

Lecture 6

Assimilationist Assumption:

- 1.) Rise of the Assimilationist Model
- 2.) Collapse of Assimilationism
- 3.) The Search for Alternatives
- 4.) Split Response to Assimilation

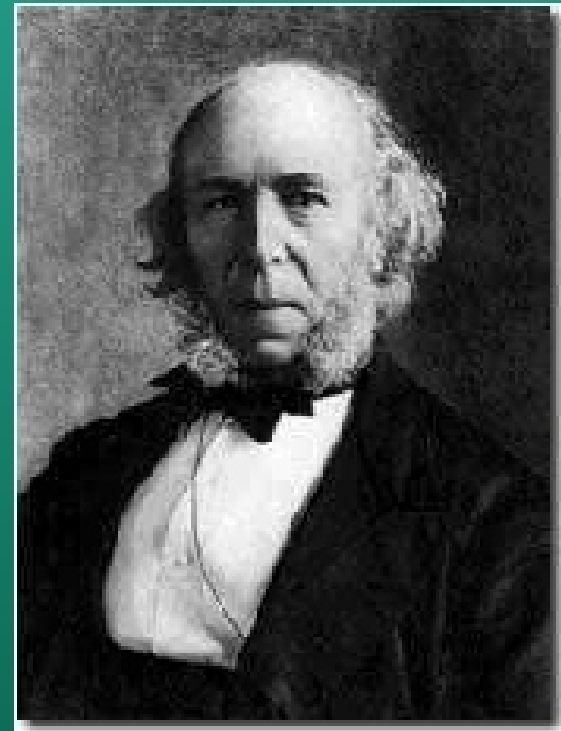
1.) The Rise of Assimilationism

History of Thought

- Social science thinking in the late 1800s concentrated on biological theories.
- It was thought that much of human behavior was caused by deep rooted biological processes. Ethnic groups thought to be biologically distinct.
- Herbert Spencer, unlike Charles Darwin, believed that human evolution was a unilineal process of increasing complexity—Some groups “naturally” more advanced than others.

Spencer and Social Darwinism

- Spencer, not Darwin, coined the phrase "survival of the fittest." To Spencer, human society should ideally be modelled upon "Nature." As such, humans should never intentionally interfere with the processes of "Nature" which select only the fittest human beings for survival into the next generation.
- Handouts to the poor, state schooling, and systematized health care were considered dangerous by Spencer; they could only interfere with "Nature" by helping weak humans survive, thereby damaging the "purity" of the rest of the human race.

