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## **Bridging the Theoretical Gap: The Diasporized Hybrid in Sociological Theory**

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In a nation of immigrants, most American ethnic groups have at some point wrestled with how to reconcile having an identity that is rooted simultaneously in their countries of origin and in the United States, particularly when they are also racialized ethnic minorities. This hybrid identity often blends divergent cultures and traditions. And sociologists, intent on explaining these tensions, have focused on the experiences that have shaped these identities for over a century. As a result, the theoretical roots of contemporary hybridity theories such as the segmented assimilation perspective, can be traced back to “classical” theorists of race, pluralism, and identity such as Robert Park, Horace Kallen, and W.E.B. Dubois. This chapter examines these roots, with the exception of DuBois’s theories of double consciousness (found in Chapter 2) to provide a holistic sociological account of theories of hybrid identities. We suggest that despite the changing nature of immigrant experiences today due to globalization, there is still significant continuity between the processes and outcomes of ethnic identity formation among 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century European immigrants and the more racially and ethnically diverse post-1965 immigrants to the United States.

In the United States, most immigrants have experienced ambivalence or tension between their hopes for being a part of the American citizenry while simultaneously desiring to retain elements of their homeland cultures. This has resulted in “a close

connection between the notion of identity and the awareness of belonging to a distinctive group set apart from others in American society” (Gleason 1992: 141). The desire to maintain cultural traditions finds immigrants negotiating a world where two identities exist and vary in salience depending on social contexts and structural conditions.

Until the mid-20th century, European immigrants were not considered fully white but instead existed in an “in-between” status in which they were considered to be neither Black nor white. The argument that “the pathway to assimilation was smoothed for the descendants of European immigrants by their racial identification is an anachronism, inappropriately imposing contemporary racial perceptions on the past” (Alba & Nee 1997: 845). With old world cultures linked to unfitness for citizenship, economic mobility was limited. Therefore, a hybrid identity persisted for generations among poor and working-class immigrants. However, this hybrid identity progressively attenuated among Europeans to the point where they identified only “symbolically” with their ethnic origins (Gans 1979). For contemporary immigrants, The United States remains a racial nationalist state where first-class citizenship rights are limited to those considered fully white. Thus, the likelihood of lasting hybrid identities looms large and necessitates a full understanding of similarities and differences between historical and contemporary immigrant groups.

### *The Place of the Diaspora in the Diasporized Hybrid*

Whether referring to groups arriving in The United States 250 years ago or two years ago, a number of similarities arise with regard to the role of the diasporic experience on identities. Traditionally applied to Jews, the rise of transnational migration has produced diasporic experiences among generations of immigrants. This results in a

diasporic consciousness such that migranhood and the journey of the diasporic experiences themselves become integral parts of groups' identities (Hall 1996; Safran 1991). Even as this identity celebrates cultures, the histories of migration, and global historical cultures and forces, it simultaneously reflects the uncertainty of actual residence and community, discrimination and exclusion, and social and economic marginalization (Clifford 1994).

Diasporic identities are characterized by a “continuing relationship to the homeland,” that may either be physical, when individuals and group members continue to visit the homeland or based on an imaginary community with the knowledge that they will not, or cannot, return (Safran 1991:84; Anderson 1991). The latter is particularly common among refugees, those fleeing religious, racial, or political persecution, as in the case of Jews fleeing from Russian pogroms or Nazi Germany, Italians fleeing Mussolini, or Tutsi fleeing Rwanda during the genocide. Diasporic groups also recognize they may never be fully accepted by their new nation and maintain memories, myths, customs, and traditions of the original homelands. These qualifications reveal that hundreds of immigrant groups arriving in America throughout its history likely experienced diasporic identities. Viewing the experiences of most American immigrants through a lens of diasporized hybridity allows us a similar lens with which to examine, compare and understand the experiences of hundreds of immigrant groups arriving in The United States during the last four centuries.

