

## Stephen Steinberg “The Melting Pot and the Color Line”

**Main Point:** Steinberg in this chapter focuses on the idea of America as the stereotypical “melting pot” of ethnicities. Though there are critics of this theory that say ethnic groups are alive and well in our American ethnic enclaves, many sociologists agree that those of European ancestry or those we would consider “white” are actually products of the “melting pot.”

### Central Issues and Concepts:

→ America as the melting pot: the idea that former ethnic identities are lost through assimilation in America

- Measure assimilation by rates of intermarriage across ethnic lines and how many generations it took for immigrant families to lose their native languages
  - Studies have shown that 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants keeps language, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation bilingual, and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation speaks English only.

→ Ethnic enclave as a buffer for immigrants in between American society and former culture. Helped prepare 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants for mainstream America.

→ 1<sup>st</sup> wave of European Immigrants since the 1950's: Eastern and Southern Europeans (Italians, Poles, Russian Jews, Ukrainians, Hungarians)

- The Melting Pot only applies to whites: Immigrants of European descent have through assimilation become “white” Americans instead of Italian-American, Russian-American, etc.

→ 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of Asian, Latino, Caribbean immigrants: cannot follow assimilation pattern of whites because race is overt.

→ African Americans: slaves were brought to this country, they did not choose to come.

America as a melting pot does not apply to blacks. Evidenced by racially segregated neighborhoods (“white flight” as a result of blacks moving into white suburbs), low rates of interracial marriage.

- Non-black immigrants have enclaves and social groups rooted in the culture of their home country but black culture evolved only out of the common experience of black people in America which historically was marked with racism and prejudice

### Key Quotes:

“First generation immigrants, who are most authentically steeped in ethnic culture, tend to throw it away, often with both hands, as they pursue the opportunities that led them to come to America in the first place. Decades later, their largely assimilated children engage in desperate but usually futile, efforts to recover the very culture that their parents relinquished. As the children of immigrants entered into the ranks of social science, they brought this same nostalgia to their analysis of ethnic trends.”

### Two Questions:

Question 1: With regards to the assimilated children described above what theory from our class discussions does this bring to mind?

“the common ‘whiteness’ of the Irish, Italians, Poles, Jews, and other groups destined them to ‘melt,’ even though they were once regarded as distinct races whose cultural and genetic differences rendered them unassimilable.”

Question 2: Would you agree with the statement that blacks have been excluded from the American “melting pot?”