2.3: Patterns of Intergroup Relations

Pattern of Intergroup Relations

Figure 2.3.1 represents a continuum of intergroup relations and it will be utilized throughout this book as a reference in order to examine and analyze the experiences of several racial and ethnic groups. The continuum is meant to represent a wide spectrum of consequences that may result from intergroup contact and disparities in power. Ethnic and racial groups come into contact through different social processes, such as migration (both voluntary and involuntary), conquest, and expansion of territory. The left side of the continuum represents the extreme rejection of the minority (subordinate) group that may result in inhumane consequences such as genocide or expulsion. Moving further along the spectrum, race and ethnic intergroup relations are mildly less inhumane, resulting in internal colonialism and segregation (de jure as well as de facto segregation). In the middle of the spectrum, separatism, a more favorable outcome arises, particularly for a marginalized group that may decide to distance itself from the dominant group through autonomy and self-determination. Moving towards a more tolerable intergroup outcome, fusion or amalgamation appears on the continuum, the result of interracial relationships and the presence of biracial and multiracial people. Next, assimilation appears as another favorable intergroup consequence; however, it can also be argued that assimilation serves to deny one's ethnic identity, which should also be understood as a troubling consequence. The most tolerant intergroup consequence of race-ethnic relations is pluralism or multiculturalism. Taken to its logical conclusion, in addition to the acceptance and embracing of cultural and ethnic diversity, this last stage would also include a more equal distribution of power in society which would eventually lead to a society without a dominant group.
Genocide

**Genocide** is the deliberate annihilation of a targeted (usually subordinate) group, and is the most toxic intergroup relationship. Historically, we can see that genocide has included both the intent to exterminate a group and the function of exterminating a group, intentional or not.

Possibly the most well-known case of genocide is Hitler’s attempt to exterminate the Jewish people in the first part of the twentieth century. Also known as the Holocaust, the explicit goal of Hitler’s “Final Solution” was the eradication of European Jewry, as well as the destruction of other minority groups such as Catholics, people with disabilities, and homosexuals. With forced emigration, concentration camps, and mass executions in gas chambers, Hitler’s Nazi regime was responsible for the deaths of 12 million people, 6 million of whom were Jewish. Hitler’s intent was clear, and the high Jewish death toll certainly indicates that Hitler and his regime committed genocide. But how do we understand genocide that is not so overt and deliberate?

The treatment of aboriginal Australians is also an example of genocide committed against indigenous people. Historical accounts suggest that between 1824 and 1908, white settlers killed more than 10,000 native aborigines in Tasmania and Australia (Tatz, 2006). Another example is the European colonization of North America. Some historians estimate that Native American populations dwindled from approximately 12 million people in the year 1500 to barely 237,000 by the year 1900 (Lewy, 2004). European settlers coerced American Indians off their own lands, often causing thousands of deaths in forced removals, such as occurred in the Cherokee or Potawatomi Trail of Tears. Settlers also enslaved Native Americans and forced them to give up their religious and cultural practices. But the major cause of Native American death was neither slavery nor war nor forced removal: it was the introduction of European diseases and Indians’ lack of immunity to them. Smallpox, diphtheria, and measles flourished among indigenous American tribes who had no exposure to the diseases and no ability to fight them. Quite simply, these diseases decimated the tribes. How planned this genocide was remains a topic of contention. Some argue that the spread of disease was an unintended effect of conquest, while others believe it was intentional citing rumors of smallpox-infected blankets being distributed as “gifts” to tribes.

Genocide is not just a historical concept; it is practiced today. Recently, ethnic and geographic conflicts in the Darfur region of Sudan have led to hundreds of thousands of deaths. As part of an ongoing land conflict, the Sudanese government and their state-sponsored Janjaweed militia have led a campaign of killing, forced displacement, and
systematic rape of Darfuri people. Although a treaty was signed in 2011, the peace is fragile.

---

### Population Transfer or Expulsion

**Expulsion** refers to a subordinate group being forced, by a dominant group, to leave a certain area or country. As seen in the examples of the Trail of Tears and the Holocaust, expulsion can be a factor in genocide. However, it can also stand on its own as a destructive group interaction. Expulsion has often occurred historically with an ethnic or racial basis. In the United States, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 in 1942, after the Japanese government’s attack on Pearl Harbor. The Order authorized the establishment of internment camps for anyone with as little as one-eighth Japanese ancestry (i.e., one great-grandparent who was Japanese). Over 120,000 legal Japanese residents and Japanese U.S. citizens, many of them children, were held in these camps for up to four years, despite the fact that there was never any evidence of collusion or espionage. (In fact, many Japanese Americans continued to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States by serving in the U.S. military during the War.) In the 1990s, the U.S. executive branch issued a formal apology for this expulsion; reparation efforts continue today.