*Historical Hybridity: Classical Theories of Incorporation*

The earliest sociological theorists of race, sometimes grudgingly, acknowledged the dualistic nature of immigrant identities. Robert Park (1928), although championing a race relations cycle predicated on the assimilation and loss of Old World cultures, recognized that this did not always occur. As “cultural hybrids,” migrants lived and shared “the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples” (892). They straddled the boundaries of two different cultures, navigating the new American culture while simultaneously adhering to old world standards. One is quickly reminded of contemporary immigrants in reading his discussion of Jews, described as “never quite willing to break, even if he were permitted to do so, with his past and his traditions, and not quite accepted, because of racial prejudice, in the new society in which he now sought to find a place” (892). Unable and unwilling to assimilate these immigrants exist as “marginal men...on the margin of two cultures and two societies, which never completely interpenetrated and fused” (892).

While Park found the multiplicity of identities problematic when permanent or semi-permanent, Horace Kallen championed cultural pluralism and dualistic identities because of their inevitability, and ability to accommodate cultural longevity and renewal. Throughout his work, he rejected assimilatory models in favor of a theory that accurately described the realities of contemporary immigrants which remains relevant today. Because they spent time in two different worlds impacting both aspects of their identity, work and home, people could not choose one identity, an American or a homeland identity, over another. For, “A man is at once...one in an ethnic and social group and the citizen on a nation” (1924:62). To account for this duality, groups asserted their

hybridity by declaring themselves Irish-American, Italian-American, and Polish-American. This hyphenation became a fact, permeating all realms of life.

In the face of massive Americanization efforts, immigrant groups resisted, determined to hold on their ethnic traditions, and it worked. For generations, cultural traditions persisted among every ethnic group in The United States. As groups became more Americanized, so too did they assert their rights to maintain their ethnic cultures.

As they grow more prosperous and ‘Americanized, as they become freed from the stigma of ‘foreigner,’ they develop group self-respect: the wop changes into a proud Italian, the hunky into an intensely nationalistic Slav... Their cultural abjectness gives way to cultural pride... In sum, the most eagerly American of the immigrant groups are also the most autonomous and self-conscious in spirit and culture (106, 114).

In America, ethnic success facilitated the perfection of hybrid ethnic identities. Using Jews as an example, Kallen finds that as they acculturated to American traditions and became more American, so too did they “become rather the more a Jew. The cultural unity of his race, history, and background, is only continued by the new life under the new conditions” (113).

Directly challenging a melting pot ideology predicated on the loss of cultures, Kallen posited hybridity as central to American democracy involving “not the elimination of differences, but the perfection and conservation of differences” (1924: 61). He foresaw

a democracy of nationalities, cooperating voluntarily and autonomously through common institutions in the enterprise of self-realization through the perfection of men according to their kind. The common language of the commonwealth, the language of its great tradition, would be English, but each nationalist would have for its emotional and involuntary life its own peculiar dialect or speech, its own individual and inevitable esthetic and intellectual forms (1924: 124).

This vision, though perhaps too optimistic because Kallen believed these groups would be immune from discrimination, foreshadows the reality of many immigrant groups today.

Even Milton Gordon (1964), who penned a model of assimilation predicated on the loss of homeland cultures, recognized that, within immigrant communities, people developed organizational networks and informal social relationships encouraging “members of the ethnic group to remain within the confines of the group for all of their primary relationships and some of their secondary relationships throughout all the stages of the life-cycle” (35). This allowed for group self-identification by simultaneously refracting “the national cultural patterns of behavior and values through the prism of its own cultural heritage” (38). Combined with class identities, these hybrid identities incorporated both American and ethnic group practices.

However, Gordon believed this identificational multiplicity was transitory as immigrants move toward identificational assimilation, when immigrants identify as “American” without any hyphenated identity. Heavily critiqued by other sociologists, this phenomena presumes a disinterest in cultural retention and requires “the extinction of any form of ethnic identity in favor of an exclusively national, American identity” (Alba & Nee 1997: 831). Immigrants must expunge all familial and extra-American origins and traditions from the collective memory which “flies in the face of the data demonstrating that the overwhelming majority of Americans still acknowledge some non-American ethnic ancestry” (Alba & Nee 1997: 831; Alba 1990).

