

BOOK REVIEW FEATURE

A REVIEW OF THE ETHNIC GROUPS IN AMERICAN LIFE SERIES*

Mario Renzi
Hiram College

This essay is a review and analysis of seven textbooks published in the Prentice-Hall *Ethnic Groups in American Life* series under the editorship of Milton Gordon. This series is seen as a way to inform Americans, in an accessible but scholarly way, about the history, contributions, and current problems of racial and ethnic groups in this society. As noted by Gordon (Moore, 1976:xii) in the Foreword to most of these works, the series hopefully will enable Americans (1) to understand what it means to live in a multi-ethnic society and (2) to give direction to the future which can mitigate prejudice and discrimination, particularly in regard to two possible forms of the "new Pluralism"—the first which Gordon calls cultural pluralism and the second identified by the term structural pluralism. It is hoped by the editor that this can be accomplished by having the material for each of the ethnic groups organized within a similar conceptual framework (Gordon's Assimilation Model), thereby insuring the compatibility between the works necessary for an adequate comparative analysis of racial and ethnic groups in the U.S.

The review will be divided into two parts: first, a brief summary and evaluation of each of the specific texts; and second, some additional comments of Gordon's model of assimilation which forms, for most of the works, the theoretical framework for the information presented.

* I wish to thank Jeanne and Ralph Cebulla for their help with this essay.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS ON THE TEXTS

Irish Americans is a short but highly readable review of the history and current status of the Irish in the U.S. a group which, according to Fallows (pp. xi), has arrived at the threshold of full assimilation into American life. An examination of the Irish is important because it provides an opportunity to analyze the various stages of assimilation, to identify the various points of transition from one stage to another, and to assess the variables or factors that have led to this nearly complete assimilation.

The book opens with a look at the migrants' background in Ireland, the reasons for migration to the U.S., and the initial reception of the migrants in this country. She makes it clear that the initial reception of the Irish varied considerably from one destination to another, and that this variation in initial reception accounted, in part, for the speed and ease of future adjustment and assimilation. Four cities are reviewed in detail: New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Stamford, Connecticut. Among the factors in this analysis that emerge as influences on Irish assimilation were local Irish density, the role of the Irish in the local political system, the ecology of the cities, and the patterns of industrial and commercial expansion.

Fallows next turns to a description of the Irish neighborhood, with a subsequent focus on social mobility, the family, politics, and the Catholic Church. Throughout these chapters, Fallows combines historical detail and personal narrative to indicate the effect of these factors on Irish assimilation. The final chapter uses Gordon's concepts of cultural and structural assimilation and concludes that the Irish represent an instance of an ethnic group which is fully assimilated into American life along both the cultural and structural dimensions.

The book provides excellent data on the Irish as a case study. It is also concise and well written and makes skillful use of various sources of information. It is a first-rate example of a work which meets the objectives of the Ethnic Group series.

The Fitzpatrick work on *Puerto Ricans* is the oldest of the monographs reviewed. The central organizing concept of this work is ethnic identity, which refers to those points of reference

A Review of the Ethnic Groups

whereby persons define themselves in relation to the world and to other people, with an awareness by persons of who they are and where they belong (p. 7).

The first third of the work presents a historical and demographic profile of Puerto Ricans, along with a lengthy discussion of ethnic identity. The middle third describes the areas where problems of identity are most acute: solidarity in the community and family, the problem of identification based on race and color, and the role of religion in Puerto Rican identity. The final third examines the relationship between a viable Puerto Rican ethnic identity and the experiences of Puerto Ricans with the institutions of the host society, e.g., government, welfare, and education.

The final chapter presents Fitzpatrick's basic conclusions. Basically, he concludes along with Glazer and Moynihan (1963), that ethnic groups emerge as large-scale interest groups in conflict with other groups in a politically unified society. In addition, for Fitzpatrick, the greater the ethnic identity of minority group members, the more effective these groups will become in mobilizing resources in political and economic conflicts.

There are a number of problems with this text, but for me the most crucial is the causal connection Fitzpatrick makes between ethnic identity and the effectiveness of groups in political and economic conflict. What is missing is a clearer understanding that minority groups need not only a viable ethnic identity to be successful in political and economic conflict; they also need a sufficient stock of material resources to support the conflict. It, as in the case of the Puerto Ricans, the institutions of the host society systematically deprive the minority group members of these resources, the chances of success in political and economic conflict are negligible regardless of the viability of ethnic identity.