Similarly, during the Great Depression of the 1930s, there was an emergence of anti-Mexican sentiment as white Americans began to lose their employment and homes. As with other examples of xenophobia and nativism, the growing resentment led to changes in official immigration policies. According to Aguirre and Turne (2007), a repatriation movement was initiated and over half a million people of Mexican origin (including both migrants and U.S.-born) were repatriated to Mexico between 1929 and 1935.

### Internal Colonialism

**Internal colonialism** refers to manner in which a superordinate (or majority) group exploits a subordinate (or minority) group for its economic advantage. Typically the superordinate group controls and manipulates important social institutions to suppress subordinate groups and deny them full access to societal benefits. The United States system of slavery is an extreme example of internal colonialism. Other examples include the South African system of apartheid and the abusive use of immigrant labor in the United States, such as the Bracero Program, which was a guest worker program that was in place from 1942-1964. The program, officially referred to as the Mexican Farm Labor Program, was initiated through an executive order in 1942 and was intended to bring in Mexican workers to fill in expected labor shortages in the agricultural sector. Although there were protections and limits written into the bi-lateral agreement, employers largely ignored the rules and Mexican laborers typically worked under harsh conditions, and many were not paid prevailing wages. (Gutierrez & Almaguer, 2016)

Internal colonialism is typically accompanied by segregation that is defined as the physical separation of two groups, particularly in residence, but also in workplace and social functions. Segregation allows the superordinate group to maintain social distance from the minority and yet economically exploit their labor as agricultural workers, cooks, janitors, nannies, factory workers, etc.
Segregation: De facto and De jure

Segregation refers to the physical separation of two groups, particularly in residence, but also in workplace and social functions. It is important to distinguish between de jure segregation (segregation that is enforced by law) and de facto segregation (segregation that occurs without laws but because of other factors). A stark example of de jure segregation is the apartheid movement of South Africa, which existed from 1948 to 1994. Under apartheid, black South Africans were stripped of their civil rights and forcibly relocated to areas that segregated them physically from their white compatriots. Only after decades of degradation, violent uprisings, and international advocacy was apartheid finally abolished.

De jure segregation occurred in the United States for many years after the Civil War. During this time, many former Confederate states passed Jim Crow laws that required segregated facilities for Blacks and whites. These laws were codified in 1896’s landmark Supreme Court case Plessy v. Ferguson, which stated that “separate but equal” facilities were constitutional. For the next five decades, Blacks were subjected to legalized discrimination, forced to live, work, and go to school in separate—but unequal—facilities. It wasn’t until 1954 and the Brown v. Board of Education case that the Supreme Court declared that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal,” thus ending de jure segregation in the United States.
De facto segregation, however, cannot be abolished by any court mandate. Segregation is still alive and well in the United States, with different racial or ethnic groups often segregated by neighborhood, borough, or parish. Sociologists use segregation indices to measure racial segregation of different races in different areas. The indices employ a scale from zero to 100, where zero is the most integrated and 100 is the least. In the New York metropolitan area, for instance, the Black-white segregation index was seventy-nine for the years 2005–2009. This means that 79 percent of either Blacks or whites would have to move in order for each neighborhood to have the same racial balance as the whole metro region (Population Studies Center, 2010).
Assimilation describes the process by which a minority individual or group gives up its own identity by taking on the characteristics of the dominant culture. In the United States, which has a history of welcoming and absorbing immigrants from different lands, assimilation has been a function of immigration. Early sociologists from the Chicago School theorized that over time, ethnic groups would assimilate into the mainstream culture and institutions of the larger society. For example, Robert Park proposed a 3-stage process of assimilation. In the first competitive phase, there may be tension between the new ethnic group and the larger, more established ethnic groups as they compete over resources, such as housing, jobs, and education. In the second accommodation phase, the ethnic groups move toward a more institutionalized, stable intergroup relationship, which could include forms of institutional discrimination such as segregation. In the final assimilation phase, there is the merging or fusion of two or more ethnic groups into a single, shared set of traditions, sentiments, memories and attitudes.

Milton Gordon contributed to this perspective by adding other types of assimilation. For instance, he argued that there are different types of assimilation, such as cultural, structural, and marital. Cultural assimilation occurs when the new ethnic group adopts the values, beliefs, practices, language, etc. of the dominant group. Structural assimilation occurs when members of the new ethnic group are incorporated and integrated into the primary groups of the dominant culture. For this reason, Gordon hypothesized that structural assimilation is more difficult to attain because it would require the dominant group to accept and absorb members of the new ethnic group into their most personal spaces and groups. Other types of assimilation would include marital (the extent of intermarriage across ethnic groups), identification (the extent to which members identify themselves with their ethnic group), and civic (the extent to which individuals are in agreement with civic values and participate in politics).