*Revisiting Historical Hybridity: New Immigration Historians*

Greater scrutiny of older ethnographical sociological studies of urban community find clear evidence of the maintenance of multiple ethnic and immigrant cultures while simultaneously assimilating to some degree into larger American culture (Bodnar 1987; Handlin 1941; Thomas & Znaniecki 1918). These immigrants lived in a world governed by a “culture of everyday life” shaped simultaneously by their folk cultures and their “present realities” in America (Bodnar 1987: 209). As a result, their identities, rooted in neither new or old countries, coalesced, forever shifting with new experiences in their new homeland.

Recent work examining white immigrant groups has focused on tensions they experience upon arriving in The United States necessitating the negotiation of racial and ethnic boundaries that often placed them as “in-between” peoples who were “not-yet-white” (Barrett & Roediger 1997). Indeed, they existed in limbo with hybrid identities. This literature emphasizes the constructed nature and selective persistence of culture and identity among immigrants who became white in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Vecoli 1964, 1990). These hybrid cultures not only existed but were integral to immigrants’ ability to adjust and succeed in The United States. Confirming Kallen’s findings nearly fifty years later, “as demands for loyalty and conformity to ‘American’ norms increased, immigrant groups responded by asserting and demonstrating the compatibility of their ethnocultures with national ideals” (Conzen et al 1992: 13).

Revisiting identity formation experiences of European immigrants, scholars find hybrid, or ethnic, identities constructed, negotiated and adapted upon arrival to and throughout their time in America (Sollors 1989). This model, like contemporary



discussions of hybridity, attributes agency to individual actors and groups in defining their own identities, cultures, and solidarities. This process entailed the fusion of “ancestral loyalties (religious, linguistic, and cultural” with American circumstances, political ideals, and participation in American political institutions (Fuchs 1990: 20). Therefore, ethnicity, like hybridity, is “a process of construction or invention with which incorporates, adapts, and amplifies preexisting communal solidarities, cultural attributes, and historical memories...grounded in real life context and social experience” (Conzen et al 1992: 4).

This ethnic culture, repeatedly modified as groups in residence in the US expanded and acculturated to American customs, served a number of purposes. It has the power to “provide the basis for solidarity among the potential members of the group; mobilize the group to defend its cultural values and to advance its claims to power and status, and resources; and, at the same time, defuse the hostility of the mainstream ethnoculture by depicting the compatibility of the sidestream ethnoculture with American principles and ideals” (Conzen et al 1992: 5-6). Perhaps most importantly, ethnic cultures provide new immigrants access to ethnic niches and networks, which allow for citizenship-based access to social, political, and economic resources (Gans 1962; Waldinger 1996). Simultaneously, proximity to other ethnic groups also increased immigrants’ likelihood to maintain their cultural identities thereby mutually reinforcing the benefits of hybridity. Ethnic groups living in rural areas were more likely to maintain their cultures and not face assimilative pressures (Conzen et al 1992) than those living in larger multiethnic cities.

Like today's immigrant groups, nearly all immigrant groups arriving pre-1965, the Dutch, Germans, Irish, Italians, Jews, Czechs, French, or Poles, engaged in some form of voluntary pluralism, separatism and attempts to maintain their own identity for at least some period of time, often a century or greater in the form of hyphenated or hybrid identities (Bodnar 1987; Fuchs 1990; Vecoli 1990). Members of groups experiencing these conditions have been described as "multicultural" individuals (Adler 1974; Alexander 2001). They resemble marginal men with "no clear boundaries between him and himself and the varieties of cultural contexts he may find himself in" such that he is "very much a formative being, resilient, changing, and evolutionary" (Adler 1974:369-71).

Many link white ethnicity to class and urbanicity arguing that as immigrants become upwardly mobile and suburbanize, they assimilate into the dominant society and lose all but their most symbolic forms of ethnicity (Gans 1979; Steinberg 1989). Like contemporary immigrants with hybrid identities, European ethnics experienced conflict as becoming American necessitated the dissolution of strong family and community ties to promote economic success (Gans 1962; Whyte 1993). However, a majority of ethnics, even in the third generation, identify with their ancestor's homeland (Alba 1990; Greeley 1974; Tricarico 1984). It is not trivial that people choose, consistently, to retain their cultural backgrounds and become hyphenated Americans.

