud of their Finn-ness as it is essential for the blacks to become proud of their blackness.» *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 30, 1969.

<sup>4</sup> Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 290; see also Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York, 1964), 265; Joshua A. Fishman, *Language Loyalty in the United States* (The Hague, 1966), 31.

<sup>5</sup> Peter I. Rose, *The Subject is Race* (New York, 1968), 168; Charles S. Kamen, »On the Neglect of Immigrants by American Sociologists,» (unpublished paper; National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, 1967).

integrity of scholarly standards, to prevent the perversion of history into special pleading, and to seek the advancement of knowledge beyond the pragmatic needs of the moment. Our ability to meet our professional responsibility, however, is crippled by our knowledge that we are morally compromised. Who, if not the historian, is responsible for the fact that lily-white and racist history has been imbibed by generations of students? Our sense of guilt has stimulated more breastbeating than hard thinking.

I suggest that a searching examination of the reasons for our failure would be more fruitful. Why has the history of the United States not been written in terms of the enormous diversity of race, culture, and religion which has characterized the American people from the seventeenth century until today? My answer will be phrased in terms of the historiography of European immigration; others better able than I can address themselves to the neglect of the history of Afro-Americans and other racial groups. What I have to say on this score is not meant as castigation of our professional forebears, rather it has been largely an exercise in self-criticism.

A joint committee of the AHA and OAH recently issued a statement on »The Writing and Teaching of American History in Textbooks« which declared that the diversity of the American people »must be faithfully portrayed.«<sup>6</sup> By and large, the portrayal of this diversity has been an ideal to which we have paid lipservice rather than a task to which we have addressed ourselves. A casual perusal of college and high school textbooks reveals that the factor of ethnic pluralism is not effectively presented. Aside from clichés about »a nation of immigrants« and »the melting pot« they convey the impression of bland homogeneity. An unspoken assumption of American historiography has been that the important things have been said and done only by English-speaking whites. Negroes have not been the only »invisible men« in American history. Immigrants, Indians, and Hispanos have also usually appeared in the history books as faceless herds, mobs, and masses.

Nor are students in college likely to be exposed to the »facts of life\* about ethnicity. A survey of course offerings in one hundred colleges and universities revealed that 38 offered courses touching

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<sup>6</sup> »The Writing and Teaching of American History in Textbooks,« *AHA Newsletter*, VI (April, 1968), 8—9.

some aspect of ethnic history; of these 20 were general social and cultural history courses; 19 Afro-American history courses; 4 American Indian history courses; and 4 immigration history courses.<sup>7</sup> Over 60 per cent of the institutions did not offer any course dealing directly with the history of group life in America. One can not derive much comfort from the fact that sociology departments customarily offer courses in »American Minorities» or »Racial and Ethnic Relations.» A recent review of such courses concluded that few of them provided a systematic analysis of group interaction either historical or contemporary. Rather they tended to concentrate on prejudice and discrimination and to substitute moral indignation for a critical assessment of the subject.<sup>8</sup>

But, I am told, the field of immigration history appears to be flourishing today. After all, one can think at a moment's notice of ten or twenty excellent monographs which have appeared in recent years. I am not about to belittle the significant accomplishments of the historians of immigration of which tribe I proudly claim membership, but my reading of the current state of health of this specialty is less sanguine. Despite the significant work of some very able historians, the study of immigration has been and remains an underdeveloped field of historical inquiry.

A generous estimate of the current number of American historians who have a major interest in immigration history would be 200, perhaps two per cent of those teaching American history at collegiate institutions.<sup>9</sup> An analysis of doctoral dissertations in immigration history further suggests that this theme has been peripheral to the concerns of most American historians.<sup>10</sup> Between 1893 (the year a student of Turner completed the first dissertation on an immigration topic) and 1965, a total of 127 Ph. D. dissertations related to American immigration have been written. Of these, nine per cent were completed by 1925; another 35 per cent between 1926 and 1945; and

<sup>7</sup> Based on a survey of course descriptions in catalogues of colleges and universities in all parts of the country.

<sup>8</sup> Rose, *Subject*, 167—169.

<sup>9</sup> There are less than 100 American historians on the mailing list of the Immigration History Group.

<sup>10</sup> The analysis was based on Warren Kuehl, *Dissertations in History* for the years 1873—1960 and on *Index to American Doctoral Dissertations* for 1961—65. I am indebted to my former research assistant, Dr. Charles Clark, for assistance in preparing this analysis.

