

MELTING POT OR SALAD BOWL

- 1 The population of the United States includes a number of different ethnic groups coming from many races, nationalities, and religions. The process by which these many groups have been made a part of a common cultural life with commonly shared values is called *assimilation*. Scholars disagree as to the extent to which assimilation has occurred in the United States. As we mentioned in Chapter 1, some have described the United States as a “melting pot” where various racial and ethnic groups have been combined into one culture. Others are inclined to see the United States as a “salad bowl” where the various groups have remained somewhat distinct and different from one another, creating a richly diverse country.
- 2 The truth probably lies somewhere between these two views. Since 1776, an enormous amount of racial and ethnic assimilation has taken place in the United States, yet some groups continue to feel a strong sense of separateness from the culture as a whole. Many of these groups are really *bilingual and/or bicultural*. That is, they consider themselves Americans, but they may also wish to retain the language and sometimes the cultural traditions of their original culture.
- 3 People of Hispanic origin were on the North American continent before settlers arrived from other European countries in the early 1600s. In Florida and the Southwest, Spanish and Latin American settlements were established centuries before the thirteen colonies joined together to form the United States in the late 1700s. Because of their long history and the continued influx of newcomers into the established communities, many Hispanics, or Latinos, have taken a special pride in maintaining their cultural traditions and the use of the Spanish language.
- 4 Generally speaking, over the years whites from different national and religious backgrounds have been gradually assimilated into the larger American culture, with some exceptions. For example, American Jews are one group who have traditionally retained a strong sense of group identity within the larger culture. This may be a result of the long history of persecution in the Christian countries in Europe, the weaker forms of discrimination and anti-Jewish feeling that have sometimes existed in the United States, and their own strong feeling of ethnic pride. Yet along with their own group identity, most American Jews have a strong sense of being a part of the larger American culture.

The Establishment of the Dominant Culture

- 5 The first census of the new nation, conducted in 1790, counted about 4 million people, most of whom were white. Of the white citizens, more than eight out of ten traced their ancestry back to England. African Americans made up a surprising 20 percent of the population, an all-time high. There were close to 700,000 slaves and about 60,000 “free Negroes.” Only a few Native Americans who paid taxes were included in the census numbers, so there is no accurate count of the total Native American population.
- 6 It was the white population that had the greater numbers, the money, and the political power in the new nation, and therefore this majority soon defined what the dominant culture would be. At the time of the American Revolution, the white population was largely English

in origin, Protestant, and middle-class. Such Americans are sometimes referred to as “WASPs” (white Anglo-Saxon Protestants); however, many people now consider this an insulting term. Their characteristics became the standard for judging other groups. Those having a different religion (such as the Irish Catholics), or those speaking a different language (such as the Germans, Dutch, and Swedes), were in the minority and would be disadvantaged unless they became assimilated. In the late 1700s, this assimilation occurred without great difficulty for most immigrants. According to historians Allan Nevins and Henry Steele Commager, “English, Irish, German, . . . Dutch, Swedish—mingled¹ and intermarried with little thought of any difference.”

- 7 The dominant American culture that grew out of the nation’s early history, then, was English-speaking, western European, Protestant, and middle-class in character. It was this dominant culture that established what became the traditional values described by Tocqueville in the early 1830s. Immigrants with these characteristics were welcome, in part because Americans believed that these newcomers would probably give strong support to the basic values of the dominant culture, such as freedom, equality of opportunity, and the desire to work hard for a higher material standard of living.