The above research highlights the extent to which white ethnicity was important to the communities which enacted these cultures from their native lands as ways to both assert their difference from native whites and utilize these cultures in their transition from one country to another. Throughout American history, immigrants have experienced and

adopted “a double identity that included ‘American’ self-definition” (Kazal 1995: 462) alongside (real or imagined) customs, values, and traditions of an ancestral homeland.

*The Diasporic Hybrid in Contemporary Immigration Theory*

Lacking a transnational perspective until recently, the immigration literature has traditionally been more concerned with how immigrant identities are shaped in response to social and structural factors within the United States. Yet the magnitude of post-1965 immigration to the United States has yielded an even greater geographical concentration of immigrants in certain metropolitan areas in the United States such as in New York City, Los Angeles, and Miami, creating ideal conditions for the formation of diasporic hybrid identities. The influx of these racially and ethnically diverse populations in the post-1965 immigration era has challenged sociologists to develop new concepts and frameworks for describing ethnic identity formation processes and outcomes. The segmented assimilation perspective was derived to capture these new ways of becoming and being ethnic Americans.

The segmented assimilation perspective posits that the way in which new immigrants are incorporated into American society will affect whether the second generation will experience ethnic identity formation as a “linear” “selective” or a “reactive” process (Rumbaut 1997; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). In particular, ethnic identity formation varies depending on where immigrant groups settle, whether there is an existing ethnic community, and whether they are accepted or discriminated against by the native-born majority group (Portes and Zhou 1993). These contextual factors shape

“divergent modes of incorporation [that are] accompanied by changes in the character and salience of ethnicity” and ethnic self-identification (Rumbaut 1997: 948).

As discussed above, the linear path has traditionally been associated with early twentieth century European immigrants for whom ethnic identity grew progressively weaker over time (Gans 1979). Children of immigrants today who are racially classified as white follow a similar path of cultural assimilation into mainstream white America. However, this option is not available to Asians, Hispanics, Africans and Afro-Caribbeans who are vulnerable to racial discrimination as ethnic minority groups in the United States. Some of these ethnic groups “selectively” assimilate into American society, while continuing to identify primarily with their ethnic origins into the second generation. Among second generation youth, this selective assimilation process is consistent with the formation of a diasporic hybrid identity. Recall that the diasporic hybrid identity recognizes that two or more cultures can become united within a single individual. Further because “a member’s adherence to a diasporic community is demonstrated by an acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history and a sense of co-ethnicity with others of a similar background,” the diasporic hybrid identity transcends space and time (Brettell 2003). So, it allows for an identity that can emerge, reside and survive outside of the immigrant homeland. Today, ethnic enclaves nourish and sustain a diasporic consciousness among second generation youth, and serve as spaces where immigrant and American cultures morph into hybrid ethnic identities.

In the United States, reactive identities tend to boomerang depending on a number of social, economic and political factors. They are particularly responsive to direct experiences with racial discrimination, and to the hostility and marginalization that

ethnic minority groups often face within American society. As a result of these experiences, some groups are likely to make a conscious effort to maintain a strong attachment to their ethnic origins and solidarity with co-ethnics as a way of defending themselves from the threat of the larger society. This reactive ethnic identity formation process is associated most with inner city Black and Hispanic youth. For example, protests against proposition 187 to deny illegal immigrants healthcare, education and other social services in California influenced a rise in group consciousness among Hispanic youth during the mid-1990s (Portes and Zhou 1993). However, because these identities are perceived as situational responses to social events inside the United States, immigration scholars tend to treat them as more American, and therefore less authentically ethnic compared to those who selectively assimilate into American culture.

#### *Criticism, Gaps and Future Directions*

Contemporary studies of ethnic identity formation among second-generation children of immigrants use ethnic labels to track their cultural assimilation into different segments of American society. For instance, in their study of second generation immigrant children in Florida and California, Portes and Rumbaut's (2001) survey uncovered four ethnic labels used by second generation youth. They determined that children of immigrants who identify based on the national origins of parents have the strongest attachment to their ethnic origins followed by those who use hyphenated ethnic labels. Next on this continuum are those who use unhyphenated American national origin labels or panethnic minority labels such as Black, Hispanic or Asian. The last two panethnic labels are assumed to signify estrangement from the immigrant experience and awareness of their status as marginalized minority group members. In both classic and

contemporary immigration literatures, the hyphenated ethnic label is used to identify individuals whose identities represent a fusion of American and immigrant cultural influences.