56 per cent between 1946 and 1965. Since over half of all the dissertations have been written since 1946, this might indeed suggest that immigration study is booming. However, when the number of immigration-related dissertations is compared to the total number of dissertations in history, it is clear that the apparent upsurge is really a reflection of the general increase in the output of dissertations. Actually the percentage of history dissertations devoted to immigration-related topics has fluctuated around one and one half per cent of the total for three-quarters of a century.

A topical analysis of the dissertations further reveals the large gaps in the literature of which immigration historians are only too aware. The great majority of the dissertations dealt with the time period, 1790—1920. Only four dissertations concentrated on the post 1920 era. This reflects the curious assumption that the history of immigration ends with the enactment of the restrictive legislation of the twenties. Most of the dissertations have focused upon a particular immigrant group. The Jews, Irish, and Germans have received the most attention, with the Scandinavians, Italians, and Chinese lagging some distance behind. For dozens of other groups there is only a smattering of studies. As one might expect, the published literature reflects these lacunae.

Yet even if we had a library of competent studies of each of the immigrant groups this would not add up to a history of ethnicity in America. To paraphrase Clemenceau, ethnicity is too important to be left to the immigration historians. If, as has been claimed, ethnicity is one of the strongest influences in America today, how much more true this must have been in the past. It is difficult to conceive of any institution which was not profoundly affected by the ethnic factor. Still we have had histories of American cities, labor movements, religious denominations, politics, and schools,<sup>11</sup> in which the immigrants and their children appear merely as residents, workers, parishioners, voters, and pupils. The fact that they also

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<sup>11</sup> Examples of such histories would be: Blake McKelvey, *The Urbanization of America, 1860—1915* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1963); Joseph G. Rayback, *A History of American Labor* (New York, 1959); John T. Ellis, *American Catholicism* (Chicago, 1965). The lack of studies of the impact of immigration on the schools is noted by Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School* (Vintage Books, 1961), 365. On the neglect of immigration in the historiography of the American Catholic Church, see: Rudolph J. Vecoli, »Prelates and Peasants: Italian Immigrants and the Catholic Church,» *Journal of Social History*, 2 (Spring, 1969), 217—68.

were, as the case might be, Polish Catholics, Welsh Methodists, Eastern Rite Ukrainians, Greek Orthodox, Swedish Lutherans, or one of a multitude of other ethnic identities is not treated as a significant datum. That the history of a society the distinctive attribute of which has been its racial, cultural, linguistic, and religious pluralism should have been written for the most part from an Anglo-American monistic perspective is indeed a paradox.

Two »explanations» are often advanced for the dearth of ethnic historical studies. One is the alleged language barrier. It is said that American students lack the linguistic skills to undertake research on such exotic groups as Rumanians and Croatians. John K. Fairbank gave the proper response to this objection: »The problem here is not: What languages do we read? The problem is: What is our intellectual and historical horizon?»<sup>12</sup> When the profession places a correct evaluation upon ethnic studies, students will acquire the necessary linguistic facility.

The second objection has to do with the alleged lack of significant bodies of historical records for ethnic groups. Even historians who should know better speak of the »inarticulate nationalities.» Such notions derive from the stereotype of the immigrants as uniformly illiterate peasants. Far from being inarticulate, the ethnic groups generated a vast amount of documentation. In 1910, over a thousand newspapers and periodicals were being published in the United States in other than the English language.<sup>13</sup> Immigration probably raised the volume of communication among the »common people, to its highest level in history. Consider the hundreds of millions of letters which crossed the ocean, both ways. Unfortunately, American libraries and archives have generally not troubled themselves with the collection of non-English language materials. In recent years systematic and successful efforts have been made to gather the records of immigrant groups. Rich, untapped collections await the student of ethnic America.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> John K. Fairbank, »Assignment for the '70's,» *American Historical Review*, LXXIV (Feb., 1969), 869.

<sup>13</sup> For a statistical analysis of the ethnic publications, see: Fishman, *Language Loyalty*, 51—74.

<sup>14</sup> For an elaboration of this argument see: Rudolph J. Vecoli, »The Immigration Studies Collection of the University of Minnesota,» *The American Archivist*, 32 (April, 1969), 139—45.

It appears to me that there have been two basic reasons why American historians have neglected the dimension of ethnicity. One has had to do with the prevailing ideology of the academic profession; the other, with its sociology.

