

U.S. CULTURE: DIVERSITY AND INTEGRATION

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Abstract: This article presents a scholarly analysis of the cultural landscape of the United States, focusing on the dual processes of diversity and integration that have shaped the nation since its founding. Drawing on historical sources, demographic data, and sociological theory, the study examines how successive waves of immigration, indigenous heritage, and the legacy of slavery have produced one of the most heterogeneous societies in the modern world. The research applies qualitative content analysis and comparative-historical methods to evaluate the explanatory power of three competing models — the “melting pot,” the “salad bowl,” and contemporary multiculturalism — in describing American cultural reality. Findings indicate that no single model fully captures the complexity of U.S. society; rather, integration occurs through overlapping mechanisms including civic nationalism, economic mobility, public education, popular culture, and intermarriage, while distinct ethnic, religious, and regional identities continue to flourish. The article also addresses persistent challenges such as racial inequality, linguistic tensions, and political polarization. The conclusions suggest that American cultural identity is best understood as a dynamic equilibrium between unity and pluralism, in which the meaning of “American” is continuously renegotiated.

Keywords: *United States, American culture, multiculturalism, cultural diversity, integration, immigration, melting pot, salad bowl, ethnic identity, civic nationalism.*

Annotatsiya: Maqolada Amerika Qo‘shma Shtatlari madaniyati — uning shakllanishida hal qiluvchi rol o‘ynagan xilma-xillik va integratsiya jarayonlari ilmiy nuqtai nazardan tahlil qilinadi. Tarixiy manbalar, demografik ma’lumotlar va sotsiologik nazariyalarga tayangan holda muhojirlik to‘lqinlari, mahalliy aholi merosi va qullik tarixining mamlakat madaniy qiyofasiga ta’siri o‘rganildi. Tadqiqotda sifatli kontent tahlil va qiyosiy-tarixiy metodlar qo‘llanilgan bo‘lib, “melting pot” (eritma qozon), “salad bowl” (salat qosa) va zamonaviy multikulturalizm modellarining AQSH voqeligini izohlash quvvati baholangan. Natijalar ko‘rsatishicha, hech bir model

jamiyat murakkabligini to‘liq qamrab ololmaydi; integratsiya fuqarolik millatchiligi, iqtisodiy harakatlanish, ta’lim, ommaviy madaniyat va aralash nikohlar orqali ro‘y beradi, ayni vaqtda etnik, diniy va mintaqaviy o‘ziga xosliklar saqlanib qoladi. Maqolada irqiy tengsizlik, lingvistik kelishmovchiliklar va siyosiy qutblanish kabi muammolar ham ko‘rib chiqilgan. Xulosalar shuni ko‘rsatadiki, Amerika madaniy o‘ziga xosligi birlik va plyuralizm o‘rtasidagi dinamik muvozanat sifatida tushunilishi lozim.

Kalit so‘zlar: AQSH, Amerika madaniyati, multikulturalizm, madaniy xilma-xillik, integratsiya, muhojirlik, eritma qozon, salat qosa, etnik o‘ziga xoslik, fuqarolik millatchiligi.

Introduction

The United States of America presents one of the most compelling case studies in the comparative study of national cultures. Few societies in modern history have absorbed so many people from so many places in such a relatively short period, and few have made the relationship between unity and difference so central to their political self-understanding. The phrase *E pluribus unum* — “out of many, one” — inscribed on the Great Seal of the United States since 1782, captures a problem the country has been working through for more than two centuries: how to forge a coherent national community out of populations that arrive with distinct languages, religions, traditions, and historical memories.

The contemporary salience of this question is not merely academic. According to U.S. Census Bureau projections, the country is approaching what demographers describe as a “majority-minority” composition, in which no single ethnoracial group will constitute more than half of the population. At the same time, debates over immigration policy, bilingual education, racial justice, and national identity have intensified, making the cultural foundations of American society a subject of urgent public concern. Understanding how diversity and integration interact in the U.S. context therefore has both theoretical importance for the social sciences and practical importance for public policy.

This article pursues three interrelated objectives. First, it traces the historical formation of cultural pluralism in the United States, identifying the principal sources of diversity from the colonial period to the present. Second, it evaluates the three dominant theoretical models used to interpret American cultural integration — the melting pot, the salad bowl, and multiculturalism — in light of empirical evidence. Third, it identifies the mechanisms through which integration actually occurs, as well as the persistent obstacles that continue to limit it.

The argument advanced here is that American culture is best understood not as a finished product but as an ongoing negotiation. The country has never been

homogeneous, and the meaning of being “American” has been redefined repeatedly as new groups have entered the national community. Recognizing this dynamic character is essential for any accurate description of U.S. culture and for any serious engagement with its ongoing debates over identity, citizenship, and belonging.

Methods

The study employs a qualitative, multi-method approach appropriate to the interdisciplinary nature of the subject. Three complementary methods were combined in order to triangulate findings and minimize the limitations of any single technique.