Immigration scholars also use hyphenated ethnic labels to signify movement away from an immigrant ethnic identity, and so they perceive the blending of two cultures as a transitory stage towards Americanization, not the creation of something new. Here, the distinction between cultural assimilation and cultural hybridization is critical. According to Oyserman, Sakamoto, and Lauffer (1998:1606) cultural assimilation, a primary focus of study for immigration scholars in sociology, is distinct from cultural hybridization:

Hybridization involves the melding of cultural lenses or frames such that values and goals that were focused on one context are transposed to a new context. Hybridization has the potential of allowing individuals to express cultural values, even when the original contexts no longer exist, and also may create a bond or connection between individuals and their new contexts by allowing a socially approved forum to express their identities.

Individuals who selectively assimilate into American society might certainly fit this definition of hybridity. However, sociologists are more focused on the fact that such an individual will eventually become “fully” assimilated into American culture. As a result sociologists have theorized about the stages that take immigrants from being ethnic to being Americans, but have paid less attention to how immigrant and American cultures interact to form new identities.

The creation of new identities has a longer history in other related disciplines, where cultural formation is a primary or significant focus of inquiry (Itzigsohn 2000). For example, borrowing from Caribbean studies, anthropologist Nancy Foner (1997) conceptualizes the formation of new (hybrid) identities among Jamaican immigrants as a “creolization” process such that “Jamaican immigrants do not become exactly like

Americans, Black or white. Nor are they any longer just like Jamaicans in the home society. [Instead] new meanings, ideologies, and patterns of behavior develop among them in response to conditions and circumstances they encounter here [in the United States] (p:967). We agree with Dewind and Kasinitz who suggest in the concluding section of the special volume in which this article appears, that creolization might be a more useful alternative to the segmented assimilation perspective in accounting for “the complexities of interaction between immigrant and American cultures and behaviors (1997:1103).

The research on ethnic identity formation among second generation Black immigrant youth is one example of how the immigration literature could benefit from a more textured understanding of hybridity in analyses of ethnic identity formation. In her seminal work on West Indian immigrants and their children, Waters (2001) categorizes her sample into three categories, the immigrant identified, the ethnic identified and the American identified. She suggests that her middle class sample were more likely to identify “ethnically” based on the nationality of their parents, but that working class youth were more likely to identify “racially” with African Americans.

The categorization of West Indian youth into such discrete categories has been challenged by the research of other scholars whose work focuses on the identities of second generation West Indian youth. While these scholars address this complexity in different ways, they tend to describe the identities of West Indian youth as “bicultural” as a way of indicating that they are equally competent in the ethnic world of their families and the American world of their peers (Zepir 2001; Butterfield 2001). Most recently, Butterfield has admonished scholars for treating the identities of West Indian youth as a

dichotomous choice between two categories. Specifically, she contends that scholars “must stop framing the question as a matter of second generation West Indians choosing between racial and ethnic identities... [because] that formulation mistakenly implies that the choice is dichotomous— [In fact, she suggests that] choosing to emphasize one identity does not negate the other” (2004:306).

Although the social categories used by immigration scholars are limited in the capturing some aspects of ethnic identity formation among children of immigrants, recently, sociologists have begun to engage with critical feminist scholarship, particularly Chicana Studies, that describe newer versions of Park’s marginal identity. Anzaldúa’s (1987) “border” or “threshold” identities are constructed of *mestizaje* consciousnesses in which multiple strands of consciousness and identity are negotiated and practiced. The

*mestizaje* consciousness is a consciousness of the borderlands, a consciousness born of the historical collusion of Anglo and Mexican cultures and frames of reference. It is a plural consciousness in that it requires understanding multiple, often opposing ideas and knowledges and negotiating these knowledges (Mohanty 1991:34-5).

