

## AMERICA: MELTING POT OR SALAD BOWL, OR ETHNIC STEW?

Looking back on American history, there is no doubt that immigrants flocked to America to work and to live. In present times, immigrants still do the same. How did they adjust back then? How do they adjust to their new country now? Did they keep their own ways or did they adapt to new ones? How do new immigrants affect the overall culture? Sociologists have been studying this for years and have used different terms to describe what occurs.

Obviously, immigrants have come from a variety of countries over time. These immigrants are often divided into ethnic groups based on the characteristics they share with others such as culture, language, or nationality. **Examples of ethnic groups in the United States would include Chinese, Dutch, Indians, Asians, Italians, Irish, or Mexicans, etc.** Originally in the United States, each of these people belonged to their own group and brought their own variety and richness to their new land of America. On that point, sociologists agree. Whether they should hold onto these ways completely, give them up completely, or perhaps do something in between is where the controversy begins.

Just a little walk in the city of New York or Chicago, for example, would make any foreigner realize the presence of people of various races walking down the street: probably Caucasians, Hispanics, African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Indians, and so on. Or for another example, on school campuses in America, both the faculty and the student body are usually composed of people from a number of countries rather than only one. Almost anywhere in America, the possibility is encountering a mix of people. Thus, America is a land of plural races and ethnicities, with a multicultural context.

Indeed, the variety of ethnicities in America is often claimed to be the best mix in the world. Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers introduce their book, *Ethnic Americans: A*



*History of Immigration and Assimilation*, by stating, “Never before – and in no other country – have as many varied ethnic groups congregated and amalgamated as they have in the United States” (1). With such reputation, here is exactly where the famous term “**melting pot**” arises. This conception has traditionally been perceived as the best expression to describe the multi-ethnicity of America. Its basic idea presents the whole nation as one large pot. Anyone who enters the United States is automatically thrown into this “pot” where, for the following years, a process of assimilation into the American belief systems is taken place. All the cultural aspects that one brings into are blended together, or melted, to form a new culture. The outcome of this massive procedure is the “melted” version of a culture, which is described as characteristically “American.” It is notable that in this assimilation, the identities of each original culture are extinguished to bring out a complete new mixture.

Along with this perspective, however, there is another expression that describes the diversity of people in America. It tends to be interpreted in the same way as the “melting pot,” but actually has a slightly different meaning with a different way of approaching and explaining American society. In comparison with the “melting pot” theory, there is the “**salad bowl**” theory. This idea demonstrates a complete separate perspective that the newcomers bring different cultures, where each of these cultures is kept as an essential part to make up the whole. Every distinctive culture or belief is considered to be one of the tastes or ingredients that contributes in forming the whole; therefore its original shape and characteristics are maintained.

Whether to apply the term “melting pot” or the term “salad bowl” to the American multiethnic conditions brings about a large discussion and controversy. Some might even combine the two concepts and suggest that America is more like an “**ethnic stew**” where all the ingredients are mixed together to create a common broth but still retain somewhat of their original shape or identity.

*Source: [http://edhelper.com/ReadingComprehension\\_54\\_181.html](http://edhelper.com/ReadingComprehension_54_181.html)*

*Source: Doshisha University, Kyoto*