First, comparative-historical analysis was used to trace patterns of immigration, settlement, and cultural change across distinct periods of U.S. history: the colonial era (1607–1776), the early republic and westward expansion (1776–1860), the era of mass European immigration (1860–1924), the period of restriction and internal migration (1924–1965), and the post-1965 era of renewed immigration from Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Periodization permits the identification of structural shifts in the composition and modes of integration of American society.

Second, qualitative content analysis was applied to a body of secondary sources including peer-reviewed scholarship in history, sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies, as well as official statistical reports such as those produced by the U.S. Census Bureau, the Pew Research Center, and the Migration Policy Institute. Sources were selected on the basis of academic credibility, methodological transparency, and recency, with priority given to publications from the past two decades while incorporating foundational classics of American studies that retain analytic relevance.

Third, conceptual analysis was used to examine the principal theoretical models — the melting pot, the salad bowl, and multiculturalism — by reconstructing their logical structure, identifying their empirical implications, and assessing their fit with the available evidence. Because the topic concerns interpretive questions about meaning and identity, no statistical hypothesis testing was performed; the study aims at descriptive accuracy and theoretical clarity rather than causal estimation. Limitations of the approach include the dependence on existing scholarship rather than primary fieldwork, and the inevitable selectivity involved in synthesizing a vast literature.

Results

The most recent decennial census, conducted in 2020, recorded a U.S. population of approximately 331 million people. The non-Hispanic White population, while still the largest single group, accounted for under sixty percent of the total — a significant decline from previous decades. Hispanic or Latino residents constituted roughly nineteen percent, Black or African American residents about twelve percent, and Asian Americans nearly six percent, with American Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander populations together approaching two percent. The number of people

identifying as multiracial more than doubled compared to 2010, an indicator of both changing self-identification practices and rising rates of intermarriage.

Linguistically, more than 350 languages are spoken in U.S. households. Spanish is the most widely spoken language after English, with roughly 42 million native speakers, followed by Chinese languages, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and Arabic. Approximately one in five U.S. residents speaks a language other than English at home. Religious diversity is similarly pronounced. Although the United States remains majority Christian, surveys conducted in the early 2020s by the Pew Research Center indicate that Christians constitute about sixty-three percent of adults, down from over eighty percent in the early 1990s. The religiously unaffiliated population — sometimes called the “nones” — has grown to approximately twenty-nine percent. Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and other religious communities together account for roughly six percent and continue to expand, particularly in major metropolitan areas. The diversity observed today is the cumulative product of distinct historical processes. Indigenous peoples inhabited the territory of the present-day United States for thousands of years before European contact and continue to maintain hundreds of federally recognized tribal nations, each with its own language, governance traditions, and cultural practices. The colonial period brought English, Scottish, Irish, German, Dutch, French, and Spanish settlers, alongside the forced migration of approximately 388,000 Africans through the transatlantic slave trade to North America, whose descendants developed distinctive cultural traditions under conditions of enslavement and, later, legal segregation.

The nineteenth century witnessed massive migration first from Northern and Western Europe — particularly Ireland, Germany, and Scandinavia — and then, in the decades surrounding 1900, from Southern and Eastern Europe, including Italy, Poland, the Russian Empire, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Asian immigration began with Chinese laborers in the mid-nineteenth century but was sharply curtailed by exclusionary legislation, most notably the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished the national-origins quota system and reopened the country to large-scale immigration, this time predominantly from Latin America, Asia, and, more recently, sub-Saharan Africa. Each of these waves brought new linguistic, religious, and culinary traditions that have layered upon those that preceded them. Empirical research identifies several mechanisms through which integration occurs in practice. Public education has historically played a central role in transmitting a common civic vocabulary, the English language, and shared narratives of national history, although the content of those narratives has been continuously contested. The labor market provides another integrating mechanism: immigrants and their descendants generally show measurable upward economic mobility across generations, although the pace varies markedly by group, period, and circumstance.

Popular culture — including film, music, sports, and digital media — generates shared cultural references across regional, ethnic, and class lines.

Intermarriage rates have risen substantially since the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1967 decision in *Loving v. Virginia* struck down anti-miscegenation laws; recent data indicate that approximately one in five new marriages now crosses ethnoracial lines. Naturalization, voting, and military service all function as civic-political pathways to full membership, while religious congregations, voluntary associations, and ethnic organizations provide intermediate communities that facilitate adaptation without requiring the abandonment of heritage. The result is a layered process in which incorporation into the national mainstream coexists with the preservation and transformation of group-specific identities. Alongside these integrative processes, the data reveal persistent gaps that complicate any optimistic narrative. Median household wealth among Black and Hispanic families remains a fraction of that among White and Asian families, reflecting cumulative effects of historical exclusion from housing markets, credit, and educational opportunity. Residential segregation, while less rigid than during the Jim Crow era, continues to shape access to schools, employment, and public services. Hate-crime statistics published by the Federal Bureau of Investigation show recurrent targeting of religious and ethnic minorities, with notable rises following major political events. These findings indicate that integration is uneven and incomplete, and that descriptive accounts of American culture must hold together both achievement and unfinished work.