A prime article of the American creed has been a profound confidence in the power of the New World to transform human nature. Even the »wretched refuse« of Europe was to be transmuted by the irresistible combination of the natural environment and republican institutions. The classic statement of the doctrine of Americanization was pronounced by the Frenchman, Heceor St. John De Crkvecoeur;

He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world.<sup>15</sup>

The belief in a »new race of men« created in the crucible of democracy became axiomatic to the conception of an American nationality. How else were Americans to emerge from the confusion of tongues, faiths, and races? But as Crkvecoeur pointed out, the immigrant must be stripped of »all his ancient prejudices and manners« in order to become a »new man.« Rapid and total assimilation thus came to be regarded as natural, inevitable, and desirable.

A review of immigration scholarship reveals how pervasive and powerful the grip of the assimilationist ideology has been. The generation of progressive historians first addressed itself to the study of immigration as a significant factor in American history.<sup>16</sup> Imbued with the reform spirit of their time, they viewed American history as a process of struggle and growth toward a democratic order. Since in such a society, differences of race, religion, and nationality, were to be inconsequential, the progressive view demanded that the eradication of these »foreign« attributes be the theme of immigration history.

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<sup>15</sup> *Letters from an American Farmer* (Dutton Paperback, 1957), 39.

<sup>16</sup> John Higham, *History* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1965), 192.

Frederick Jackson Turner and Charles A. Beard were the giants who towered over this generation of historians. Both were environmental determinists who stressed the primacy of economic forces, although, of course, with a difference. Turner was perhaps the first to call attention to the need for the study of immigration.<sup>17</sup> When Turner delivered his frontier thesis, in language reminiscent of Crèvecoeur, he described the impact of the wilderness upon the European: »In the crucible of the frontier the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality or characteristics.»<sup>18</sup> For Turner, the frontier was »the line of the most rapid and effective Americanization.»

The historians who established immigration history as a field of study following World War I were almost to a man Turnerians. Their basic concepts were those of the frontier and the section, and their theme was that of the adaptation of Old World cultures to New World environments. Like Turner they were Middle Westerners, but unlike him, they were sons of German and Scandinavian immigrants. The works of Theodore Blegen on the Norwegians, George Stephenson on the Swedes, and Carl Wittke on the Germans are enduring accomplishments of this generation of immigration historians. An aura of nostalgia, however, lingers over their volumes; the »culture in immigrant chests,» seemed destined to be buried with the first generation. »Americanization,» Wittke observed, »moved irresistably onward.»<sup>19</sup>

Marcus Lee Hansen, while of similar background, was able to transcend some of the limitations which characterized the work of his contemporaries. Rather than focusing on a particular nationality, Hansen took all of European emigration as his province and related

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<sup>17</sup> Turner wrote in 1891: »The story of the peopling of America has not yet been written. We do not understand ourselves.» Quoted in Lee Benson, *Turner and Beard* (New York, 1960), 82.

<sup>18</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920). In his later study of sectionalism, Turner recognized the role of cultural influences carried to the frontier by immigrants. He professed to see a »mixing bowl» rather than »meltingpot» at work in the Old Northwest, but he was quite vague as to the outcome. He acknowledged the influence of Marcus Lee Hansen on his thinking about immigrant heritages. *The United States 1830—1850* (New York, 1935), 280—87.

<sup>19</sup> Carl Wittke, *We Who Built America* (New York, 1939), 446, also Chap. 13. »Culture in Immigrant Chests.»; Theodore C. Blegen, *Grass Roots History* (Minneapolis, 1947).



it to the full sweep of American history. A student of Turner, Hansen expanded the impact of the frontier to European society, Hansen urged the study of the »immigrant communities in America that formed the human connecting link between the Old World and the New»<sup>20</sup> Despite such original insights, Hansen was fundamentally a Turnerian. In 1938, Hansen told the Augustana Historical Society that »it is the ultimate fate of any national group to be amalgamated into the composite American race.»<sup>21</sup>

While many aspects of Turner's frontier hypothesis have been criticized in recent years, his proposition that the American environment profoundly transformed the immigrant has gone practically unchallenged.<sup>22</sup> If the standard text on the westward movement now acknowledges the persistence of European traits as »equally» important with free land in shaping the nation, it also reiterates the Americanizing influence of the frontier and contains only a handful of references to specific ethnic groups. Certain recent elaborations of the Turner thesis by David Potter, George W. Pierson and Daniel Boorstin, are agreed upon an environmental explanation of national character.<sup>23</sup> Intent upon establishing the homogeneity of the American people, they share a common neglect of sources of diversity such as immigration.

