

Ethnic America: A History Study Guide

Ethnic America: A History by Thomas Sowell

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Plot Summary

Ethnic America, written by economist and historian Thomas Sowell, is a history of nine ethnic groups that immigrate to the United States. Sowell's aim is to illustrate important points about history, economics, social science, social philosophy and social policy in these histories in order to draw certain lessons towards the end of the book. Yet the histories are of great interest in themselves, as they tell the human story of the profound struggles and impressive achievements of the individuals within these groups.

In Chapter 1, Sowell outlines the ethnic groups that he will discuss, and the metrics upon which he will measure their successes and failures. He also stresses intragroup diversity and the relationship of these ethnic groups to American society as a whole. To this day, important differences between ethnic groups remain with respect to wealth, health, IQs, education level and so on. Age is another important difference, which is often overlooked. The time of immigration and the area where a group immigrated are also particularly important to understanding the progress of an ethnic group.

The next four chapters cover four ethnic groups that emigrated from Europe. Chapter 2 covers the Irish, who were among the first major immigrant groups to the United States following the presence of the majority of Anglo-Americans. Sowell notes that initially the Irish faced profound political and social resistance to their physical presence in the United States and to their cultural progress. Yet over time, they overcame extreme poverty, lack of literacy and high crime rates to wholly normalize as part of American society. Chapter 3 covers German immigrants, who have large intragroup diversity and have immigrated to the United States over a long period of time, giving them little intragroup identity. Chapter 4 covers the Jews, showing how this group, sometimes facing the greatest adversity, has triumphed beyond any other group on every level. They are, in Sowell's mind, a great American success story. The Italians are covered in Chapter 5.

Chapters 6 and 7 discuss Americans who emigrated from Asia, the Chinese and the Japanese. Many often forget how ruthlessly American society discriminated against Asians. They, unlike other ethnic minorities, succeeded while remaining hidden and unobtrusive in American social life.

Chapter 8 covers the major American group from Africa, the Blacks. They are the only group brought to the United States by force and their extremely long legacy of ruthless oppression has held them back in important respects; yet even after being freed black culture did not effectively develop a culture with values that promoted their self-development. Nonetheless, blacks have improved across the board on most major social metrics. Chapters 9 and 10 cover immigrants from Latin America, particularly Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. Mexican American history is particularly multifaceted, whereas Puerto Rican American history is young.

In Chapter 11, Sowell discusses various implications of his study, emphasizing in particular that cultural values matter, that some cultures adapt more effectively than

others, and that blame for cultural failure cannot always be placed on institutional or social failure. Some groups have triumphed against adversity due to their perseverance, self-reliance, cultural values, and willingness to assimilate; others have not. Political correctness should not prevent social theorists in attending to these and other important facts.

The reader should bear in mind that this book was written in 1981 and that much has changed for the groups discussed in the book.



Chapter I, The American Mosaic

Chapter I, The American Mosaic Summary and Analysis

The United States, it is well-known, is a nation of immigrants. The American people come from every culture, religion and ethnicity and speak the languages of the world. As a result of the diversity of ethnicity in American, there is no standard "minority" model, nor are the ethnic groups here mere colonies of their original counterparts elsewhere. These groups cannot even be properly called minorities, as there is no true majority. The British are the largest ethnic sub-group in the United States, only 15 percent of the US population, Germans come in second at 13 percent and blacks at 11 percent.

Unity and diversity remain in tension today as they have always been. No two groups are alike, in culture, geography, age, income, occupation, and so on. Explaining these differences is difficult. Most people of color earn less than whites, but black ethnic groups like West Indians earn more than ostensibly white groups like Puerto Ricans. Jews arrived penniless in the 19th century and are now the wealthiest group of all. Many ethnic groups exceed the national average, such as the Japanese, Polish, Italian, German and Irish. Age differences track income differences within groups. Many factors influence income, such as education, fertility, longevity, crime, IQ and drug use. All of these features can change as well. Polish IQs have raised an average of twenty-four points in two generations.

Social attitudes have developed as well. Intermarriage between groups have increased, but the road to tolerance has been difficult, with the United States undergoing various race riots and other conflicts. Mutual intolerance, however, has proven destructive.

The groups that arrived in the United States arrived at different times and settled in different places. Scandinavians settled in the mid-west, Mexicans in the south-west, Orientals on the West Coast, and so on. They also have characteristic trades, but differences within ethnic groups are deeply affected by geography—blacks in New York earn twice what blacks in Mississippi earn. Further, technological change influenced these matters as well.



Chapter II, The Irish

Chapter II, The Irish Summary and Analysis

Chapter 2 covers the Irish, who form the first great immigrant wave into American cities. They start to immigrate in the 1820s, but come in droves during the 1840s and 1850s. They take up low-class, labor-intensive jobs in American cities and live in poor conditions; their communities are rife with violence, crime and alcoholism. However, they improve over the generations—their incomes, occupations, IQs and other indicators all rise and they are publicly accepted now.

In the early 19th century, slaves live longer than poor Irish people; they eat better and live in better homes. The Irish are occupied under the British, who dominate them politically and economically and the British oppression of the Irish extends for centuries back into the past. The British destroy the Irish ability to resist, but the Irish develop vast networks of underground civic associations and can organize effectively, a point which proves important later to their political rise in the United States.

The Irish exist more as a low caste in Britain and then the United States. They produce whiskey, which at one point is thought to be cheaper than bread. This leads to widespread drunkenness. Their poverty is increased by widespread famine and crop failure and the potato famine halves Ireland's population between the 1840s and 1914. Immigration is miserable, as well; crossing the ocean is an ordeal.

Most Irish cannot afford the fare to the United States, so lower-middle class Irish come first and send money home. Many lack skills but most speak English and around half are literate. They have a sense of identity as well.

The original Irish emigrants are the Scotch-Irish, however, the Protestant Irish from Ulster County; they consider themselves distinct from later, Celtic immigrants. They settle between central Pennsylvania and the Carolinas, with names that begin with "Mac." They are often independent farms and build many church and schools. They are eventually absorbed into the general American identity since they make no attempt to maintain their cultural identity.

Those people known as the Irish, then, are Celtic-Irish, and over half go to Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania and Illinois. More Irish people live in New York than Dublin. In the 19th century, 4 million Irish come to the United States and live overwhelmingly in cities. They are spread largely through participating in infrastructure building projects. Houses are stuffed with multiple families and cleanliness is not a value or even reasonably possible. Alcoholism and fighting are brought over from Ireland and half of those arrested in New York in the 1850s are from this group. However, the Irish often try to improve themselves, such as through temperance societies and emigrant aid groups, along with the Catholic Church.



