**CHAPTER 2**

**Assimilation and Pluralism: From Immigrants to White Ethnics**

**Classroom Activities and Suggestions for Discussion**

1. Try to recreate an early Ellis Island “experience” by assigning students a particular ethnic background (e.g., Russian, Italian, Irish) or by having students draw lots for a particular ethnic category. Have students investigate what life would have been like for such an immigrant before coming to this country. At the next class period, have student sit close together with no room to stretch. Give them a “citizenship test” by asking them questions about U.S. history and government (both past and present). Call on individual students to answer questions about their native country and their intentions in the United States. You could assign some students to the role of “inspector” and have them check students’ teeth, hair, and so on. “Undesirable” students should have their clothing marked with an X. Have students reflect on and write about this experience, linking their thoughts to topics covered in the text. Use these reflective writings as the basis for discussion.
2. Have students use the Internet to investigate current immigration laws in the United States. Students might also read news articles and editorials that address immigration issues. What’s the overall tone of what students read? Do the articles seem “immigrant friendly”? Do they assume anything about immigrants? If so, what? Could students make sense of what they found? What are some of the barriers immigrants face, both structurally and culturally?
3. As a homework assignment, ask the students to assemble a “checklist” of U.S. citizenship. This would include the Constitutional Amendment that designates citizenship, and all the subsequent federal laws that help “clarify” citizenship. Ask the students what role race and ethnicity have historically played in the citizenship laws. Why is citizenship so important? How does citizenship connect the issue of immigration?
4. Have students contrast the poems “A Broadway Pageant” by Walt Whitman and

“Unguarded Gates” by Thomas Bailey Aldrich. What differing ideas about ethnicity, race, immigration, and assimilation do students see in these poems? How do they feel about the different perspectives offered by the authors? Do they hear similar ideas today? You may also ask students to write a poem that reflects their feelings about these topics. Then, discuss them as a class.

1. Have students role-play as if they were different theorists presented in the chapter. For example, what would Gordon and Park say to one another about assimilation in the U.S. if they got together for dinner? What would Glazer and Moynihan, Greeley, Gallagher , and Steinberg say to one another? (NOTE: If you are going to assign role-playing activities, it’s best to give your students some advance warning so they can prepare key ideas.)
2. Have students find out about their family’s immigration history. If possible, students can interview relatives to learn what kinds of barriers they faced. For example, did their relatives need to learn a new language? Did they need to find a job? What was their economic standing when they came to the U.S.? Did they have family members or other forms of support here to assist them? Why did they decide to come to the U.S.?
3. Have students write about and discuss a time when they tried to assimilate into a new group or situation (e.g., a sorority or fraternity, their college dorm, a new workplace). What was it like for them? What feelings did they have? Did they face any resistance and, if so, how did they deal with it? What were their biggest barriers to integration and how did they overcome them? How does their experience provide insight into what it might be like for an immigrant coming to the U.S.?
4. Ask the students to talk openly about current immigration issues in the U.S. Ask them to think about why immigration is important to the U.S. now, as it was in the past. What is different about immigration now compared to in the early 20th century? Does the U.S. have a duty to allow immigrants to enter the country? If so, which immigrants and under what circumstances? If not, why not? What do immigrants contribute to our society? What would be the consequences of ending all immigration?
5. Ask the students to discuss the idea of a national language in the U.S. Should we have a national language? If so, what language should it be and why? What purpose does a national language serve? What are the benefits of a national language? What are the downsides to having a national language? How does this play a role in the current issues revolving around immigration?
6. Ask students to define assimilation, including detailing what the “traditional” model of assimilation entails. How is this “melting-pot” theory limiting when assessing the various forms of assimilation? Does the pluralist or multicultural model solve the problems of the melting-pot? Why or why not? Can students think of other metaphors that might better capture the ways that immigrants assimilate into U.S. culture? Do we need different models to discuss the ways that different groups experience incorporation?
7. Ask students to discuss the differences between enclave minority groups and middleman minority groups. What are the benefits of each status? What downsides do each have?
8. Is the United States becoming more pluralist in policy and/or attitudes? Have students discuss contemporary events where race, ethnicity, and immigration status have had either a positive or negative impact on the people involved. Some examples could include the trial of George Zimmerman, the shooting of Michael Brown and subsequent social unrest in Ferguson, MO, and the ongoing national debate about undocumented immigration, the Dream Act, and the allotment of social services to people who are immigrants.
9. Have students do some research about how immigrant populations have changed over the last 200 years. What factors have encouraged some groups to immigrate to the U.S. and inhibited other groups? How is the immigrant of today different from an immigrant at the turn of the 20th century? How do assimilation and integration work differently for immigrants today?
10. Have students discuss the concept of ethnic succession and prepare a narrative or graphic to describe how this process works. Which groups, in migrating to the U.S. “first,” wound up at the top of the ethnic “pile”? Which groups, although they migrated early, were denied the ability to climb the ladder of ethnic succession? What role does class status at the time of migration play in determining this process?
11. Have students discuss the concept of a “twilight of white ethnicity,” found on pages 61 and 62. How does this concept match their experiences of race and ethnicity in the United States? Do they believe “whiteness” will disappear as a racial and/or ethnic category sometime in the future? When? And why or why not?