It remained for Merle Curti, a student of Turner, to translate the frontier thesis from an ideological pronouncement into a verifiable historical statement. In his pioneering work, *The Making*

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<sup>20</sup> M. L. Hansen, »The Third Generation in America,» *Commentary* XIV (Nov., 1952), 500; *The Immigrant in American History* (Harper Torchback, 1964); *The Atlantic Migration 1607—1860* (Harper Torchback, 1961); Allan H. Spear, »Marcus Lee Hansen and the Historiography of Immigration,» *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, XLIV (1961), 258—68.

<sup>21</sup> Hansen, »Third Generation,» 499.

<sup>22</sup> In a little-known essay, Edward Mims, Jr. attributed to the nationalistic influence of the frontier thesis the indifference of American historians to the study of immigration. The disciples of Turner, he asserted, had emphasized the effect of environment to the neglect of European cultural backgrounds. Mims, however, argued that the older Turner came to appreciate the role of immigrant influences, as did those of his followers who were exponents of »Neo-Turnerism.» *American History and Immigration* (Bronxville, N. Y., 1950). See also Marcus Lee Hansen's remarks in Dixon R. Fox, ed. *Sources of Culture in the Middle West* (New York, 1934), 103—110.

<sup>23</sup> Ray Allen Billington, *Westward Expansion* (3rd ed., N. Y., 1967), 1—3, 308, 706, 746; Potter, *People of Plenty* (Chicago, 1954); Boorstin, *The Americans. The National Experience* (New York, 1965); Pierson, »The M-Factor in American History,» *American Quarterly*, XIV (Summer, 1962), 275—89.

of an American Community, Curti utilized quantitative as well as qualitative data to determine whether the frontier did indeed make for democracy and Americanization.<sup>24</sup> Curti concluded that at least in Trempealeau County conditions did tend toward an equalization of opportunity and condition between the native and the foreign-born. I think it significant, however, that no effort as such was made to measure the persistence of ethnicity.

That Turnerian determinism is far from being exhausted was demonstrated by the appearance in 1968 of a book entitled *The Immigrant Upraised*.<sup>25</sup> A history of Italians in the trans-Mississippi West, it depicts them as aspiring yeomen-farmers drawn by the magnet of virgin land. Contrasting their condition to that of degraded sweatshop workers and organ-grinders in the Eastern cities, the author asserts that the western Italians achieved ready acceptance, rapid assimilation, and »success in the sun«. In his foreword to the volume, Ray Allen Billington hailed it as preparing the way for a completely new interpretation of immigration history.<sup>26</sup>

If the faith of the Turnerians in the liberating effects of the western environment was unshakeable, they were less optimistic about the future of the immigrant masses in the industrial cities. It is significant that no one of them, not even Hansen, effectively addressed himself to this phase of immigration history. Turner, himself, was distinctly uncomfortable in discussing the Irish and other immigrants in the eastern cities. He doubted whether the melting pot could work under such circumstances and whether the denizens of the ethnic ghettos could be transformed into »the historic American type.«<sup>27</sup>

For Charles Beard the triumph of industrial capitalism was the 'main theme of »The Rise of American Civilization.«<sup>28</sup> However,

<sup>24</sup> *The Making of an American Community* (Stanford, Calif., 1959).

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Rolle, *The Immigrant Upraised* (Norman, Okla., 1968).

<sup>26</sup> Rolle, *Immigrant*, x. Billington also commented that Rolle had demonstrated »for the first time that the western environment could escalate the foreign — no less than the native-born)!«

<sup>27</sup> Turner, *United States*, 53—55, 94—96. See also Turner's series of newspaper articles dealing with various immigrant groups, *Chicago Record-Herald*, June 19—October 16, 1901.

<sup>28</sup> Charles and Mary Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (2 vols.; New York, 1927). Beard revealed an admiration for the politics and agricultural bent of the Germans and Scandinavians (II, 143); in this, he shared the preferences of the Turnerians.

he did not concern himself with the issues of assimilation or ethnicity. Viewed as »economic men,» the immigrants simply played out their appointed roles in the scenarios of class conflict. As Lee Benson has pointed out, Beard did not even consider the variable of ethnic affiliation as a possible determinant of political behavior.<sup>29</sup> For the followers of the Beardian-Marxist interpretation of American history, economic class was the only meaningful social category. Such a crude economic determinism was not conducive to an appreciation of the subtle play of ethnic influences.