Discussion

The melting pot metaphor, popularized by Israel Zangwill’s 1908 play of the same name, depicted America as a great crucible in which the cultural distinctions immigrants brought with them would be fused into a new, unified American identity. The model captured something real: linguistic shift to English typically occurs within three generations, regional cuisines and customs blend, and a recognizable national popular culture emerged in the twentieth century through cinema, radio, and later television. Yet the metaphor obscures as much as it reveals. The pressures of “melting” historically fell most heavily on European immigrants who could be incorporated into the legal and social category of whiteness, while non-European populations — particularly African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans — were often excluded from the same fusion through law, custom, or both. The melting pot, in other words, presupposed boundaries that it did not openly acknowledge. The salad bowl image, which became prominent in academic and public discourse from the 1960s onward, was offered as a corrective. In this view, the United States is not a homogenizing crucible but a composition in which distinct ingredients retain their own flavor while contributing to a larger whole. The philosophical roots of this perspective extend to Horace Kallen’s early-twentieth-century essays on cultural pluralism, which

argued that democracy is enhanced rather than threatened by the preservation of ethnic distinctiveness. Empirical support for the salad bowl model includes the persistence of ethnic neighborhoods in major cities, vigorous religious communities, language maintenance among certain immigrant groups, and the increasing prevalence of hyphenated identities such as Mexican-American, Korean-American, and Nigerian-American. Multiculturalism, emerging from the civil rights and ethnic studies movements of the 1960s and 1970s, represents the institutionalization of pluralist principles. Bilingual education programs, ethnic studies departments in universities, public recognition of holidays such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Juneteenth, and corporate diversity initiatives all reflect this orientation. Critics, however, have raised concerns from multiple directions. Some argue that strong multiculturalism risks weakening the shared civic culture necessary for democratic deliberation; others contend that official multiculturalism remains largely symbolic and fails to address the structural inequalities that generate disadvantage. The debate continues to shape American politics, education, and law, and its outcome remains genuinely open. The evidence reviewed suggests that none of the three models is fully adequate on its own. American society does exhibit assimilative pressures — language acquisition, market participation, civic norms — but it equally exhibits durable pluralism. A more accurate description treats integration and diversity as simultaneous rather than sequential. Individuals can hold strong ethnic, religious, or regional identifications while also identifying as Americans, and the content of “American” itself shifts as those identifications enter the mainstream. The growing share of multiracial Americans, who by definition do not fit cleanly into any single category, is perhaps the clearest demographic expression of this dynamic. Theoretical models that assume sharp group boundaries struggle to describe a population that is increasingly producing its own. Compared with other immigrant-receiving societies — Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany — the United States is distinguished by its early adoption of birthright citizenship, its constitutional separation of church and state, and the strength of its civic-national tradition that defines membership in terms of allegiance to founding principles rather than ethnic descent. These features have generally facilitated the formal incorporation of newcomers. At the same time, the legacy of slavery and the ongoing salience of race as a social category set the U.S. case apart from European nations whose contemporary diversity stems primarily from postwar immigration. Comparative analysis therefore must be careful not to assume that lessons drawn from one context translate directly to another. Several pressures test the integrative capacity of American society today. Political polarization has produced sharp disagreements over immigration enforcement, the teaching of national history, and the legitimacy of multicultural recognition. Economic inequality, geographically concentrated in deindustrialized regions and urban peripheries, complicates the

assumption that mobility will smooth ethnic differences. Digital media, while connecting people across vast distances, also enables fragmentation into ideological enclaves that limit shared cultural reference points. How these tensions resolve will shape the cultural trajectory of the country in the coming decades, and serious analysis must hold both the integrative achievements and the unresolved problems in view.

Conclusion

The cultural identity of the United States cannot be captured by any single image. The melting pot, the salad bowl, and multiculturalism each illuminate part of a larger picture in which assimilation and pluralism operate concurrently rather than as alternatives. Integration in the American context proceeds through institutions — schools, markets, civic organizations, popular culture — while distinct identities persist and renew themselves through community life, religious practice, family transmission, and political mobilization. The country's historical capacity to incorporate new populations has been substantial but uneven, and the boundary between insider and outsider has been redrawn many times in response to political, economic, and demographic change.

Future research should pay particular attention to the experience of newer immigrant groups from Latin America, Asia, and Africa, whose patterns of incorporation are still emerging and whose long-term trajectories cannot yet be confidently predicted. Comparative studies that situate the U.S. case alongside other multicultural democracies would clarify which features are distinctive to America and which reflect more general dynamics of pluralist societies. Finally, attention to the lived experience of multiracial and multi-religious Americans promises to refine theoretical models that have generally assumed discrete and stable group boundaries.

What can be said with confidence is that diversity is not, in the United States, a temporary condition awaiting resolution into uniformity. It is a permanent and constitutive feature of national life. Integration, in turn, is not the dissolution of difference but the construction of a shared political community capable of holding difference together within a common framework of rights and obligations. The phrase *E pluribus unum*, two and a half centuries after its adoption, remains less a description of a finished accomplishment than a statement of an ongoing project — one whose continuation depends on the willingness of successive generations to negotiate, again and again, what unity and plurality require of one another.

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