Kitano's work on the *Japanese-Americans* shares with Fallows a close and successful utilization of some of Gordon's central ideas about assimilation. Fallows describes an ethnic group which is both culturally and structurally assimilated; and Kitano provides an overview of a group which has successfully acculturated with minimal structural assimilation.

Mid-American Review of Sociology

The material in the first seven chapters is organized to demonstrate how each of the three generations (Issei, Nisee, and Sansei) of Japanese-Americans has adjusted and adapted to American society. Furthermore, within each of these generations Kitano makes clear how the factors of social class and residence affected the process of cultural assimilation. Chapter eight summarizes the current data in terms of a profile of Japanese-American cultural traits and values and points to those particular traits and values which the author feels have been the most important in the relatively successful adaptation to the institutions of the host society.

Chapters nine and ten are somewhat removed from the major thrust of the work. They describe Japanese-American deviance and the situation of Japanese-Americans in Hawaii. The final chapter is more than a summary of the previous material. It is a clear discussion of the important issues in the process of assimilation and a clear statement of the factors which Kitano feels account for Japanese-American success in the U.S.

This is a well-written, interesting and generally successful case study. It reflects in many ways the objectives of the Prentice-Hall series. For the undergraduate one would have to go a long way to find a better study of the Japanese-Americans. It has a nice balance of historical detail and sociological theory which is so often lacking in case study material.

Lopata's monograph on the *Polish-Americans*, while part of the series, in many ways stands separately from the rest. She makes little use of Gordon's model of assimilation, preferring instead to center her attention on the dynamics of status competition as a major factor in the development and maintenance of Polonia (Polish American community). For her, in Polonia there are sufficiently complex and flexible sources of status to allow individuals and families to compete with others for "status points," and the total "status points" obtained determine one's reputation (prestige) in the community (p. 9). Lopata holds that this status competition was and currently is the basic process which holds the Polish-American community together. Simply, status competition affects community solidarity because those

A Review of the Ethnic Groups

who have a reputation (prestige) in the community will attempt through control of various ethnic organizations to maintain the viability of the community in which their reputation (prestige) is rooted.

The work begins with a chapter examining the problems associated with identifying Polish-Americans because Poland as a nation state did not exist for much of the time when immigration to the U.S. was occurring. Chapters two and three describe the culture that immigrants left and the modifications that were made to this cultural heritage in the process of establishing the Polish-American community.

Chapter four turns to an examination of Polonia's relationship to the rest of American society, showing how the community is maintained even though most Polish-Americans participate in the secondary institutions of the host society. The next chapter explores the socio-demographic changes occurring in Polonia, with particular attention to the role of status competition as a vehicle for community solidarity in the face of overall Polish-American upward social mobility. Chapter six further explores the basis of Polish-American community solidarity, adding to status competition a second factor encouraging solidarity, that of companionate circle. She defines companionate circle as a loosely bound group of people sharing the same ethnic background and social class who interact with one another, belong to the same organizations, and lead similar life styles (p. 119). Lopata then presents case material from three local communities, Hamtramck, Buffalo, and Los Angeles, to show the dynamics of the factors of solidarity, given widespread territorial dispersal.

The last chapter offers a prognosis of the future viability of Polonia. Lopata feels that the culture that has been developed by the Polish peasant in America will no longer serve as an alternative to both cultural and structural assimilation. The only possibility that Lopata sees as stemming the full assimilation of the Polish-American is the adoption of elements of the Polish national culture which would be attractive to the younger generations and around which new organizational forms could develop to maintain a Polish ethnic identity.

The work, while a significant addition to the series, suffers from a lack of comparability with the case studies of some of the other ethnic groups. If one were interested only in Polish-Americans this work would be an excellent place to begin. If on the other hand one is concerned with a more general understanding of facts and ethnic groups in American society, which necessitates a comparative approach, Lopata's theoretical framework is so different from the other case studies that comparisons which could lead to generalizations would be extremely difficult.

The *Mexican-Americans*, by Joan Moore, gives a compact description of the experiences of the second-largest minority in the U.S. It examines the sources of both diversity and similarity within this population. Moore begins with a short historical account of the Mexican-Americans in the Southwest, with a lengthy discussion of the effects of this group's becoming a minority by conquest as distinct from immigration.

Turning from this, Moore then describes the geographic, economic, social and demographic peculiarities of the Southwest which helped shape the indigenous Mexican-American culture. In addition, she documents the effects of the large-scale migration of Mexican nationals on the evolving culture and life style. This concern is then further discussed by giving an up-to-date demographic profile of the Mexican-Americans and again pointing to the great diversity of this population.