It remained for a sociologist to develop a theory of assimilation which would comprehend the immigrant in an urban setting. Robert Ezra Park was perhaps the most influential student of racial and ethnic relations in 20th century America. A close observer of immigrant life, Park was early persuaded that the country could digest »every sort of normal human difference, except the purely external ones, like the color of the skin.»<sup>30</sup> Impressed by the ease and rapidity with which the immigrants acquired the language and customs, Park declared in 1913: »In America it has become proverbial that a Pole, Lithuanian, or Norwegian cannot be distinguished, in the second generation, from an American born of native parents.» In 1926, Park summed up his thinking about the process of acculturation:

»The race relations cycle which takes the form . . . of contacts, competition, accommodation and eventual assimilation, is apparently progressive and irreversible. Customs regulations, immigration restrictions and racial barriers may slacken the tempo of the movement; may perhaps halt it altogether for a time; but cannot change its direction; cannot at any rate, reverse it.»<sup>31</sup>

Thus for Park and his followers assimilation was foreordained and unilinear.

Rather than posing an obstacle to assimilation, the city was Park's

<sup>29</sup> Benson, *Turner*, 154—60.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Ezra Park, *Race and Culture* (Free Press Paperback, 1964), 205—06.

<sup>31</sup> Park, *Race*, 150. Park's colleague and associate, W. I. Thomas, the co-author with Florian Znaniecki of the influential work, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (Boston, 1918), shared this assimilationist perspective. He concluded: »Assimilation . . . as inevitable as it is desirable; it is impossible for the immigrants we receive to remain permanently in separate groups.» Edmund H. Volkart, ed., *Social Behavior and Personality: Contributions of W. I. Thomas to Theory and Social Research* (New York, 1951), 285.

melting pot par excellence.<sup>32</sup> For Park the impact of the city was quite similar to that of Turner's frontier; it broke the »cake of custom» and emancipated the individual. If this experience was painful and traumatic, Park left no doubt that he thought this price for individual freedom was worth paying. Within his theoretical scheme of urban ecology, Park associated spatial movements with cultural change. The process of assimilation was conceptualized in terms of physical mobility through successive zones of settlement. The movement of the immigrants outward from the ghetto culminated in their final absorption into the larger society. Where Turner had faltered, Park succeeded in expanding the assimilationist ideology to encompass the immigrants of urban, industrial America.

Scholarship on racial and ethnic groups was also profoundly influenced by the rise of cultural anthropology — and particularly by the work of Franz Boas.<sup>33</sup> The rejection of »scientific racism» and the establishment of the primacy of culture as the determinant of human behavior were obviously of fundamental importance to the study of ethnicity. However, when anthropologists themselves turned to the study of ethnic groups in modern America their much vaunted »cultural relativism» failed to immunize them against the assimilationist faith.

Margaret Mead, herself a student of Boas, depicted the generational changes between immigrants and their children as involving a complete break and acculturation to the »American Way of Life» on the part of the second generation.<sup>34</sup>

Fresh from field work among the Australian aborigines, W. Lloyd

<sup>32</sup> I have benefitted from Mr. Michael Passi's seminar paper, »Metropolis, Evolution, and Ethnicity: Robert Ezra Park,» and discussions with him in this analysis of Park.

<sup>33</sup> George W. Stocking, Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution* (New York, 1968), 195—233. Pointing to the persistence of the Lamarckian doctrine of inheritance of acquired characteristics, Stocking suggests it may have provided the rationale for the »melting pot.» 245. Boas, himself, in his study of changes in bodily forms of descendants of immigrants concluded that »the head form, which has always been considered one of the most stable and permanent characteristics of human races, undergoes far-reaching changes due to the transfer of the people from European to American soil.» U. S. Immigration Commission, *Abstracts of Reports* (2 vols.; Washington, D. C., 1911), II, 501—56. This conclusion, of course reinforced the belief in the transforming power of the American environment.

<sup>34</sup> Margaret Mead, *And Keep Your Power Dry* (New York, 1965), 46. With obvious satisfaction, she wrote: »Almost miraculously the sons of the Polish day laborer, and the Italian fruit grower, the Finnish miner and the Russian garment worker became Americans.,

Warner descended upon Yankee City in the early 1930's. One of the volumes resulting from this community study was *The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups* by Warner and Leo Srole published in 1945.<sup>35</sup> Although it contains detailed descriptions of the ethnic subcultures, the data are subsumed within a Parkian theoretical framework. The various immigrant groups are depicted as moving along a continuum from peasant village culture to modern urban culture. Residential, occupational, and social class indices are used to measure their movement up the escalator of social mobility toward total assimilation. Anthropologists thus proved to be just as susceptible to the ethnocentric appeal of the assimilationist creed as other social scientists.

