

# UNIT 1

# Local Experiences of Racial and Ethnic Identity, Communities, and Diversity in America

## Unit Selections

1. **Ethnic Goes Exurban**, Tyler Cowen
2. **It's Blarney Meets Chutzpah, over Red Wine and Green Beer**, Jennifer Medina
3. **A Shift in the Income Divide in Queens Puts Blacks Ahead of Whites**, Sam Roberts
4. **'New Brooklyn's' Replace White Suburbs**, Rick Hampson
5. **Parishes in Transition**, Jessica Trobaugh Temple and Erin Blasko
6. **In New York, Gospel Resounds in African Tongues**, Daniel J. Wakin
7. **In Brooklyn, an Evolving Ethnicity**, Delizia Flaccavento
8. **Mélange Cities**, Blair A. Ruble
9. **Greektown's Rise No Myth**, Antero Pietila

## Key Points to Consider

- Explore the racial and ethnic diversity of neighborhoods, towns, and counties that are within your experience and compare them to the accounts presented in these articles.
- Review local, metropolitan, state and national data on ancestry data collected and published by the U.S. Census.
- In what respect does location define race and ethnic relations?
- Does the rise of ethnic marketing foster the assimilation of new immigrants?
- What opinions do you have about churches comprising populations that are predominately one ethnic group?
- Does the economic climate of a particular time significantly influence group relations? What additional variables are important for intergroup relations?

## Student Web Site

[www.mhcls.com/online](http://www.mhcls.com/online)

## Internet References

Further information regarding these Web sites may be found in this book's preface or online.

### American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

<http://www.aclu.org>

### Human Rights Web

<http://www.hrweb.org>

### Supreme Court/Legal Information Institute

<http://supct.law.cornell.edu/supct/index.html>



**A** new generation of American leaders was increasingly comfortable with experiences of racial and ethnic diversity. They challenged the country and its institutions of cultural formation to discard the “Melting Pot” ideology and to replace it with a universalism of law, due process, and equal protection for all. This effort could be easily claimed in legislation, but the stubborn facts of social practices were embedded in patterns of regional diversity and mobility. The economic limitation related to levels of urbanization and social development as well as a political potential and competitive edge that could be achieved by either pandering the passions of fear, hatred, and prejudice created a web of contradictions that would define race and ethnic relations: the singular isolation and exclusion of persons whose ancestry was rooted in American slavery and consciousness of color; the mentalities and constraints of a unique American form of shared consciousness derived from the dichotomous mentality of Anglo-conformists and their logic, practices of social division, and divisiveness; the urban immigrant and ethnic enclave experiences that demanded a new evocation of cultural pluralism beyond the insularity, isolation, and racist mentalities; and institutions of governance derived from the rural foundations of states in the Anglo-Scot-Irish American culture that lacked mechanisms of metropolitan governance.

Ethnic and racial identities are social constructions of culture. The articles in this section present contemporary accounts of local experiences which suggest that modern forms of identity and communities are formed by shared symbols and meanings that constitute bonds of union among persons. Such modern bonds are self expressed in various ways as types of ethnic and race relations. Such behaviors are not simply primordial givens.

On the contrary, they are dynamic and changing cultural forms. They are fashioned from relationships among persons and in the constitutions of groups, and they are significantly—if not essentially—shaped by the willful orchestration of leaders intent on explanations and action within social, economic, and cultural institutions.

Dr. Thaddeus C. Radzilowski, president of the Piast Institute, argues that ethnicities are derived from and cultivated in local communities. Thus, localism is a feature of race and ethnic relations experienced in specific residential communities and the bonds of shared values—traditions—that are formative of personal consciousness and group identity. Radzilowski’s view on this approach to ethnic and race relations is grounded in the argument expressed in the following three points:

- Ethnicity is one of the deepest and most enduring of human identities because it is based on language, religion, culture, family, common history, and local community. It can have political salience and as such can play both negative and positive roles. However, political or public salience is not necessary for its survival. It can be the basis of community formation and a generous pluralism on the one hand, or divisiveness and prejudice on the other.
- Ethnicity in America is a creative adaptation to life in the New World by immigrants, both free and coerced. It was an attempt by newcomers to make themselves at home in a new place, often under difficult and challenging conditions. Out of the process came cultures that were born out of preservation, adaptation, direct borrowing, and invention—often reinforced by prejudice and interest. Successful ethnicities have kept the ability to change themselves to meet new conditions as well as to modify the dominant society in which

they are embedded and to affect other ethnic cultures with whom they exist.

- Ethnic adaptation to preserve core values and to mobilize group members in times of difficulty has happened with remarkable speed given the usual more leisurely pace of historical change. To be able to anticipate and use ethnicity in ways beneficial to the evolution of our society requires a clear understanding of recent history and current prospects if it is to succeed.

Articles in this unit present a sample of case-studies. This sampling, like the many thousands of weekly profiles of ethnics, immigrants, and enclave populations that appear in your local papers and magazines provide access to distinctive locations and their particular qualities. In composite, they are the pieces of pluralism within our social fabric, our consciousness of human variety and values rooted in rural and various national traditions that are being part of the American reality. The challenges and opportunities of contemporary race and ethnic relations in America are shaped within the framework of social, political, economic, and cultural institutions. Contemporary trends, currents of opinion and attitude, are influenced by significant events and communications, as well as imaginative portrayals—at times called 'literary ethnicity'. Such social processes are woven into porous configurations of local, regional, and national relationships. Viewed from this perspective, a significant facet of what constitutes the American reality is derived from fundamentally localized demography. To adopt this perspective requires attention to the variety of populations, their settlement patterns, and the movement and succession of groups and cultures from old neighborhoods to new neighborhoods. This social and analytical approach invites the observer to examine the American reality as a dynamic process involving the shifting clustering of racial and ethnic groups and their renegotiation of relationships in new places, in new ways, and with new opportunities and challenges that are endemic to American pluralism.

These articles recount experiences of ethnic populations in specific situations and places. They portray unresolved dilemmas

related to American pluralism. Ethnic clustering was driven in part by the "creative destructiveness" of economic growth and the bonds of group affinity—their choices, opportunities, and challenges experienced in both turbulent group relations and the hopeful processes of recovering viable urban communities. The pivotal significance of terrorism on immigration is particularly salient for the entire country. Yet the process of forging new relations among communities reveals the development of new strategies and the formation of shared values derived from various traditions and articulated as each group negotiates the pathway from immigrant to ethnic American. Thus "becoming American" occurs in the ongoing process of addressing challenges and opportunities. This shift in consciousness regarding race and ethnic relations as well as the technological capacity, information, and data explosion produce new models and explanations of society and culture and further increases awareness of ethnicity and race.

Settlement patterns and economic differences within societies and the arrangements of economic production are usually explained in terms of theories of progressive development or of class conflicts. Unlike such structural causes and determinants, current social practice and new modes of explanation appear to be motivated by a new horizon of cultural values and the collective aspirations of ethnic groups. Currently we discover that the forces reconstructing social realities are the products of creativity, imagination, and religion. Each of these factors appears to be influenced by and interrelated to contemporary articulations of racial and ethnic relations. Consciousness of the pluralism expressed in ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural diversity have emerged throughout the world. Various social science and humanistic disciplines are recasting models and calibrating variables to account for these powerful forces of cultural, religious, and ethnic cohesion as well as forms of conflict that erupt from time to time at the boundaries that define contentions that are salient for group interaction and mobilization.