Chapter five shifts from the Mexican-Americans to an analysis of the Americans, i.e., education, the Catholic Church, and the criminal justice system. Chapter six returns to the issue of population diversity and accounts for it by socio-economic status and residence. Here Moore utilizes the distinction between frontiersmen and colonists to conceptualize the two dominant orientations toward assimilation, the former being more assimilationist in orientation, with the latter tending toward ethnic exclusiveness. Following the diversity noted in the first part of the case study, chapter seven turns to the similarities among Mexican-Americans, with particular emphasis on language, distinctive behavior patterns, values, and the effect of these on ethnic cohesiveness.

A Review of the Ethnic Groups

The last chapter, written with Pachon, gives an overview of Mexican-American political participation: widespread political non-participation before World War II, the accommodationist politics from World War II to 1965, the emergence in the middle sixties of ethnic militancy and the Chicano movement, and the current situation of the new "ethnic politics" where Mexican-Americans are sufficiently well-organized to affect both local and national politics.

The case study is in some ways similar to Lopata's in that it does not make extensive use of the assimilation model of Gordon, but rather opts for a historical and descriptive approach. However, where Lopata offers an alternative set of theoretical constructs to organize and present her material, Moore is satisfied with an essentially atheoretical approach. Nonetheless this does not detract from what is overall a first-rate study of an important minority group.

Moskos' work on the *Greek-Americans* is the newest in the series and follows in structure some of the early works. It gives a sociological, cultural, and historical description of the Greek-American experience. The first three chapters present a chronological account of Greeks in the U.S., from the initial attempts at settlement, through the era of mass migration at the start of the 20th century and finally, the contemporary Greek-American community. In this latter section there is a lengthy description of the various community institutions, especially the Greek Orthodox Church.

Chapter four examines the continuity and variability in Greek culture across four generations of Greek-Americans, followed by a description of Greek-American social mobility, part of which reads like a Who's Who in Greek-America. The remainder of the chapter explores the affinity of Greeks for small business ownership particularly restaurants, as the typical pattern of social mobility.

Chapter six is Moskos' reconstruction of his own family's American experience; it adds to the work an air of reality and substance. The sociology of Greek-Americans is presented in the seventh chapter. Two significant themes emerge in this

analysis. First is the relatively unique process of Greek em-bourgeoisement, which moved Greek-Americans away from an identification with other working class ethnics toward an identification with the ideology of the middle class. The second important issue discussed is the level of acculturation and as-similation of Greek-Americans. Using the concept of "ethno-genesis" Moskos argues that Greek-Americans are unique in that acculturation has proceeded more slowly than assimilation. For many Greek-Americans, to be Greek means to participate voluntarily in Greek-American secondary institutions, particularly the church. While many members of this ethnic group have primary relationships with non-Greeks, some of their secondary affiliations are with exclusively Greek-American organizations.

The final chapter appears to be an afterthought; in that it addresses the situation of Greeks in Australia, however, it adds little to the work and in most cases should be ignored by the reader. There are, however, other problems with this monograph. Perhaps because the Greek-American population is so small (1.25 million), there is an overemphasis on the contributions of particular Greek-Americans. For the non-Greek this listing of particularly noteworthy Greek-Americans is tedious and distracting from the more important issues in the work. In addition, Moskos avoids the use, in the first three-quarters of the work, of any conceptual organization. When the important analytic concepts are finally presented, in the latter part of the work, the reader is constantly returning to other sections of the book for some concrete examples that fit the generaliza-tion being developed.

Pinkney's work on *Black Americans* is, like the others, a short survey. It presents a reasonably complete picture of the status of black people in the U.S., from 1619 to the present.

The first chapter is a brief sketch of the significant his-torical events in the 350 years of Black-American history, with an emphasis on those circumstances which are responsible for the present status of race relations in the United States. Chapter two gives a demographic profile of the black population. The next four chapters extend some of the demographic information

A Review of the Ethnic Groups

with greater discussion of community, socio-economic status, family, politics, religion, and the area of deviance.

Chapter seven utilizes Gordon's model of assimilation to assess the current state of Black assimilation. Pinkney concludes that among Black people assimilation has not been accomplished; while Blacks are to some extent culturally assimilated, there has been minimal structural assimilation. Therefore, the other stages of assimilation which Gordon feels are dependent on structural assimilation are yet to be accomplished.

The last two chapters review the emergence and subsequent development of the "black revolt," from the civil rights movement to the contemporary expressions of Black nationalism, with a final section offering a prognosis of future black and white relations.