American historians of course, were influenced by the significant work being done in the social sciences. In 1932, a committee of the American Historical Association on the planning of research urged historians to avail themselves of the new insights being developed in anthropology, psychology, and sociology. The report of the Eastern Conference on American History cited as a neglected area of research: the history of race relations and of race acculturation.<sup>36</sup> It was not until 1939, however, that social scientific concepts were explicitly brought to bear on the historical study of ethnic groups. At the AHA meeting that year Caroline F. Ware presented a paper on »Cultural Groups in the United States.»<sup>37</sup> Ware noted the neglect by American historians of the ethnic groups which deviated from the dominant literate culture. Observing that the interaction of the immigrants with the modern city was creating a new industrial culture, Ware concluded:

»In the still unexplored history of the non-dominant cultural groups of the industrial cities lies the story of an emerging industrial culture that represents the dynamic cultural frontier of modern America.»<sup>38</sup>

Unfortunately Ware's manifesto was hearkened to by too few.

<sup>35</sup> Warner, *Social Systems*. Writing in 1962, Warner was less dogmatic about the inevitability of assimilation. *American Life: Dream and Reality* (Chicago, 1962), 205.

<sup>36</sup> Committee of American Historical Association on the Planning of Research, *Historical Scholarship in America* (New York, 1932), 92—93. »Race» as used here was the equivalent of ethnic.

<sup>37</sup> Caroline F. Ware, »Cultural Groups in the United States,» in Ware, ed., *The Cultural Approach to History* (New York, 1940), 61—89.

<sup>38</sup> Ware, »Cultural Groups,» 73.

Three decades later the industrial culture of modern America remains largely »unexplored history.«

A significant breakthrough, however, was realized with the publication in 1941 of Oscar Handlin's *Boston's Immigrants: A Study in Acculturation*.<sup>39</sup> Informed by the insights of anthropology and sociology the volume expertly delineated the impact of immigration upon the culture, economy, ecology, and social structure of Boston. With the exception of the Irish, the newcomers assimilated readily. However, the group consciousness and cohesion of the Irish were intensified by the bitter conflicts between them and the »others.« From clontacts of dissimilar cultures emerged an ethnic pluralism which left Boston a divided city. Here then was no tale of rapid, easy assimilation.

For several decades, Handlin has been the primary exponent, exemplar, and teacher of the history of American ethnicity. In essays and books, Handlin both chronicled and championed cultural pluralism in American life.<sup>40</sup> While acknowledging the ugliness of group hostility and pnejudice, Handlin has contended that in a chaotic world, ethnic identity provided a much needed source of stability and order.

Handlin, however, is best known for *The Uprooted*.<sup>41</sup> It is this wonk which has had the greatest influence on the thinking of historians and social scientists. The theme of *The Uprooted* is the utter devastation of culture by environment. The immigrant is deracinated because none of his traditional forms of thought and behavior can be transplanted.<sup>42</sup> Its grim environmental (determinismplaces *The Uprooted* squarely in the tradition of Turner and Park. For all of them, the physical voyage from the Old World to the New was also a sociological journey from the traditional to the modern, from the sacred to the secular, from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft. Paradoxically, Handlin, who has more than any other historian advanced the study of ethnicity, in his most influential work reinforced the assimilationist ideology.

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<sup>39</sup> (Cambridge, Mass., rev. ed., 1959).

<sup>40</sup> Oscar Handlin, *The American People in the Twentieth Century* (Beacon paperback, 1963); *Race and Nationality in American Life* (Anchor Book, 1957); ~Historical Perspectives on the American Ethnic Group., *Daedalus* (Spring, 1961), 220—32.

<sup>41</sup> (Boston, 1951).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 170—71.

Ethnicity in American historiography has remained something of a family scandal to be kept a dark secret or to be explained away. Even those historians who have dealt with the theme in a competent fashion have felt obliged to apologize for its existence.

Ethnic studies thus have long suffered from the blight of the assimilationist ideology. Because of their expectations that assimilation was to be swift and irresistible, historians and social scientists have looked for change rather than continuity, acculturation rather than cultural maintenance. Since ethnicity was thought to be evanescent, it was not considered worth studying.<sup>43</sup>

The sociology of the academic profession may provide yet another clue to the neglect of ethnicity. Although the shift from the patrician historian to the professional historian had a democratizing effect on historical study, the first generation of Ph. D.s still tended to be drawn from middle-class Protestant old stock. It is not surprising that interest in immigration history during this period was minimal or that a nativist bias pervaded much that was written.<sup>44</sup>

The sons of northern and western European immigrants began to enter the profession in the 'twenties and 'thirties. Some of them devoted themselves to writing the history of their particular ethnic groups. Significantly scholarly work on the «new immigration» was practically non-existent. Few offspring of southern and eastern European parentage were as yet able to avail themselves of the academic profession as a ladder of upward mobility. One reason, as E. Digby Baltzell has noted, was that until the 1940's the major universities continued to be the preserve of old stock Protestants.<sup>45</sup> It was not very long ago that certain history departments as a matter of policy did not hire Catholics or Jews, to say nothing of Negroes.