Irish jobs are difficult, dangerous and often filthy. Unskilled labor is also unsteady; many live on charity and many Irish children are orphans. The Irish, however, donate massive amounts of money to home and the Catholic Church. Their economic conditions are perhaps worse than any group in American history.

There have been first-generation Irish immigrants in the United States since the original immigrations, but most Irish stay in America and give birth to further generations. They initially form voting blocks in large cities and have influence as early as the 1830s. Irish mayors begin to be elected in Boston in the 1880s. They run the Tammany political machine, along with many other big city political machines; this continues to the present day. The Irish change city politics forever and often foster corruption in the political process.

Culturally, they have many advantages suited for politics, such as strong group identity and organizational prowess. They also have the advantage of preferring the separation of church and state, unlike other Catholics and can act independently of the Catholic Church which is disliked by most Anglo-Americans. While the Know-Nothing movement and other anti-Irish populist sentiment are common, the Irish weather it all.

The Irish rise up the economic ladder, starting at the bottom rungs. As they rise, internal differentiation spreads within Irish social classes. Other ethnic groups begin to replace the Irish in low-class, unskilled jobs. The Irish are often unionized, fighting against un-unionized Italians and blacks who work for lower wages. They seldom pursue entrepreneurship or own businesses, although there are exceptions. They do best in areas not requiring business prowess or academic education—sports, entertainment, law enforcement, and popular writing.

The Irish conflict with other ethnic groups quite fiercely, particularly blacks, Germans, Jews and Italians and they make it difficult for non-Irish to advance in Irish-controlled institutions like the Catholic Church, political machines, and unions. However, the Catholic Church does help to reconcile the Irish to other Catholic ethnic groups like the Italians and Catholic schools often prove superior to public schools.

Today, half of Irish people marry outside of their ethnic groups; much of their ethnic identity has ebbed away, although far from all of it. They have incomes 5% above the national average, their education levels are average, IQ scores are above average, but their high alcoholism rates continue. They are 8% of the US population and vote about the same as most Americans.



Chapter III, The Germans

Chapter III, The Germans Summary and Analysis

25 million Americans have German ancestors, second only to those descended from the British. They have played major roles in American education, industry, defense, eating and so on. Their language continues to influence the country as well. Germanic military practices has given the United States some of its best generals. Large scale German immigration is extended across American history, from colonial America through the 19th century. Some have been Catholic, some Protestant, others Jewish, and German immigrants came from different classes and regions as well.

Much German immigration occurs before Germany exists, yet the German peoples already have an ancient history. German regions are at the forefront of science, art, music, philosophy and so on. They are among the most civilized people in history. German immigration flowed with European historical events, such as the Reformation, Counter-Reformation, French Revolution, Napoleonic Wars and so on. Many political refugees flee to the United States as well.

The first Germans come among the Dutch in 1620s in the area that is to be New York; and in 1683, Mennonites settle in Germantown, leading to the "Pennsylvania Dutch" culture, which is mostly Mennonite and Amish. Germans come in the early and late 18th centuries as well. Ocean travel is difficult, and most Germans come over as indentured servants; the emigrants are often preyed upon by locals. However, Germans keep coming throughout the 18th century.

Germans work hard and are thorough and thrifty; they quickly develop highly technical skills, scientifically, intellectually and so on. Their discipline and perseverance makes this possible. They are usually obedient to authority and ready to fight (two respects in which the Pennsylvania Dutch differ). The Germans often live in isolated religious communities throughout the country, although many of the early American German immigrants live in Pennsylvania. Many Germans fight in the revolution, particularly Reformed and Lutheran Germans. Some Germans are prominent in politics, but not many.

Few Germans emigrate in the early 19th century, but massive numbers come during the 1848 revolutions and thereafter. German states ease restrictions on emigration, farming is shrinking and people need to change jobs, German dictators force people out and many German authors paint idealistic pictures of American life. 5 million Germans come to the United States in the 19th century, and initially three quarters of them are men. Many Germans work the countryside but often form communities along the Mississippi, the Missouri, the Ohio, and so on. They settle in cities like Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Milwaukee. 19th century Germans tend to settle in the mid-west and lead exploration of the Pacific Northwest. The German culture is always promoted and perpetuated. Numerous German-language publications flourish and many of their cultural artifacts—



Christmas trees, frankfurters, hamburgers and so on, melt into mainstream American culture. German union workers bring many skills to the United States, including the manufacture of beer (Anheuser-Busch, Miller, Pabst, all German).

German communities promote innocent public family entertainment like card playing, swimming, bowling, and so on, along with marching bands and orchestras. Germans start the first kindergartens and German Lutherans and Catholics start their own parochial schools. Most early Germans are Protestant, but in the 19th century, they are mostly Lutheran and Catholic. German Lutherans form the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, a more conservative body of Lutherans that exists to this day. German frontiersmen often get along with Native Americans and Germans fight on both sides in the Civil War (though most with the North).

As the 20th century began, German Americans are in a good position in American society, but anti-German propaganda in World War I and II severely diminishes their public status, forcing a lot of German cultural practices out of the public. Many German organizations, streets, schools and cities change their names. In the 20th century, Germans assimilate, and their children start to grow up in homes with English as the primary language spoken. Many illustrious Germans come to the United States before, during and after World War II, but these are mostly scientists, writers, scholars, and so on. Few German-Americans sympathize with the Nazis, and most of them are liberal and Democratic.

Today, German Americans have largely assimilated. In 1972, they are 13% of the population, with incomes 11% higher than average; their ages and education levels are the same as the national average.

Chapter IV, The Jews

Chapter IV, The Jews Summary and Analysis

Jewish immigrants come from all over the world, but most originate from Russia, Poland and other Eastern European countries. In fact, in the forty years between 1880 and 1920, one-third of Eastern European Jews migrate to the United States. Jews share a common ethnic and religious identity that goes back for centuries to ancient Israel. They have typically been cultural outsiders and have been dispersed from their home country since 70 A.D.

Jews are widely persecuted throughout their history, and are usually only protected by ruling elites who need their unique services. Jews are often unsafe outside of their own ghettos and have to keep their traditions alive while severed from one another. European Jews always respect learning, especially religious learning. Mothers want their daughters to marry learned men. Jews are typically skilled workers, clean, generous and have unusually low rates of alcoholism. When restrictions on Jews relax, they tend to assimilate. Jews have been unusually influential for their numbers.

Sephardic Jews are the first immigrants to the United States, coming from Spain and Portugal. They start to migrate due to their expulsion in 1492. They move to Portugal and Holland and follow colonization to the United States, especially when British policy becomes tolerant in the seventeenth century. Sephardic Jews are not as focused on learning as their Ashkenazi Jewish relations, but are excellent businessmen.