This consciousness is a “fluid, transformational thinking process that breaks down the rigid boundaries between apparently separate categories of meaning” (Keating 1996: 7) but at the same time “is plagued by psychic restlessness” from internal strife, insecurity and indecisiveness (Anzaldúa 1987: 78). This re-invigoration of Park’s concept of a marginal identity, along with the criticisms of immigration scholars above, all point to new possibilities for how hybridity might be further developed within contemporary immigration theory.



It isn't that sociologists do not recognize that ethnic identity is a complex and multi-dimensional concept. In fact, in addition to ethnic labels, Portes and Rumbaut's (2001) study of second generation racial and ethnic identities also focuses on how salient these identities are to children of immigrants and the extent to which these identities change over time and across varied social contexts. But there is good reason why sociologists continue to use hyphenated ethnic labels to convey a hybrid ethnic identity and have focused less explicit attention to how new identities are formed. From its point of origin, classic studies on immigrant adaptation used ethnic labels to measure and predict social and economic integration into American society, and this practice has continued to the present day. For instance, ethnic labels are now consistently associated with variation in academic outcomes among children of immigrants and this helps sociologists to predict how well these young people will do in the labor market. So while a focus on "cultural hybridization" or "creolization" would be useful to sociological discourses on ethnic identity formation, a focus on consciousness limits their usefulness in predicting the academic and economic outcomes that are at the core of classic and contemporary literatures on immigrant adaptation.

### **Diasporic Links between Historical and Contemporary Immigrants**

Central to these accounts of identity construction among new and earlier immigrants is the role of the diaspora. This role may be minimal, as in the case with the descendants of European immigrants who selectively incorporated elements of their ancestral homeland into their identity without it critically impacting their daily life. In the case of refugees, the experience of having been displaced makes it all the more important

for them to want to remain connected to their homelands by incorporating cultural practices into their daily lives while living elsewhere. Over time it is likely that this diasporic consciousness will increase or decrease in salience depending on the situation or as a result of larger social, political, or historical forces.

The diasporized hybrid identity makes explicit the role of border crossings *and* the potential or prohibition of return due to larger global processes and conflicts. Similarly, the reason for leaving the homeland, whether for political, economic, familial or a combination of all three reasons that often result from such events as famine, war, or industrialization, are key to this identity. Therefore, the diasporized hybrid must take into account not only the old and new cultures in which the group previously and currently resides but the entire transnational experience of movement and the social, political and economic reasons behind this migration. The diasporic experience, then, represents a bridge between multiple locations that will always exist, even if it is never again crossed. Though Jewish identities are deeply tied to multiple diasporic experiences, many American Jews will never visit Israel and even fewer will return to live there. Nor will many Jews from other nations, unless they experience persecution, as in the case of Russian Jews who fled to Israel during the 1970s and 80s. On the other hand, a variety of contemporary immigrant groups to The United States, such as those from South American and Asian nations, retain sustained ties to people, cultures and villages from which they emigrated with frequent return trips home.

However, the diasporized hybrid identity does not have to center on a particular shared homeland or host location. Many immigrants to The United States, regardless of where they initiated, identified with their home villages and not with a nation state, as in

the case of Italians identifying as Sicilian, Jews identifying from Bialystok or Mexicans identifying with Juarez (Moya 2005; Soyer 1997; Vecoli 1964). Instead, this protonational aspect of the hybrid identity was created during and after relocation as a result of local, national and global developments, in conjunction with the United States' tendency to categorize immigrants by nation, rather than the village from which they came. Only after living in their new nation, did they become Italian, Jewish, and Mexican Americans. Instead, a shared history of displacement results in potentially global imagined communities. For example, Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* features a diasporized hybrid identity linking all British, American, and Caribbean Africans dispersed by the slave trade to propose similarities based on the diasporic experience itself but transcending specific national boundaries.

The simultaneous discomfort with the former homeland as a result of displacement and deep attachment, usually in conjunction with a longing for return, results in a complicated interplay of consciousnesses which are then fused with developing norms and cultures rooted in the cultures and customs of the host nation and local community. For example, Somalian refugees in Minnesota (Darboe 2003) remain attached to their former homelands even as they have been exiled for political reasons (sometimes under threat of death). They do this, in part, to maintain cultural traditions, but also to signal to local residents that they are not American Blacks. This collective memory of cultural trauma (Alexander 2003) in their former homeland in conjunction with experiences of potential discrimination in America therefore feature prominently in the construction of diasporized hybrid identities.