Since World War II, with the boom in higher education, the walls of ethnic exclusion around the groves of academe have come tumbling down. As a result, there has been a significant influx of second and third generation Americans, many of them of Catholic and Jewish origin, into the historical profession. Yet there has been no

<sup>43</sup> Fishman, *Language Loyalty*, 15, 21, 86; Kamen, «On Neglects», 6—7.

<sup>44</sup> Higham, *History*, 52—67. See also Edward N. Saveth, *American Historians and European Immigrants, 1875—1925* (New York, 1948).

<sup>45</sup> E. Digby Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment* (Vintage Book, 1966), 335—42.

outpouring of ethnic studies by these sons and grandsons of immigrants. Why is this so?

Higher education in America has been one of the most effective agencies of acculturation (or to use Joshua Fishman's term, de-ethnization). Its primary function, as Baltzell has observed, has been to assimilate talented youth from all segments of society to the Anglo-American core culture.<sup>46</sup> College students of ethnic background therefore are prime candidates to become marginal men. For those who choose academic careers, the university may represent an escape from ethnicity. Milton Gordon has suggested that these »marginally ethnic intellectuals» constitute a distinct »transethnic» subsociety.<sup>47</sup> Be that as it may, the second and third generation scholars do assimilate the academic ethos; they dedicate themselves to the life of the mind and the rule of reason. As emancipated intellectuals they reject the narrow parochialisms and tribal loyalties of their youth.<sup>48</sup> The responses of certain academic men of Italian descent to an invitation to participate in a study of the Italian-American ethnic group illustrate this state of mind:

I am too concerned with trying to erase all national boundaries - - and nationalisms — to be enthusiastic about activities delineating any national groups.

I do not believe there is room for an Italian minority. I suggest that Italians or persons of Italian origin have no recourse but to merge into the majority.<sup>49</sup>

Here we have the interesting phenomenon of the intellectual who not only rejects ethnic membership for himself but denies the validity of ethnicity for all others as well.

The de-ethnization of scholars is related to the larger process whereby the most able individuals of ethnic origin have been systematically assimilated into the Establishment.<sup>50</sup> This »brain drain» inevitably has had a major impact on the life of ethnic groups. Presumably it deprived them of potential leadership and contributed to their cultural impoverishment. The estrangement of many intellectuals from their ethnic roots may have something to do with their aliena-

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Gordon, *Assimilation*, 224—230.

<sup>48</sup> Fishman, *Language Loyalty*, 372; Melvin M. Tumin, »In Dispraise of Loyalty,» *Social Problems*, XV (Winter, 1968), 267—79.

<sup>49</sup> Personal communications.

<sup>50</sup> Gordon, *Assimilation*, 256; Caroline F. Ware, »Immigration,» *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, IV: 592.



tion from popular culture, while the widespread anti-intellectualism among ethnic Americans may reflect their resentment of the aloof professors whom they regard as traitors and Uncle Toms. Many ethnic groups sponsor historical societies which attempt to record in a more-or-less scholarly fashion the role and contribution of their particular element to American history. These efforts have not been generally viewed in a kindly fashion by professional historians. But it has been the »standoffish« attitude of historians of ethnic origin which has been most resented. The Polish *American Historical Association Bulletin* recently complained about professional historians of Polish background who remained distant from the organization: »Why are they not members? Are they academic snobs who are so ambitious that they do not want identification with 'an ethnic group?'»<sup>51</sup> Such academic snobbery, if such it is, is regrettable. For the cultivation of ethnic history might serve as one of the much-needed bridges between the university ghetto and the ethnic ghetto.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, the academic milieu has generally not encouraged the pursuit of ethnic interests. How many graduate students have shied away from research topics for fear they would be suspected of ethnic chauvinism? Historians of ethnic origin have on occasion been reminded of their marginal status. A few years ago, the then president of the AHA commented:

». . . many of the younger practitioners of our craft, and those who are still apprentices, are products of lower middle-class or foreign origins, and their emotions not infrequently get in the way of historical reconstruction. They find themselves in a very real sense outsiders on our past and feel themselves shut out.»<sup>53</sup>

Filio-piety, as anyone who has read any American history knows, has not been peculiar to ethnic historians, yet they have been particularly suspect.