German Jews follow Sephardic Jews and grow over time. They have their own temples and immigrate in large numbers, increasing the population of Jews in the United States from 3000 in 1776 to over half a million in 1880; most come from Germany. The German Jews spread throughout the country; this leads to Jews being accepted.

Eastern European Jews come next, after having been tolerated for centuries in some Eastern European nations; the 19th century brings Jewish pogroms. These Jews are highly literate and urban. The Eastern European Jews add to the German Jewish majority; they concentrate in New York City, particularly the lower east side. They are initially poorer and less well educated and speak Yiddish. German Jews are embarrassed by them; they urge Eastern European Jews to assimilate.

Economic conditions for immigrant Jews are initially difficult; they often engage in manual, skilled occupations. Eastern European have trouble spreading out across the country, as their religion restricts their practices, as do their linguistic differences. They focus on sweatshop textile work. Many Jews peddle goods, but two-thirds of Jews are skilled workers.

Jewish culture helps many Jews to escape poverty and they resist alcoholism and have lower death rates than other groups. Their religious culture promotes health and many



Eastern European Jews follow German Jews in highly valuing education. Many of them, however, have educational issues due to linguistic difficulties and a culture that does not promote restrained manners.

The upward movement of Jews in the United States has no parallel. The number of Jewish physicians exploded, doubling in ten years between 1891 and 1907. Many move to high collar jobs and peddling declines. 20% of Jewish men are professionals in 1950, double the national average and three times as many Jews are business owners as are ordinary Americans. The richer Jews become, the more they spread out, particularly within New York City. Most are concentrated in the Northeast.

Jews also come to be better educated and have higher IQs, with Jewish men's IQs a full third higher than the average American man. One-fourth of all Nobel prizes in the United States have been won by Jews, despite being only 3% of the population. Jews become writers, scientists, movie producers, comedians, musicians, and millionaires. Mostly Jews avoid agriculture and have little impact in sports but become more prominent in politics as time progresses. They are early socialists but later liberal. They do this all the while opposing anti-Semitism, which is widespread.

Sowell speculates that it is Jewish cultural values that promotes their success culturally and economically. Socially, they are more likely to marry and less likely to divorce; they often intermarry but this is rarer than in other ethnic groups. The Jewish family used to be among the largest but now is among the smallest. They tend to have peaceful and cooperative relationships with other groups and often adopt ideologies that purport to protect the "underdog," like socialism, anarchism and liberalism. However, this comes to be expressed through a generic center-left liberalism in the present day.

After the Holocaust, Jewish identity becomes more pronounced and Jewish culture more unified. They feel as if they cannot relax and strongly support the establishment of the state of Israel. Philanthropy in the Jewish community highly favors it. Jewish identity has also somewhat migrated away from its tie to Judaism.

Today Jewish families' incomes are the highest of any group at around 72% above average; they tend to be older and better educated, but Jews earn more even without more education. Sowell regards the Jewish experience in the United States as the classic American success story.



Chapter V, The Italians

Chapter V, The Italians Summary and Analysis

Italian Americans descend from Southern Italian immigrants and cultural differences among Italians are important. Italian Americans come in large numbers to the United States, more than all other immigrants to the Western Hemisphere put together. Italians have a rich and ancient history, but Italy is always divided between the better educated and more industrious North from the more rural South. It has weaknesses agriculturally and industrially due to geographic conditions.

The people of the South have an unusual history of great impoverishment and subjugation. Initiative is discouraged and the poor are oppressed. Many leave when they have the chance and resemble the Irish in various respects. Some of their institutions, like the vendetta and the Mafia, are ways of striking back; they have strong familial ties as well. They often feel alienated from organized religion and instead defend family at all costs. Education is downplayed due to a history of being forced into education by others. Spirituality often represented a sense of being out of control of reality. Wine drinking is routine, but excess drinking is discouraged.

Northern Italian migration in the 19th century is not significant, but southern Italian migration is massive. They often immigrate and then return home with new wealth. While in America, Italians maintain tight family ties and are somewhat isolated. They also fight with other ethnic groups. They do not assimilate well and mostly intermarried.

Most Italian immigrants are laborers, factory hands, and miners. They sometimes are sailors, masons, and tailors as well. They almost never work service jobs and do better than the Irish due to their sobriety. However, they are still poor. Italian Americans increase in size in this time as well. Padrones, or organizers and supervisors, begin to take control of Italian integration and employment. This system lasts until World War I. They often grow prosperous.

Family remains the strongest institution, with little competition from Rome. They rarely contribute to the church; religion is highly individual, as the Southern Italians are anti-clerical. They often organize mutual aid societies and have organization power, along with labor unions. Italians have lower rates of crime as well, apart from the mafia.

Some Italian values and practices change with time; Italians move up and divorce is rare. Simple living is common and the family patriarchal. They are slow to endorse formal education and are often truant. Italians move up in skilled labor, however and move up the occupational ladder; they often take jobs as municipal employees. They often work harder than other ethnic groups and begin to exceed the Irish in business ownership. As they grow richer, social and economic differentiation spread; middle-class Italians tend to assimilate and the family structure shrinks. They also become more

reliant on organized crime, particularly during Prohibition. Italians often participate in sports, entertainment, and law enforcement.

Italian Americans today match the average American on most important metrics. They tend to have higher incomes but this is achieved, unusually, through channels not requiring education. They save money as well. Italians mostly lack national loyalty or intergroup identity. They have no problem invading Italy in World War II. Their political successes are a late achievement. They are often hostile to blacks, despite getting along with them in the nineteenth century.



Chapter VI, The Chinese

Chapter VI, The Chinese Summary and Analysis

Chinese immigrants have left China for nations all over the world, not just the United States. They have typically become successful business people particularly in societies that are poor. However, this has bred mass resentment in many cases. The story of the Chinese American is unique but is part of a larger story of worldwide Chinese immigration.

China is an ancient nation, but overseas Chinese are a phenomenon that dates back centuries due to fluctuations in China's prosperity. Chinese immigrants to the United States come primarily from the province of Kwantung in the south. The Chinese emphasize the importance of learning for centuries.

The original Chinese immigrants to the United States are hardworking agricultural and railroad laborers. They are willing to work for less than many whites. The first immigrants are almost all male. Americans resist Chinese immigration, as they are both non-white and non-Christian; they are different in every respect and hated as competitors. They are attacked routinely; exclusion from American society devastates Chinese immigrants. The lives of immigrants are often destroyed. Even where the Chinese are tolerated, they are required to take the most menial jobs but do help to construct the Central Pacific railroad. The Chinese response to intense segregation is to hide and withdraw from public life; Chinatowns develop all over the country as a result. Chinese gangs, the tongs, often divide territory. Despite the overwhelming majority of Chinese immigrants being male, clan and social structures are constructed.