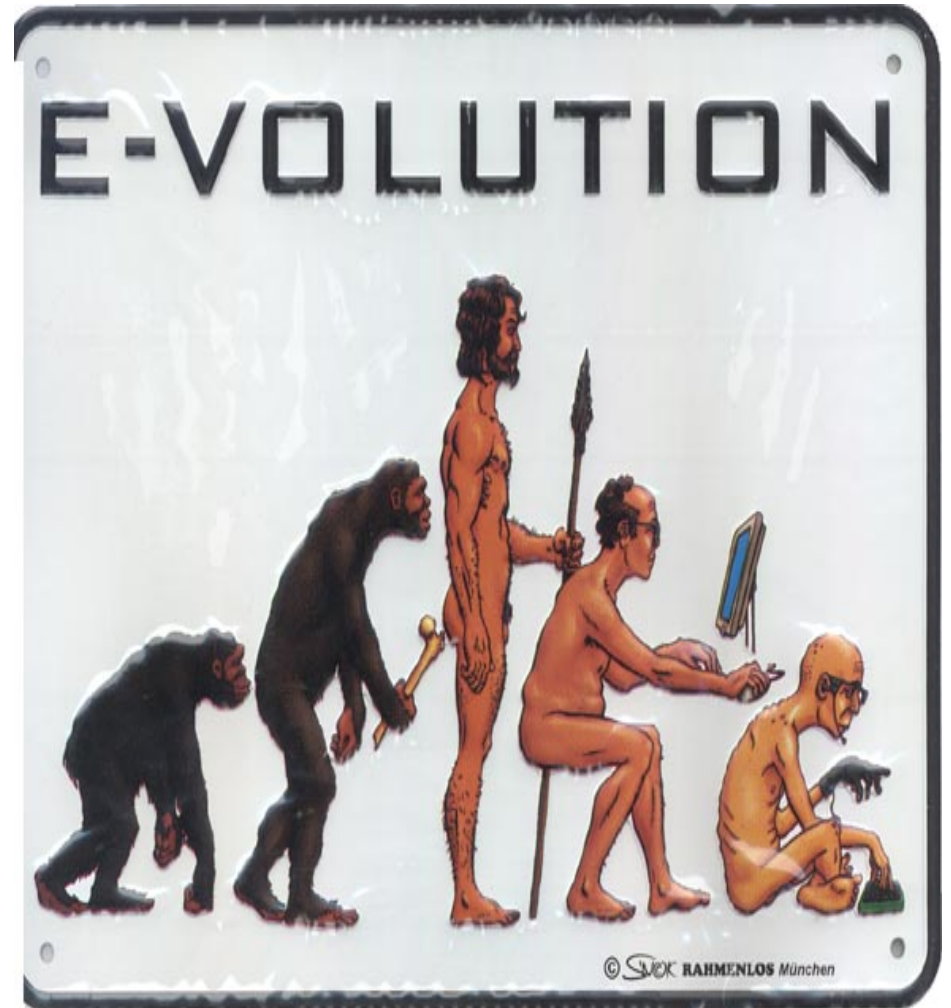


Herbert Spencer
(1820-1903), English
philosopher

Herbert Spencer

The sociological concept of progress was elevated by Spencer. The evolution of society involves increasing complexity of social structure and associate culture symbols, and this complexity increases the capacity of the human species to adapt and survive in its environment.

(Turner 1998:81)



1900s: Culture is important!!



Franz Boas: culture, not biology, is what makes people what they are and explains differences between groups

Margaret Mead: developed and popularized these ideas



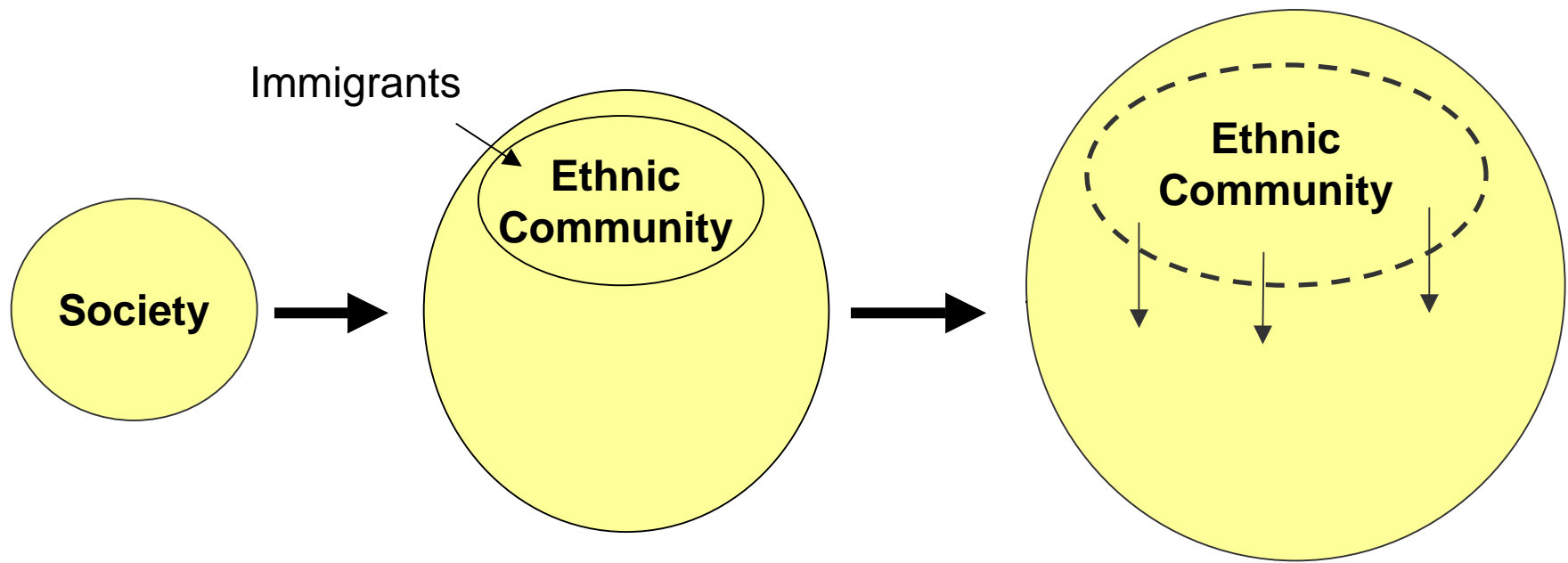
Robert Park and Urban Sociology

- Chicago school sociologists interested in immigration and what happens to immigrant populations
- Race relations cycle: contact, competition and conflict, accommodation, and *assimilation*.



Assimilation

- Assimilation is a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life.
- In so far as assimilation denotes this sharing of tradition, this intimate participation in common experiences, assimilation is central in the historical and cultural processes.