For a variety of reasons, therefore, the recruitment of scholars of ethnic background has not, by and large, had the fruitful consequences for historical study which one might have anticipated. Those who have deliberately dissociated themselves from their group ties often

<sup>51</sup> Polish American Historical Association, *Bulletin*, XXIV (January-June, 1968), 3.

<sup>52</sup> Rudolph J. Vecoli, »Ethnic Historical Societies: from Filiopiety to Scholarship,« an unpublished paper read at a joint session of the American Historical Association and the American Jewish Historical Society, Toronto, Dec. 28, 1967.

<sup>53</sup> Carl Bridenbaugh, »The Great Mutation,« *American Historical Review*, (January, 1963), 322. My emphasis.

reject at the conscious level any suggestion of lingering ethnic loyalty. But it has been suggested that such repressed ethnicity manifests itself in a sublimated fashion. Although we claim to be free of primordial ties based on race, religion, or nation, yet we have tended to identify with »the underdogs and disinherited in modern society.« In our history as well as our politics, we have often championed the causes of »captive groups.« A consideration of the ethnic backgrounds of white historians of black America lends substance to the notion of sublimation of ethnicity. Can it be, as Melvin M. Tumin has suggested, that we have:

»used our hard-won freedom from the enmeshment of our own primary groups with all their irrationalities only to be adopted into the equally disabling and restricting network of other primary group loyalties? Can it be that we cannot bear to be without primary group loyalties, causes, and missions?»<sup>54</sup>

Whatever the answer to that particular question, it is not my intention to promote the study of ethnicity as a »cause« or »mission«. I do not conceive of historical scholarship as a form of advocacy or therapy, nor am I suggesting that historians of ethnic origin should necessarily devote themselves to the study of their groups. I think that the doctrine that only the individual of a particular ethnic or racial background can »understand« the history of his people« is pernicious. Often the »outsider« can bring to the subject certain perspectives which are denied to the »insider.« The historian of ethnicity, whatever his origin, must, if he would remain true to his calling, eschew the role of advocate no matter how noble the cause in order to pursue the truth wherever it may lead him.

There are signs that the long winter of neglect of ethnicity is coming to an end. Perhaps the surest indication of spring is that publishers are scurrying about seeking to sign up authors for ethnic and minority history series. More solid assurances have come from the increasing number of books and articles by historians and others which deal competently with the ethnic factor. There is evidence that the heightened pluralism of society is being mirrored in a new scholarly interest in the sources of diversity. American historians are beginning to free themselves from their compulsive obsession with assimilation.

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<sup>54</sup> Tumin, »In Dispraise,« 275.

At this particular juncture of our national history we have an urgent need for a clear-eyed scholarship of ethnicity. What the historian can best contribute is a realistic perspective on the dynamics of ethnic group life and interaction. In place of an homogenized American history, he must portray the complex variety of racial, religious, and cultural groups living together in conflict and concord. Our current concern with Afro-American history should not be allowed to obscure the larger whole of which it is a part. Certainly the racial polarization of which the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders warned — »two societies, one black, one white» — should not be projected into the past. Such an interpretation of American history would constitute a serious distortion of reality, ignoring as it would the class as well as ethnic factors which have been and remain important sources of differences among whites. The historian of ethnicity has the responsibility of insisting upon a pluralistic rather than a dichotomized view of the past.

An appreciation of our own diversity should enable us not only to deal more intelligently with group conflict at home, it should also permit us to relate more realistically to the rest of the world. Professor Fairbank has recently suggested that our survival may hinge upon our ability »to get a truer and multivalued, because multicultural, perspective on the world crisis. . .»<sup>55</sup> The arrogant assumption of the unquestionable superiority of the »American way of life» which underlies the assimilationist ideology constitutes, I submit, an insuperable obstacle to such a world-view. A recent statement by Senator Richard Russell of Georgia expressed the ethnocentric doctrine of 100 per cent Americanism in its starkest form; commenting on the possibility of nuclear war, the senator said: »If we have to start over again with another Adam and Eve, I want them to be Americans; and I want them on this continent and not in Europe.»<sup>56</sup> A candid recognition that the melting pot did not work, that we remain a congeries of peoples, that there are *many* American ways of life rather than *one*, might help us to discard our notion of ourselves as a »Chosen People\* and to affirm our common humanity with the rest of mankind.

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<sup>55</sup> Fairbank, »Assignment,» 863.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in George Wald, »A Generation in Search of a Future,» *The New Yorker*, (March 22, 1969), 31.