As the generations pass, a small generation of children grows up and eases the sex imbalance. Many Chinese women are smuggled to the United States; crime, sexual and drug-related, often flourishes among unmarried men. Crime rates fall as the sex imbalance rights itself and laxer immigration laws help as well. Chinese communities begin to care for their own poor and resist federal aid. Younger Chinese gradually take places as professionals as an "entering wedge" that grows over time. Chinese economic power in the United States increases primarily within Chinatowns. Their economic rise is like that of Jews—spectacular and most Chinese today do not live in Chinatowns. Chinatowns have notoriously poor social conditions but many Chinese leaders begin to rehabilitate them. While Chinese children face a language barrier, they have higher than average IQs.

When the Chinese are overcome by the Communists in 1949, many flee to Hong Kong and the United States. These Chinese are very different and do not speak the same dialect as previous immigrants but do not quite speak English either. Regionalism keeps them from integrating with other Chinese and they are already partly Westernized. Hong Kong youth are also often violent and form gangs. Adult Hong Kong Chinese are

hardworking, but the children are different and Hong Kong Chinese are still often a problem for the Chinese today.

Chinese Americans have higher incomes than the average American and 25% of Chinese in the United States are either in scientific or other professional work. They have faced worse discrimination than almost any other social class but have succeeded nonetheless. They work harder and are better educated; as a result, they can compete. The Chinese have avoided politics until only very recently and have largely avoided poverty, save in certain pockets. The sex balance has been largely rectified.



Chapter VII, The Japanese

Chapter VII, The Japanese Summary and Analysis

The Japanese have suffered greatly despite a great interest in becoming part of American society. Americans lump them with the Chinese but they are strikingly different. Japanese people begin to come to the United States in the late 19th century from the time of the Meiji Restoration in 1868. It is for most of history, a deeply isolated nation. When they open up, they become obsessed with the West. The Japanese look to the United States as a great benefactor.

The Japanese often have ambivalence attitudes towards Americans, some seeing them as superiors others as inferiors. Much of the Meiji Era is devoted to taking feudalism apart and modernizing. Japanese population explodes 30% in a single generation. Standards of living rise quickly. Many Japanese look to other countries for a home. They often emigrate via family ties and economic conditions force Japan to relax immigration restrictions in the late 19th century.

Japanese are initially greeted positively in the United States. They are great workers, kind and healthy. They mostly start as agricultural laborers, others as personal servants. They work for low wages, and often work together. They are always thrifty and excellent savers. This leads unions to discriminate against them. Japanese immigration is limited in 195 as the Japanese are becoming a world power.

Japanese immigrants are not the poor of Japan; this is unique for American ethnic immigrants. These are mostly middle class Japanese looking to make a life for themselves. They are educated and enjoy reading. They almost universally write and read. Immigration is small as well, but they do become 20% of the population in Hawaii. In California, the Japanese become well-known for entrepreneurship and contract gardening. They move quickly to running small business, enabled partly by their savings. Like the Chinese, they avoid politics and their early families are large, their birthrate being four times that of whites. Their families are always stable and their children are obedient and polite in school. Their achievements are excellent, as are their IQs. There is little hint of individualism in their familial structure.

There is a generation gap between first and second generation Japanese-Americans, due partly to the imbalance of men to women, leading men to reproduce later in life. Older immigrants are Buddhists while many younger generation Japanese are Christian. The Japanese try to resist assimilation.

During World War II, many Japanese Americans are forcibly interned by the United States. Americans are furious and often attack Japanese-Americans. FDR signw the order to "evacuate" Japanese to camps, although not in Hawaii. Internment devastates the Japanese, particularly financially; they lose 400 million dollars in assets in terms of 1942 dollars. They accept internment and live impoverished lives there. 300,000

Japanese Americans fight in World War II anyway and often are interpreters. This changes their history and when the internment camps are declared unconstitutional in 1944, the younger generation begin a rapid rise up social and economic ladders.

After the war, Japanese Americans have trouble resuming their lives as before; the older generation—the Issei—are unable to adapt, but the younger generation—the Nisei—are more fortunate, being well-educated and speaking English. In 1959, Japanese Americans typically earn the same as whites, only 15 years after internment. The Nisei also begin to predominantly enter professional fields. Racism against them declines and intermarriage increases. The third generation—the Sansei—will not remember internment and 88% of them become professionals.

Today there are 600,000 Japanese Americans, 33% in Hawaii and another 33% in California. Most are native born although most are second-generation. They have risen up the economic ladder because they work more, harder and are better educated. They have smaller families than most Americans, which makes them richer. The Japanese Americans are assimilating. They have made many important contributions to American life, particularly in music and science.



Chapter VIII, The Blacks

Chapter VIII, The Blacks Summary and Analysis

Blacks are the only ethnic group brought to the United States against their will. Initially, they are from all over Africa and are among the oldest Americans, but are not free until 1863. As a result their history is quite different and their African histories are largely erased. 10 million African slaves are shipped around the world, 400,000 of which end up in the United States; the US had the most slaves of any Western nation.

Slaves are horribly treated but have regular access to low-quality food and housing comparable to the European working class. The slaves are kept in captivity through keeping them completely ignorant and dependent on slave owners. Slaves develop "foot-dragging" and "work-evading" practices because they are under control.

Blacks also develop a strong sense of racial solidarity. Slave communities develop strong community norms; breaking them means severe ostracism. Slaves have certain manners and mores, along with their own cultural products, like Negro spirituals, jazz, the blues, and so on. They focus on the family and have two-parent families. Slave owners like family relationships because they promote stability. Slavery also varies across regions but are concentrated in the South; slaves also manage crops, particularly cotton, sugar, rice, wheat and corn.

American slavery is unique. It is never wholly politically accepted and when England abolishes slavery, this puts pressure on the United States. The controversy over slavery splits the country and the United States is founded based on political principles incompatible with slavery.

Slavery has a profound genetic, linguistic, and cultural legacy; freed blacks found a social hierarchy rooted in their occupational roles under slavery (house vs. field slaves) and their degree of white ancestry. In 1860, half a million blacks are free and a few years later they all are. However, even freed blacks are ruthlessly oppressed. Freedom comes as a shock to the black community and they migrate en masse.