Immigrant groups who maintain diasporized hybrid identities can never be fully identificationally assimilated with their new national communities because of cultural allegiances to other nations and cultures. Identities and cultures relating to the former homeland, as well as the experiences that precipitated the transnational movement, persist perennially and across generations. The salience of this persistence is largely dependent upon the reception from (i.e. whether groups are welcomed and readily incorporated or subject to racism, discrimination and isolation) and similarities to cultures in the host country. As a result, decisions made and actions undertaken with regard to citizenship are never holistically rooted in their current situation or place of residence. Rather, they are reflective of diasporic experiences, consciousness, and cultures.

These experiences, whether personal or in the repositories of a group's collective memory and consciousnesses, result in different worldviews and lived experiences than members of the dominant group in the new host nation. For example, while many Jews have achieved tremendous social and economic assimilation, the persistence of a diasporized hybrid identity finds adherents always viewing the world through the lens of an outsider, real or imagined, and is critically influenced by the particular residential location and concentration of group members.

The diasporic aspect of the diasporized hybrid identity is therefore a central feature of both historical and contemporary immigrants. The diasporic hybrid identity is formed in part, but is certainly not limited to the actual experiences of planning the migration, the reason for leaving the country of origin, the journey itself and finally, the context of reception in the host society. Taking into account the variety of ways in which these different aspects affect contemporary and historical immigrants' experiences and

identities will allow researchers to more accurately compare and contextualize similarities and differences between groups arriving from and departing to a wide variety of locations, which will become increasingly important as transnational migration proceeds in an increasingly global and transitory world.

## **Conclusion**

From the perspective of American society today, there are significant differences between the experiences of nineteenth and twentieth century European immigrants and today's Asian, Hispanic and African descended ethnic groups. It is difficult, for example, to foresee a time when Black immigrants will be fully accepted within the mainstream of American society as did the Irish, Italians and Jews. For African Americans have had a long history of knocking at the door of opportunity, and have yet to gain America's full embrace. Historically, the color line has been pushed, prodded and pummeled against by a number of ethnic minority groups, people of African descent in particular, but never severely damaged nor destroyed. Nonetheless, the "in between" status of European immigrants is often ignored when comparing their experiences of adapting to American society in comparison to today's racial and ethnic minority groups. Accordingly, there is a propensity to study these groups in isolation, using different theoretical perspectives. As a result, the historical continuities in their experiences become invisible or seem irrelevant.

Theoretical discussions of hybrid ethnic identities represent an area of convergence between the European experience of adapting to American society and that of more racially and ethnically diverse population streams in the post-1965 immigration era. First, discrimination and social exclusion fostered and maintained hybrid ethnic

identities among European immigrants, similar to the reactive ethnic identities produced among racial and ethnic minorities of today. Similarly, separation from the mainstream, whether it occurred in isolated rural communities, segregated urban ghettos or today's ethnic enclaves, fuels the development of hybrid identities. In the communities that are formed, sometimes voluntarily and other times not, the sustained day to day interactions that take place primarily with co-ethnics reinforce a common culture and identity.

Ethnic groups who are marginalized from the mainstream of American culture are more likely to develop and maintain hybrid ethnic identities because this kind of exclusion reinforces the fact that they are different from majority group members. Due to the hostility that they face, these groups are likely to actively differentiate themselves from majority group members. Experiences with discrimination may also heighten a pre-existing attachment to an immigrant group's country of origin, strengthening and promoting a diasporic consciousness among first and later generation children of immigrants. Clearly, hybridity has deep roots in the sociological literature due to its utility for understanding the similarities in how different racial and ethnic minorities groups have identified with their ethnic origins over time. Yet it has been underutilized within the contemporary immigration literature. In the future, scholars might consider further incorporating existing concepts and knowledge from within other subfields within sociology (such as the literature on feminism) or from other disciplinary perspectives such as anthropology or cultural studies.

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