Time

Cultural Assimilation

example: Anglo American pattern:

- English spoken; foreigners expected to use it
- Protestant religious ideas were dominant; non-Protestant practices discouraged
- system of law and government was imported from England
- system of business practices
- some foods, place names, words, etc. therefore culture of Anglo Americans no longer identical to that of English...but VERY similar

An American Ethnicity?

- WASP ethnic group
 - White Anglo-Saxon (British) Protestants
 - 4 out of 5 colonialists were WASPs
 - End of 17th century, other groups assimilated
 - Features:
 - English language (education, politics, religion)
 - Anglo-conformity (others change, we don't)
 - Economic, legal, political frameworks
 - Market-oriented capitalism
 - Work ethic



Ethnic Groups in the U.S.

- German-Americans
 - Influx in 17th century (7 million)
 - Skilled and educated
 - Attempted to retain culture
 - During WWI and WWII, largely assimilated
- Irish-Americans
 - Influx in 19th century
 - Unskilled and uneducated
 - Object of the Know-Nothing party
- Italian-Americans
 - *Padrone* and chain-migration systems in late 19th century
- Polish-Americans
 - Anglo-Saxon racism affected S and E European peoples

Conclusions from Early Studies

- 1.) Ethnicity is a cultural phenomenon
- 2.) Ethnicity, not rooted in biology, was dynamic
- 3.) Assimilation: Ethnicity would generally disappear in the “great melting pot”

2.) Collapse of Assimilationism

- Modernity *should* make original ethnic identities—tribal, linguistic, regional ... all the 'primordial' identities—weaker.
- This did not happen!
- Two world developments showed this: 1.) postindependence of “new nations” and the 2.) “retribalizing” of modern nations

Multiculturalism in the U.S.

- Cultural Pluralism today
 - Salad Bowl or Stir Fry, not Melting Pot
- Demography
 - Past 40 years, growth of populations of non-European ancestry
 - Decline in birth rate of white Europeans, higher birth rates of ethnic minorities
- Multiculturalism = changes in education, history, model of America
- Applied multiculturalism in schools, businesses, etc.