Many blacks continue to do agricultural work, but women begin to stay at home, and whites lose their house servants. Blacks are wholly destitute and therefore still at the mercy of whites. For centuries blacks develop norms shirking work and whites breed in them a lack of initiative; freedom does not change this immediately. Reconstruction leads to increased political power for blacks but it is hotly resisted by whites in various ways, particularly through the Ku Klux Klan. Freed slaves also are wholly illiterate and education is beyond most blacks' imagination. White religious groups like Catholics and Quakers educate blacks, however. Blacks flocked to be educated all over the country, raising them from 100% illiteracy to 75% literate in fifty years.



After freedom, black elites arise, including various musicians, scientists, writers and politicians, including Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington. Jim Crow brings blacks a step back in terms of oppression, and some black achievements are undone. Blacks flee in an exodus from the South to many cities in the North. Black ghettos like Harlem form all over the country in cities. The migration significantly uproots black social life and leads to a social pathology in the form of crime, divorce, drug addiction, and so on.

The black family is strong in the beginning of the 20th century, but middle class blacks have fewer children than poor blacks, but this difference is more pronounced than in other ethnicities. Black education has to struggle; light-complexioned blacks do well in college, but darker blacks have trouble entering higher education until the G.I. Bill. Their lack of adequate secondary education prevents them from doing well; progress is slow and painful, but blacks make many great cultural achievements.

In the early 20th century, many blacks emigrate from the West Indies as well and many famous blacks number among the descendants of these groups. Slavery in the West Indies is worse than it is in the South but blacks do really reproduce themselves. Western Indian blacks are emancipated a generation earlier than blacks in the United States and they are prepared for freedom. They face similar economic challenges to American blacks. When Western Indian blacks migrate they begin to develop antagonistic relationships with American blacks. Restrictions on immigration slows their migration in the 20s, however. West Indians have significant advantages over American blacks in terms of jobs and income, with incomes 52% higher than American blacks. Since they have been relatively successful, they have become relatively "invisible" as a group.

Today black Americans still face important challenges. Fights for racial justice have been largely successful but hard and blacks have risen in income, jobs, education, and so on. Their health levels have increased as well. However, in some areas, blacks have moved backwards. The black family has disintegrated; but this phenomenon is not due to slavery, as the black family was fairly strong early in the 20th century and right after slavery ended. Unemployment has also exploded, but this was not common before. Government interventions of various types have made overcoming these challenges more difficult. Despite this, blacks share a role in every major American Institution.

Chapter IX, The Puerto Ricans

Chapter IX, The Puerto Ricans Summary and Analysis

Puerto Ricans have been part of the United States indirectly for some time, but as American immigrants their presence is rather new. They repeat many of the patterns of enclave living of other ethnic groups. They are multicolored and arrived in the United States with the welfare state in place. Puerto Rican progress is relative to the period it is measured from.

Since Puerto Rico has been a Western possession since the late 15th century, it has a large range of races and racial mixtures. Puerto Rico only achieves independence from Spain in the late 19th century and Americans exercise varying degrees of control since then. Economic development in Puerto Rico begins in earnest after World War II, with family incomes increasing six fold between 1940 and 1966. Their standard of living is much lower than the United States, but their lives are greatly improved.

After World War II, many come to the United States. Between 1930 and 1950, over 600,000 came to the United States, the large majority of which are concentrated in New York. Migration varies with the state of the American economy. Puerto Rico's economy has been basically primitive agriculture for centuries, and malnutrition and disease are widespread. High fertility is common and this continues in the United States. Machismo among men is common. Puerto Ricans as a whole have next to no intellectual tradition and face problems with linguistic integration into the United States. They face high rates of crime, violence and dependence on public charity and welfare.

Puerto Rican migrants are typically from the poorer classes and are unskilled. Many have never worked at all and are very young; they tend to come from rural areas. Very few hold professional positions and continue to hold mostly unskilled jobs. Their youth is one obstacle. Twenty percent of Puerto Rican families have no income from a working parent. It is unclear how much of their plight is due to discrimination. Most Puerto Ricans do not participate in politics, but when they vote they vote for Democrats.

Puerto Ricans are the immigrants in the book who come to the United States latest, so they have had the least amount of time to make progress. Their progress is hard to measure but they have had strong upward movement in previous decades and do relatively well on reading and IQ tests. They are also assimilating. Increased wealth reduces family size. Understanding Puerto Rican progress must be understood against the backdrop of their very young age.

Chapter X, The Mexicans

Chapter X, The Mexicans Summary and Analysis

Mexican immigrants are among the oldest and newest to the United States and no one name covers their ancestries, as their ancestries differ. Most live in the Southwest and their culture extends back for centuries from Spain and Central Americans. Spanish imperialism in Mexico creates a class stratified society largely on racial and economic grounds, with the whiter groups holding more elite positions. Racial mixtures are widespread.

Mexican immigration has three major waves. The first wave comes in the early 20th century to work on the railroad and make primitive settlements around the area. They mostly work for the railroad, farmers and mined. They remain uneducated and work twelve to fourteen hour days. However, they still make double and triple the money that they would make in Mexico. Controlling their movement proves pointless. These people do not stay but are transient. They are hated for various reasons by locals due to skin color, and other factors. Mexican-Americans hate them too because they have already been accepted into American society. The first wave has large families as well. A campaign to deport Mexicans moves forward in the 1930s and many are sent home, some of which have never been to Mexico before.

The second wave comes after World War II, which absorbs millions of Americans into the military, generating a labor shortage. Mexicans are brought in to work in war time. Their numbers grow from 50,000 to 400,000 between 1945 and the late 50s. However, many of them are expelled in the early 50s.

The third wave begins with the change of immigration laws in the mid-60s; this immigration continues to the present day. Many illegal immigrants come in with legal immigrants, still securing higher paying jobs than those in Mexico. Mexican government policies have encouraged immigration as well, particularly with lax emigration policies.

Mexican-American populations are varied and dispersed, although they are located mostly in the Southwest. The three waves have produced difference between Mexicans regarding class, education, jobs, and so on. Many Mexicans have moved to cities; most rich Mexicans are second, third and fourth generation immigrants. First-generation Mexicans tend to be poor. However, income comparisons are difficult; despite this, however, incomes have risen substantially and are approaching the US average. Mexican families are still large and have low per capita incomes. Numbers are also held down by illegality.

Mexican families are warm to one another and hostiles to those outside. They stick together in groups and have few family break-ups for their income level. They have high fertility and Spanish is still the primary language in half of Mexican homes. The primary language has an impact on educational and economic achievement.

Mexican goals and values rarely focus on education; their numbers reflect this. Acculturation is often difficult for them; they are also subject to a variety of diseases and unusually high levels of fatal automobile accidents. Politically, Mexicans are largely invisible until recently. Figures such as Cesar Chavez brings Mexican political power into fashion but Mexicans still do not participate in politics as much as they could.