This work, perhaps because it was one of the first published in the series makes extensive use of the Gordon model. This encourages the kind of compatibility with some of the other monographs in the series that in many ways is the most attractive feature of these short works. It is a well written work, conceptually clear, concise, and well documented. It is a work well suited as a first exposure to the current status of Black-Americans and an important point of departure for more extensive investigations.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

As noted above, in many of the works Gordon's model of assimilation serves as an important conceptual foundation for the presentation and analysis of the historical and descriptive information. Briefly, Gordon's model attempts to explain the simultaneous occurrence among various American ethnic and racial groups of both assimilation and pluralism. In order to do this, Gordon argues that assimilation is not a single uni-dimensional occurrence, but a multidimensional process characterized by relatively independent stages of subprocesses. He distinguishes between seven different stages of assimilation (1964:71).

Mid-American Review of Sociology

- Cultural assimilation - change of the cultural patterns of the racial or ethnic group to those of the core society.
- Structural assimilation - entrance by ethnic group members into the cliques and associations of the core society at the primary group level.
- Marital assimilation - large scale intermarriage between members of the minority and dominant group.
- Identification assimilation - development of a sense of peoplehood based exclusively on the host society.
- Attitude receptional assimilation - absence of prejudice.
- Behavioral receptional assimilation - absence of discrimination.
- Civic assimilation - absence of value and power conflict.

Within this model the two most important forms of assimilation are cultural and structural assimilation because of the unique relationship between these two and their relationship to the other five processes. As Gordon (1964:77) makes clear, cultural assimilation (acculturation) is likely to be the first of the processes to occur after the initial contact of the racial or ethnic group with the host society. Furthermore, cultural assimilation may take place even when none of the other types have occurred, and the situation of "cultural assimilation only" may continue indefinitely.

On the other hand, because structural assimilation is integration into the dominant group on the primary group level, it becomes the crucial sufficient condition for later stages of assimilation. For Gordon (1964:81), once structural assimilation has occurred either simultaneously with or subsequent to acculturation, all of the other types of assimilation will naturally follow. To Gordon, structural assimilation is the major key to understanding the ethnic make-up of American society because

A Review of the Ethnic Groups

whether an ethnic group is or is not structurally assimilated determines the extent to which ethnicity along with social class serves as a basis for identity and social interaction. For many American ethnic groups the absence of structural assimilation means that these ethnic Americans tend to remain within their own ethnic group for most of their intimate relationships, interacting with other ethnic groups in largely impersonal secondary group relations (1964:234). In summary, for Gordon, the generalization concerning the adaptation of racial and ethnic groups in American society is one of substantial cultural assimilation along with minimal structural assimilation, or if you will, cultural assimilation along with structural pluralism.

Although Gordon's work has become a classic in the field of minority studies, his analysis of assimilation leaves a number of issues open. It is to these issues that we turn our attention.

First, in regard to cultural assimilation, Gordon's discussion of it makes it appear as essentially an inevitable, one-directional process in which white middle class Protestant values come to be shared by other racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. In other words, for Gordon, cultural pluralism, i.e., the absence of acculturation, is a rather minor and short-term situation for American ethnic groups. Greeley's (1974) theory of ethnogenesis and some of the discussion by Glazer and Moynihan (1963) of ethnic identity seriously challenge Gordon's position. In both cases the authors describe processes by which members of various ethnic groups are self-consciously creating an ethnic culture as an alternative to that of the dominant group. For Greeley and Glazer and Moynihan, cultural pluralism, rather than being a minor phenomenon doomed to inevitably disappear, seems to be the goal and direction of the current trend of ethnic groups' adaptation to American society. In fact, Moskos' work on Greek-Americans stands as a good example of an ethnic group's commitment to cultural pluralism.

A second shortcoming of Gordon's model is the total neglect of social conflict (Newman, 1973). His model emphasizes the orderly adjustment of racial and ethnic groups to American society and ignores the fact that race and ethnic relations are

more often characterized by intergroup conflict than by orderly adjustment.

This emphasis on order as distinct from conflict prevents Gordon from developing any systematic understanding of the issues of racial subordination, exploitation, and inequalities of social power. This in turn leads Gordon and other assimilationist theories to neglect important differences in the experiences of various racial and ethnic groups, particularly the recognition of the differences in the U.S. between white and non-white groups. Any model which purports to explain the racial subordination of non-white ethnic groups without power as a central organizing principle is bound to be incomplete. Race and ethnic relations must be seen as intimately connected with a comprehensive theory of social stratification, which more clearly addresses the benefits of minority subordination for the dominant group.

