

Roger Waldinger “When the Melting Pot Boils Over: The Irish, Jews, Blacks, and Koreans of New York”

Main Point: Waldinger writes that it may be better to think of ethnic progress in American as a collective search for mobility in which successive waves of immigrants ensure a continuous competitive conflict over resources. He examines the movement of ethnic groups, specifically the Irish, Jews, African Americans, and Koreans, throughout a two-hundred year period in which each group is associated with the four successive waves of migration occurring in New York. There is a classic sociology model explaining ethnic mobility, however more recent sociologists have modified this because one of the key points was inaccurate.

Central Issues and Concepts

The classic sociology model claiming immigrant-ethnic groups start at the bottom and gradually move up; their mobility takes place through individual advancement, not group collective action. As immigrant-ethnic groups mobilize upwards, they lose their distinctive social structure and begin becoming like members of the core group and then become part of the core group by moving into the same neighborhoods, making friendship with members, and through marriage. This model is wrong about the individualistic assumption about advancement.

Groups move up by specializing and dominating in a particular economic branch and as long as the specialization goes unchallenged.

What distinguishes Koreans from the Irish, Jews, and Black are community resources. These other groups are less likely to be embedded in ethnic or family ties. Koreans, unlike the other groups, have also been able to work alongside with the other groups on a few occasions.

Ethnicity continues to be important because it engenders feelings for one's own kind, animosities towards outsiders, and it is also the mechanism in which groups of categorically different workers have been sorted into an identifiably distinct set of jobs.

Two Key Quotes

“Conflict, often of the fiercest kind, runs like a red thread through the history of American ethnic groups.” (Page 251)

“Now, as in the past, distinctive roles in the ethnic division of labor impart a sense of 'we-ness' and group interest – ensuring the persistence of ethnic fragmentation and conflict.” (Page 259)

Two Questions:

If there was so much conflict and antagonism between these four groups, it would seem that Koreans would not be the only ones to use community resources and help one another with staff, loans, information, contacts, and etc., yet this is the case according to the text. Why is that?

The text lists discrimination as a factor affecting the mobility of Blacks, however did the Jews and Koreans not encounter discriminatory practices as well? And if so was discrimination not

emphasized as a factor for their group because it was not to the extent of the Blacks'?