Today Mexican-Americans exhibit different levels of progress according to the wave in which they entered the country. Latin American culture is increasingly accepted and Mexican Americans reach into new professions and activities as time progresses. Half of Mexican Americans are native born.



Chapter XI, Implications

Chapter XI, Implications Summary and Analysis

Ethnic identity history can teach many lessons. Ethnic groups teach individualistic cultures like those of the United States that social groups and social consciousness have a major impact on the individual; ethnic differences also caused serious social problems.

Looking for cause and effect, however, is difficult. It is hard to say what the causal relationship is between bigotry and poverty and personal merit alone does not determine one's fortune. Many of the most successful ethnic minorities avoided politics. Nonetheless, patterns appear in history.

These patterns include, for one, that all classes have grown richer over time, are better represented and live longer. Every ethnic group is better off on almost any measure. Yet comparing these groups is difficult due to their very different histories. Comparing black progress to Puerto Rican progress can be very misleading.

Another pattern is the process of newer ethnicities replacing older ones as the older ethnicities climb the social and economic ladder. Ethnic secession is common among lower classes but as these classes rise they tend to assimilate. Ethnic secession can have good and bad effects.

A major pattern is the relationship between cultural attitudes towards learning and self-improvement on the one hand and actual achievement on the other. The Jews contrast strikingly with groups that do not emphasize learning and achievement or hard work, for instance. Family values also play an important role. Strong families produce healthier and wealthier individuals. Yet how families are formed matters as well. It also appears that increasing economic progress raises IQ levels as time moves forward.

Culture matters enormously; human capital is very important. Cultural values can promote the accumulation of human capital like skills and education. Thrift mattered as well to economic progress. Minority groups that do not value hard work and have bad work attitudes do poorly. Educational success also requires discipline and focus.

Sowell emphasizes that cultures are not better or worse than one another; instead, they are simply better or less well equipped for certain circumstances. Jews were particularly well-suited to the United States but before had had major failures, particularly in farming.

Acculturation is not a one-way process. Cultures assimilate but they also change American culture generally. Intragroup differences have an important impact. Older generations are more traditional, focused on their culture and discourage assimilation. These differences often separate generations. Intergroup hostility is often an



impediment to progress, particularly among groups at the same level of socioeconomic status.

Discrimination has a clear impact but the concept of discrimination is diverse; employer discrimination does not really explain income differences between ethnic groups; instead, they better explain differences within ethnic groups. Group differences are also not merely the result of discrimination. Groups are not necessarily held back by discrimination but it can still have a devastating psychological impact.

Ethnic identity is important to some ethnic groups but not others and varies within ethnic groups as well. It is hard to explain the idea of ethnic identity clearly. Making cultural uniqueness an issue has not clearly aided ethnic minorities' progress.

Sowell ends by arguing that political correctness can keep historians and social theorists from discussing certain important causal factors, such as the cleanliness of a culture, its IQ level, and so on. Looking at these facts is important to understanding group progress. Whitewashing history hides the achievements of those minorities who struggle to improve themselves. Group progress is not the result of society, but is often driven by mechanisms internal to the ethnic group. One cannot look at the progress of ethnic minorities simply, as a mere "morality play." It is too diverse for this, too internal to the human spirit.



Characters

The Jews

Sowell describes the Jewish experience in America as "the classic American success story." Jews come to the United States initially from Spain and Portugal; Sephardic Jews come to the United States in its colonial days to escape oppression. However, their numbers are relatively small. In the 19th century, German Jews, Ashkenazim, immigrated to the United States due to renewed persecution and political revolution. They are discriminated against but quickly adapt to American circumstances.

Jewish culture has, for centuries, emphasized learning and business skill which makes them particularly well-suited to advance in American society. Later, when Eastern European Jews begin to immigrate to the United States, tensions arise between them and German Jews, who are more assimilated into American society. These tensions sometimes result in German Jews attempting to drive Eastern European Jews into assimilation.

Economic conditions for immigrant Jews are initially difficult, with many Jews taking up peddling and manual, skilled occupation. Some face linguistic challenges, but Jewish culture emphasizes charity to fellow Jews and resists alcoholism. The upward movement of the Jews is nothing short of extraordinary. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Jews move into professional jobs and proprietorship en masse. Jews have won 25% of all American Nobel prizes, while being 3% of the American population.

Today Jewish families' incomes are the highest of any group at around 72% above average; they tend to be older and better educated, but Jews earn more without more education. Sowell regards the Jewish experience in the United States as the classic American success story.

The Blacks

Blacks are the only ethnic group brought to the United States against their will. As a result their history is quite different and their African histories are largely erased. The black family is strong in the beginning of the 20th century, but middle class blacks have fewer children than poor blacks, but this difference is more pronounced than in other ethnicities. Black education has to struggle; light-complexioned blacks do well in college, but darker blacks have trouble entering higher education until the G.I. Bill. Their lack of adequate secondary education prevents them from doing well; progress is slow and painful, but blacks make many great cultural achievements.

Sowell also emphasizes the often-overlooked contribution of West Indian immigrant blacks to the black American experience.



Today black Americans still face important challenges. Fights for racial justice have been largely successful but hard won and blacks have risen in income, jobs, education, and so on. Their health levels have increased as well. However, in some areas, blacks have moved backwards. The black family has disintegrated; but this phenomenon is not due to slavery, as the black family was fairly strong early in the 20th century and right after slavery ended. Unemployment has also exploded, but this was not common before. Government interventions of various types have made overcoming these challenges more difficult. Despite this, blacks share a role in every major American Institution.

The Irish

Irish immigrants initially face great discrimination, in part due to the fact that they come to the United States in massive numbers. They struggle against poverty, poor education and crime and eventually are largely integrated into American society.

The Germans

German immigrants to the United States arrive over a long period of time; as a result, they have little ethnic identity and largely assimilate into American culture at large, particularly due to the anti-German sentiment brought about by World War I and World War II.

The Italians

Italian immigrants come mostly from Southern Italy and many return to Italy after spending some time in the United States. Italian communities do not always emphasize education but Italians are nonetheless successful in various occupations that do not require much education.

The Chinese

Chinese immigrants settle mostly on the West Coast and struggle against ruthless discrimination quietly and without getting involved in politics. They succeed economically against the odds.

The Japanese

The Japanese are eager to participate in American life, but resistance by the American population, especially during World War II, makes this difficult.



The Puerto Ricans

Puerto Ricans are among the most recent immigrant groups to come to the United States; they are typically unskilled, poor and extremely young.