Another critique of the assimilation model is the historical emphasis (in both theory and policy) on Anglo-conformity. This assimilation model promoted the subordination of ethnic and immigrant cultural values to Anglo-American values, practices, holidays, and the exclusive use of the English language. This model also influenced important legislation such as the Immigration National Origins Act of 1924 (also called the Johnson-Reed Act), which favored European immigration at the expense of non-European countries and specifically excluded Asian countries by denying them a...
quota. Additionally, the Anglo-conformity model was also integral to the establishment of government sponsored 
**boarding schools** for Native American children in the late 1800's (and some remained until the 1970s). The boarding 
schools were designed to immerse Native Americans into the Anglo-American culture by forcibly removing them from 
their families, forcing them to have European names, haircuts, and clothing, forbidding them to speak their indigenous 
languages, and replacing their indigenous names with more "acceptable" European names. To say the least, this was a 
traumatic experience for Native American youth and the boarding schools were plagued with abuse.

Most people in the United States have immigrant ancestors. In relatively recent history, between 1890 and 1920, the 
United States became home to around 24 million immigrants. In the decades since then, further waves of immigrants 
have come to these shores and have eventually been absorbed into U.S. culture, sometimes after facing extended 
periods of prejudice and discrimination. Assimilation may lead to the loss of the minority group’s cultural identity as they 
become absorbed into the dominant culture, but assimilation has minimal to no impact on the majority group’s cultural 
identity.

Assimilation is antithetical to the “salad bowl” created by **pluralism** (the idea that ethnic groups retain cultural and 
behavioral characteristics even as they assimilate); rather than maintaining their own cultural flavor, subordinate cultures 
give up their own traditions in order to conform to their new environment. Sociologists measure the degree to which 
immigrants have assimilated to a new culture with four benchmarks: socioeconomic status, spatial concentration, 
language assimilation, and intermarriage. When faced with racial and ethnic discrimination, it can be difficult for new 
immigrants to fully assimilate. Language assimilation, in particular, can be a formidable barrier, limiting employment and 
educational options and therefore constraining growth in socioeconomic status.

The path of assimilation and the integration of immigrants and children into American society may also depend on their 
point of entry into the stratified, unequal American society. Sociologists Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut proposed 
the theory of **segmented assimilation**, whereby immigrant ethnic groups will be absorbed into different segments of the 
stratified American society, depending on their socioeconomic status, social networks, other forms of capital (such as 
educational background). If immigrant ethnic groups assimilate into poorer, and perhaps racialized, communities then 
they (and their children) will have a more difficult time experiencing upward mobility and success in the United States.

---

**Amalgamation**

**Amalgamation** is the process by which a minority group and a majority group combine to form a new group. 
Amalgamation creates the classic “melting pot” analogy; unlike the “salad bowl,” in which each culture retains its 
individuality, the “melting pot” ideal sees the combination of cultures that results in a new culture entirely. A significant 
component of this process is interracial relationships and the increase of biracial and multiracial people in the United 
States. Since the 1967 Loving v. Virginia Supreme Court case, which overturned anti-miscegenation laws in the United 
States, interracial marriage rates have steadily increased. Today, nearly 20% of all newlyweds are married to someone 
of a different race or ethnicity, up from 3% in 1967. Overall, about 11 million (about 10%) of all married people have a 
spouse of a different race or ethnicity. What does this mean for the future of race and ethnic relations in the United 
States? According to the assimilationist perspective, the increase in intermarriage rates is a reflection of the continuous 
process of the incorporation and integration of racial and ethnic groups into mainstream American society. Theorists like 
Park and Gordon predicted that this would occur over time, albeit perhaps at a slower rate for racialized groups. 
However, other social scientists who draw from the conflict or critical race theory perspectives would argue that the 
increase in intermarriage rates and biracial people does not necessarily guarantee that it will bring racial equality to the
United States and that racism will persist in different forms.

Pluralism

Pluralism is represented by the ideal of the United States as a “salad bowl”: a great mixture of different cultures where each culture retains its own identity and yet adds to the flavor of the whole. True pluralism is characterized by mutual respect on the part of all cultures, both dominant and subordinate, creating a multicultural environment of acceptance. In reality, true pluralism is a difficult goal to reach. In the United States, the mutual respect required by pluralism is often missing, and the nation’s past pluralist model of a melting pot posits a society where cultural differences aren’t embraced as much as erased. In addition to embracing cultural and ethnic diversity, the pluralist stage will also include a more equal distribution of power in society including government roles and positions, professional occupations, administrative roles, and socioeconomic resources, across racial and ethnic groups. In other words, the dominant group, defined by having relatively more power, property, and prestige in society, would cease to exist.

Contributions and Attributions

• Ramos, Carlos. (Long Beach City College)
• Gutierrez, Erika. (Santiago Canyon College)
• OpenStax (CC BY 4.0)

Works Cited