A third issue, related in part to the above, is that while Gordon's model may be useful for categorizing the various levels of assimilation different ethnic groups have attained, the model itself leaves unexplained the particular level of a group's assimilation, as well as the differences in levels between one ethnic group and another. The model lacks a specification of the causal factors that account for the variability in the process of assimilation. In other words, the model could be useful to conceptualize assimilation as a dependent variable but leaves totally unspecified what factors to view as independent variables.

Finally, Gordon's limitation of structural assimilation to only primary group integration between dominant and minority group members, without an explicit recognition of the integration or lack of integration of various ethnic groups into some of the core secondary institutions of this society is a serious oversight. Given current efforts at affirmative action and desegregation of public schools, what might well be unfolding in American society is structural pluralism at the primary group level with structural integration at the level of societal institutions. Gordon's model seems unable to account for such a possibility.

These and other problems of the assimilation model have not led to an abandonment of this perspective but rather to a

A Review of the Ethnic Groups

clearer understanding of the situations where the model is and is not applicable. The model seems best suited to clarifying the experiences of essentially European ethnic groups, and less suited to the experiences of non-European groups. The subordination of these latter groups seems to be better understood from the perspective of internal colonialism (Blauner, 1972). In many ways the addition of the internal colonialism model, as well as others, to the assimilation model has given sociologists interested in minority relations a larger set of analytic tools, leading to a clear recognition of the diversity of adaptations made by various ethnic groups in this society.

CONCLUSIONS

The works in this series must be judged in regard to the goals specified by the editor of the series, that is, as short readable texts, to be used by undergraduates and not by experts in the field of race and ethnic relations. On these terms, the series as a whole is generally successful. While there is some unevenness in the overall quality of the works, they do seem able to convey to the student the diversity of the American ethnic experience.

The series as a whole is a valuable contribution to the resources available to a teacher of race and ethnic relations. But it must be kept in mind, if some of these works are used, that the professor should be ready to offer alternative theoretical models to the students in order to most effectively utilize the wealth of information these short-case studies contain. Otherwise, the students are likely to come away from such a class with a less than comprehensive picture of ethnic groups in American life, a picture which would inaccurately emphasize order and harmony and would not do justice to subordination and exploitation of various racial and ethnic groups.

PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

Fallows, Marjorie R.

1979 *Irish Americans*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 158 pp.

Mid-American Review of Sociology

Fitzpatrick, Joseph P.

1971 Puerto Rican Americans. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 192 pp.

Kitano, Harry H.L.

1976 Japanese Americans, 2nd edition. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 231 pp.

Lopata, Helen Z.

1976 Polish Americans. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 174 pp.

Moore, Joan

1976 Mexican Americans, 2nd edition. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 173 pp.

Moskos, Charles C.

1980 Greek Americans. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 161 pp.

Pinkney, Alphonso

1975 Black Americans, 2nd edition. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 242 pp.

OTHER LITERATURE USED

Becker, Laura

1980 "Review of Irish Americans," *The Annals of the American Academy* 448:183-184.

Blauner, Robert

1972 *Racial Oppression in America*. New York: Harper and Row.

Connor, John

1977 "Review of Japanese Americans," *American Anthropologist* 79:692-693.

Feagin, Joe

1978 *Race and Ethnic Relations*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Forrest, Audrey

1977 "Review of Mexican Americans," *Contemporary Sociology* 6:470.

Galaskiewica, Joseph

1977 "Review of Polish Americans," *American Journal of Sociology* 83:270-272.

Glazer, Nathan and Daniel Moynihan

1963 *Beyond the Melting Pot*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Glick, Paula

1972 *Assimilation in American Life*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Greeley, Andrew

1974 *Ethnicity in the United States*. New York: John Wiley.

Johnson, Cyrus

1970 "Review of Black Americans," *American Sociological Review* 35:572-573.

A Review of the Ethnic Groups

- Kantrowitz, Nathan
1972 "Review of Puerto Rican Americans," *Contemporary Sociology* 2:83-85.
- Kornblum, William
1969 "Review of Black Americans," *American Journal of Sociology* 75:296-298.
- Montero, Daniel
1977 "Review of Japanese Americans," *Contemporary Sociology* 6:467-468.
- Newman, William
1973 *American Pluralism*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Prager, Jeffrey
1981 "Review of Irish Americans," *Contemporary Sociology* 10: 308-309.
- Rogler, Lloyd
1972 "Review of Puerto Rican Americans," *Commonweal* 96:485-486.
- Silver, James
1970 "Review of Black Americans," *The Social Studies* 61:342-344.