The Mexicans

Mexican immigrants are the major source of immigrant at present; but they are very different from one another, having come to the United States in three major waves over the last 150 years.

Bigots and Oppressors

Oppressors of American ethnic minorities come not only from the majority white population but from other ethnic groups as well. It is not clear the extent to which bigotry and oppression impedes economic progress, despite the adverse psychological impact it almost always has.

First-Generation Immigrants

First-Generation immigrants resist assimilation and have linguistic difficulties. They often engage in cultural secession, forming ethnic communities.

Second-Generation Immigrants

Second-generation immigrants tend to assimilate more readily, as they know the language and the broader American culture that is available to them.



Objects/Places

The American Mosaic

The American mosaic is Sowell's concept representing the fact that the United States is a nation of ethnic minorities, with no ethnic group containing even more than 20% of the population.

Ireland

The country of origin for Irish immigrants.

Germany

The country of origin for German immigrants and German Jews.

Eastern Europe

Many Jewish immigrants come from Eastern Europe, following Sephardic and German Jewish immigrants.

Southern Italy and Sicily

Most Italian immigrants emigrate from Southern Italy and Sicily.

China, particularly the Toishan District of Kwantung Provinc

Almost all Chinese immigrants come from the Toishan District of Kwantung Province in China.

Africa

The continent where African slaves are taken; African Americans have ancestors all over the continent.

Puerto Rico

The American protectorate where Puerto Rican immigrants originate.



Mexico

The country of origin for Mexican immigrants.

The United States

The major country in the book, all the relevant immigrant groups have the United States as their destination.

The South

The location of most American blacks, due to slavery.

The Southwest

The location of most Mexican immigrants, due to its proximity to Mexico.

Cities

Many ethnic minorities settle in or migrate to cities, including the Irish, the Jews and, after World War II, blacks.

Income

The major measure of economic progress for ethnic groups.

IQ

Sowell talks a lot about rising IQ levels associated with the progress of ethnic groups.

Divorce Rates

Strong families, on Sowell's views, promote ethnic progress. Divorce rates are signs of family break-up.

Successful Cultural Values

Hard-work, education, thrift, hygiene, self-control and an aversion to alcoholism all promote ethnic progress in the United States.

Health

One of the more important measures of ethnic progress.

Themes

Ethnic Differences

Sowell argues that often ethnicities are approached monolithically and ethnic minorities are treated almost exclusively according to their similarities, while acknowledging their differences becomes politically incorrect. One of the points of *Ethnic America: A History* is to emphasize ethnic differences in an attempt to explain why some immigrant groups have succeeded in the United States and why others struggle.

One profound contrast in the United States' history of immigration is the contrast between Jews and blacks. Blacks have been ruthlessly oppressed for centuries in the United States; they were originally deliberately taught to be dependent on their owners. However, after freedom, many blacks resisted developing the kind of culture that would help them to make progress in the United States—a culture often associated with whites that emphasized learning, hard work, saving, and family unity. As a result, Sowell (who is himself a member of this group) argues that the black community suffers vis-à-vis other groups. The Jews, on the other hand, while as oppressed in the United States as blacks, have suffered systematic oppression for millennia, yet their emphasis on thrift, hard-work, business, and learning caused them to exceed the successes of any other American ethnic group.

Sowell also emphasizes the differences within ethnic groups, which he notices is often ignored. Age differences between groups make a large difference, as richer people tend to be older. Jews are relatively old in age, whereas Puerto Ricans are extremely young. Within groups, Mexican Americans derive from three major waves of immigration; they possess different attributes as a result. Two different waves of Japanese immigrants exhibit different features as well.

The Complexities of Ethnic Groups

Sowell sets out to describe the complexities of ethnic groups over and above their differences within themselves and better each other. Ethnic groups have complex histories that vary significantly. Blacks not only suffer from a legacy of slavery but from a resistance to embracing values that would help them progress in American society. The presence of West Indian blacks is often ignored or obscured in the history of black American.

Jews exhibit important tensions within their own group between German Jews who immigrate earlier and Eastern European Jews who immigrate later. German Jews gain some acceptance in American society by assimilating and are threatened by the resistance of Eastern European Jews to assimilate so much that they partly finance programs that will help Eastern European Jews assimilate.



Many Chinese immigrants and Japanese immigrants are lumped together as Asian immigrants and their unique histories of oppression are often downplayed or ignored. Chinese immigrants face enormous discrimination but because they suffer it quietly, it is forgotten. Japanese immigrants, it is often forgotten, are eager to join American society. Yet Americans sometimes refuse to remember that the government forcibly interned Japanese Americans between 1942 and 1944 which destroyed hundreds of millions of dollars in Japanese assets—in 1942 dollars.

The importance of ethnic complexities is also ignored in terms of politically incorrect measurement metrics, such as IQ and hygiene. Many immigrant groups remain in poor health because their cultures do not promote good hygiene. One reason for Jewish longevity is a millennia-old culture of cleanliness. Irish suffer early on for having a culture that does not prize hygiene. Sowell also points out that when IQ is ignored, the impressive increases in IQ among ethnic minorities are ignored as well.

Discrimination and Political Correctness

Sowell argues that determining the causes of ethnic progress or the lack thereof is hard to determine. We have data, although it is often measured in misleading ways, but drawing cause and effect relations between aspects of the data is complex. However, Sowell believes that we know enough to refute the common view on the left that lack of economic progress is due largely to discrimination.

While the relative lack of black progress is due partly to discrimination, other groups have weathered discrimination extremely well in economic terms (if not in psychological terms). The Chinese and the Jews endure intense discrimination, and they not only survive but thrive. Sowell points out that the difficulties facing black culture are not due merely to a legacy of discrimination, but of cultural failings.

Political Correctness, Sowell argues towards the end of the book, prevents social scientists from examining hypotheses that might shed light on ethnic progress. A resistance to consider hygiene habits of ethnic groups or their IQ level often obscures important factors that contribute to their economic, political and cultural progress. Further, thrift is often ignored as a factor in development, whereas political participation is often overemphasized.

Sowell believes that political correctness leads to an overemphasis on discrimination as a cause of lack of ethnic progress. However, this is not only inaccurate, it erases the struggles that many members of ethnic minorities have engaged in to make the achievements they have, denigrating their history and suffering.

Style

Perspective

Thomas Sowell is a well-known libertarian conservative economist and historian. As such, he tends to have emphases in line with these social and political ideologies in his approach to ethnic histories.