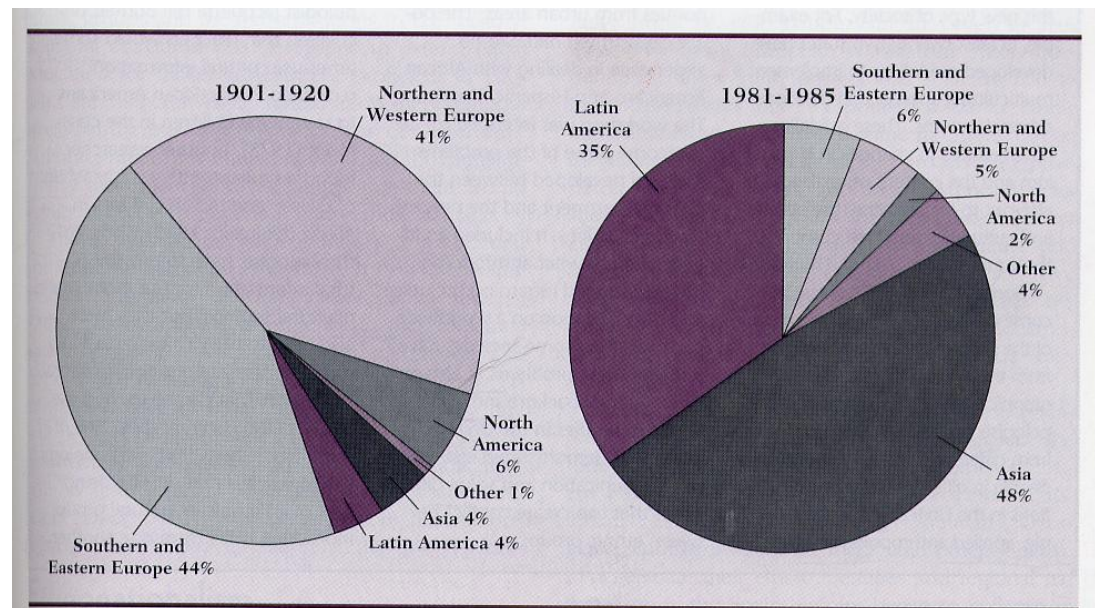
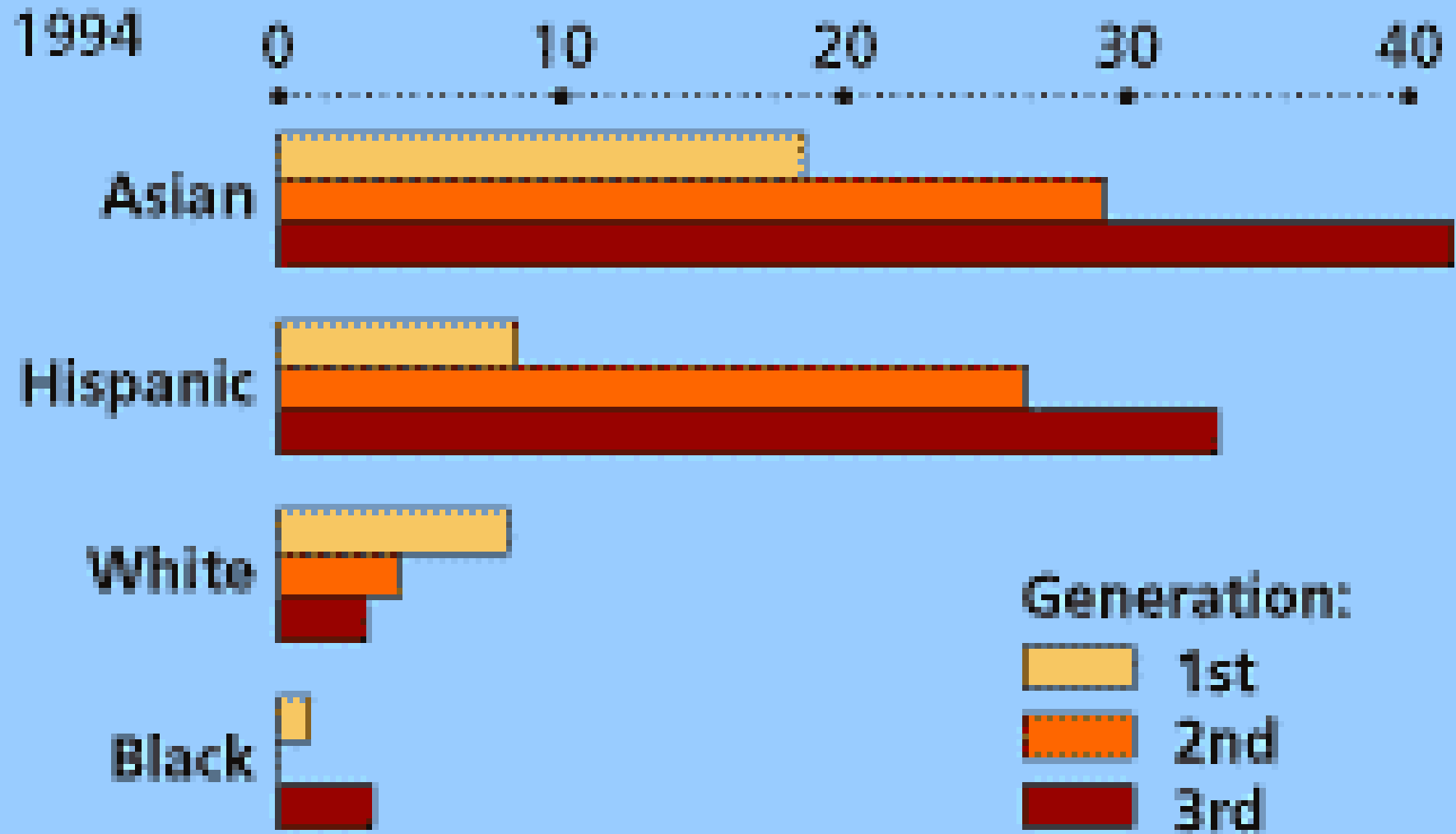


FIGURE 16.1 Legal immigrants admitted to the U.S. by region of birth.

Marrying out

Intermarried women as % of married women



Source: Current Population Survey

3.) The Search for Alternatives

- Three main forces have emerged to explain ethnicity—material interests, culture, and cognitive schema.

Material Interests

- Utilitarian model: people perceive political or economic payoffs through organization and cooperation along ethnic terms
- Examples: Political power in Rwanda and genocide, ethnic loyalty and business

Cultural Practice

- Ethnicity is not a product of material interests, but products of the distinctive ways in which people live, act, speak, eat, worship, etc.
- Example: Italians are bonded by food, language, love of particular sports, and Catholicism

Cognitive Schemes

- Ethnicity is a set of mental constructs concerning how people perceive themselves and their relationships to others.
- Example: I am White, but I see myself as Latina because of my 10 years of living in Puerto Rico.

4.) Split Response to Assimilation

- Why does ethnicity persist?
 - 1.) Primordialism: ethnicity is a system of social bonds that resists being derailed by outside forces (**Fixed** model, ethnicity persists because of its “heart”)
 - 2.) Circumstantialism, instrumentalism: ethnicity is affected by the sociocultural circumstances (**Fluid** model, ethnicity persists because of its malleability to be useful for many purposes.)