Historians and economists on the left tend to emphasize causal forces in ethnic progress that are "external" to these ethnicities. Examples include institutional circumstances, political accommodation, government programs aimed at poverty reduction and discrimination and cultural perceptions of American society at large. Left-wing social scientists often hold that the individual or ethnic group is a product of forces external to it and can be easily controlled, dominated, manipulated and altered by those forces. Ethnic success is due to institutional organization, not personal responsibility, merit, innate differences, or cultural values. As a result, social scientists on the left resist explaining a lack of cultural progress of a minority due to faults of that culture.

Sowell takes a very different perspective. He does not deny that institutional, "external" factors are important. In fact, he gives a particularly illuminating picture of the ways in which discrimination disadvantages blacks to this very day. However, he is also willing to pay attention and place emphasis on factors that social scientists on the left resist accounting for. He often covers cultural values in his discussions of ethnic progress. Jews benefited, he argued, from a culture that emphasized education and Asians benefited from this and a culture that promoted thrift and family structure. However, he points out that low IQs and lack of hygiene and self-control held back many Irish and blacks early on. Sowell often emphasizes "internal" facilitators of and barriers to ethnic progress, something characteristic of a libertarian and conservative perspective.

Tone

The tone of *Ethnic America: A History* is measured, scholarly, authoritative and full of admiration. The book is a detailed history of the progress of nine different ethnic immigrant groups in United States history. It is measured because it discusses these groups with an appropriate distance and lack of bias; its claims are modest and balanced, while advancing arguments that many will reject and most will regard as controversial. Sowell's book has the tone of a writer who wants to make a solid case that many important features of ethnic histories are overlooked by historians and social scientists.

The tone is also scholarly. Sowell interspersed economic terms of analysis throughout the book along with statistics and figures illustrating ethnic progress and differences in progress between ethnic groups. It relies on extensive citations and careful historical generalizations. Claims, again, are modest and appropriate given the level of economic



and historical information that Sowell brings to bear. The tone has the cool, careful feel of a scholar who knows his craft and is adept in making his argument. Consequently, the tone is also authoritative. The measured, well-supported claims of the book come off as having an air of authority; Sowell does not apologize for his conclusions and carefully criticizes his opposition while engaging in no misrepresentation and rhetorical sleight of hand.

Finally, Sowell's tone reflects his deep admiration for the individuals and groups who struggled against great obstacles in order to achieve the economic, social and political progress that they currently possess. All of the groups Sowell discusses have made dramatic improvements in their lives in the United States and Sowell is intent to demonstrate these achievements and criticize those whose ideology obscures these accomplishments.

Structure

The structure of *Ethnic America: A History* is fairly standard for a scholarly historical text. It begins with an introduction or overview of the subject matter, follows with a main body of text supporting the master argument of the text and ends with a discussion of the implications of the master argument and illustrations in the book.

Ethnic America: A History has eleven chapters. The first chapter, which is the whole of part one, is called "The American Mosaic" because it describes the diverse network of ethnicities in the United States. The body of the book is divided into four parts: Americans from Europe; Americans from Asia; Americans from Africa; and Americans from Latin America.

In Part II, Americans from Europe, the reader will find Chapters 2-5, which discuss the histories of The Irish, the Germans, the Jews and the Italians respectively. Part III, Americans from Asia, discusses the Chinese and the Japanese in Chapters 6 and 7. In Part IV, Americans from Africa, only blacks are discussed. This lengthy chapter is the 8th. Part V takes up the history of Americans from Latin America. It has two chapters; Chapter 9 covers the Puerto Ricans, whereas Chapter 10 discusses the Mexicans.

Part VI, An Overview, contains a single chapter, Chapter 11, which is an extended discussion of the general lessons and patterns that can be drawn from the book as a whole. Within each of the nine middle chapters, Sowell usually gives a brief history of the historical circumstances of the immigration, the difficult social and economic circumstances of immigrant groups and how they handled the obstacles in front of them. He ends each chapter with a discussion of where the ethnic groups stand at the current time (1981).



Quotes

"The peopling of American is one of the great dramas in all of human history." (3)

"The Irish were the first great ethnic 'minority' in American cities." (17)

"More than 25 million Americans are of German ancestry. This is more than for any other ethnic group except descendants of people from the British Isles." (43)

"One of the classic features of European Jewish culture was respect and reverence for learning." (73)

"Yet the internal values and traditions of the Jews were almost tailor-made for success in the American economy." (93)

"Altogether, it was the largest exodus of people ever recorded from a single nation." (101)

"In the long run, America proved to be a land of opportunity for those who came here from Italy. But it was an opportunity turned into the reality of progress only by great toil and persistence." (129)

"As a group, Chinese Americans have, in one sense, integrated into American society occupationally and residentially, while retaining their own values and ethnic identity. It is no small achievement, against great odds." (154)

"The history of Japanese Americans is a story of tragedy and triumph. Few people ever came to American more predisposed and determined to be good Americans. Few met such repeated rebuffs and barriers—including barriers of mass internment camps—or more completely triumphed over it all, across a broad spectrum of economic, social and political success." (155)

"Black Americans were the only racial or ethnic group brought to American against their will." (183)

"None have had to come from so far back to join their fellow Americans." (224)

"Most Puerto Rican adults in the continental United States today are still the first generation where they are. Few groups in American history could claim more progress in as short a span, as history is measured." (243)

"From the rural Mexican cultures of the 1920s to modern urban American today is a very long journey in human terms. Most Mexican Americans have come a long way on that journey." (270)

"In an individualistic society, ethnic history reminds us of the enduring consequences of centuries-old cultural patterns into which each individual is born." (273)



"As a corollary, some of the longest and hardest struggles for self-improvement must be denied—which is to say, history itself is denied." (296)

"The history of American ethnic groups—which is to say, ultimately, the history of the American people—is the history of a complex aggregate of complex groups and individuals. It cannot be a simple morality play. It is a story of similar patterns and profound differences, of pain and pride and achievement. It is, in one sense, the story of many very different heritages. In another sense, it is the story of the human spirit in its many guises." (296)

Topics for Discussion

What is unique about the Jewish experience in the United States? What is unique about their achievements?

How did the Chinese and Japanese handle political participation? How were they successful economically vis-à-vis politics?

Do you think Sowell's history shows that cultural assimilation is a good thing? Explain the multiple aspects of Sowell's understanding of cultural assimilation as part of your answer.

What does Sowell think are the deleterious effects of political correctness in the study of ethnic history? How are they corrected?

Does Sowell think some cultures are better than others? What observations does he make about claims like this?

What are the benefits that have accrued to all immigrant groups in American society?

To what extent has discrimination affected American immigrants? Economically? Socially? How are they different?

What is unique about the history of American Blacks? How does their history continue to pose problems for their cultural and economic progress?