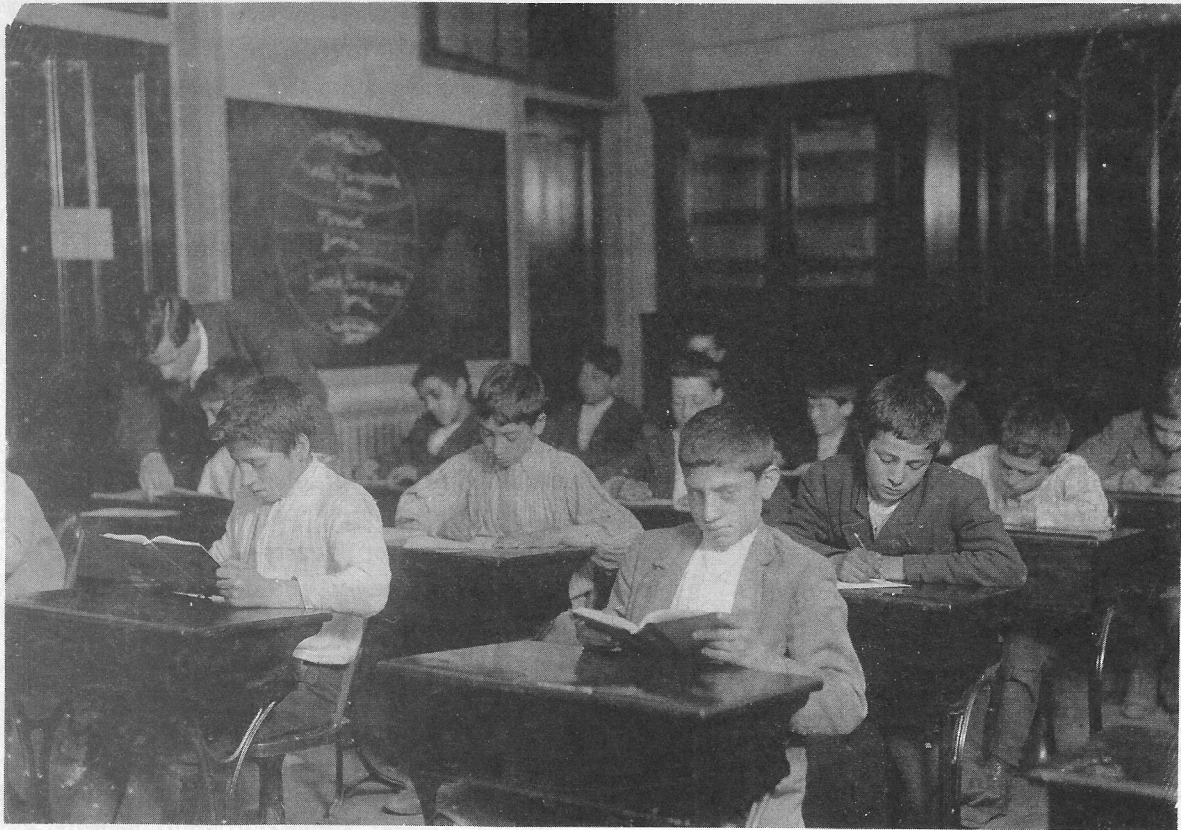
The Assimilation of Non-Protestant and Non-Western Europeans

- 8 As is the case in many cultures, the degree to which a minority group was seen as different from the characteristics of the dominant majority determined the extent of that group’s acceptance. Although immigrants who were like the earlier settlers were accepted, those with

significantly different characteristics tended to be viewed as a threat to traditional American values and way of life.

- 9 This was particularly true of the immigrants who arrived by the millions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most of them came from poverty-stricken nations of southern and eastern Europe. They spoke languages other than English, and large numbers of them were Catholics or Jews.
- 10 Americans at the time were very fearful of this new flood of immigrants. They were afraid that these people were so accustomed to lives of poverty and dependence that they would not understand such traditional American values as freedom, self-reliance, and competition. There were so many new immigrants that they might even change the basic values of the nation in undesirable ways.
- 11 Americans tried to meet what they saw as a threat to their values by offering English instruction for the new immigrants and citizenship classes to teach them basic American beliefs. The immigrants, however, often felt that their American teachers disapproved of the traditions of their homeland. Moreover, learning about American values gave them little help in meeting their most important needs, such as employment, food, and a place to live.
- 12 Far more helpful to the new immigrants were the “political bosses” of the larger cities of the northeastern United States, where most of the immigrants first arrived. Those bosses saw to many of the practical needs of the immigrants and were more accepting of the different homeland traditions. In exchange for their help, the bosses expected the immigrants to keep them in power by voting for them in elections.

¹ mingled: met and talked with a lot of different people socially



Immigrant boys study in night school because they work during the day.

- 13 Many Americans strongly disapproved of the political bosses. This was partly because the bosses were frequently corrupt;² that is, they often stole money from the city governments they controlled and engaged in other illegal practices. Perhaps more important to disapproving Americans, however, was the fact that the bosses seemed to be destroying such basic American values as self-reliance and competition.
- 14 The bosses, it seemed, were teaching the immigrants to be dependent on them rather than to rely on themselves. Moreover, the bosses were “buying” the votes of the immigrants in order to give themselves a monopoly of political power in many larger cities. This practice destroyed competition for political office, which Americans viewed as an important

tradition in politics just as it was in other facets of American life.

- 15 Despite these criticisms, many scholars believe that the political bosses performed an important function in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They helped to assimilate large numbers of new immigrants into the larger American culture by finding them jobs and housing, in return for their political support. Later the bosses also helped the sons and daughters of these immigrants find employment, but the second generation usually had the advantage of growing up speaking English.

- 16 The fact that the United States had a rapidly expanding economy at the turn of the century made it possible for these new immigrants, often with the help

² *corrupt: dishonest*

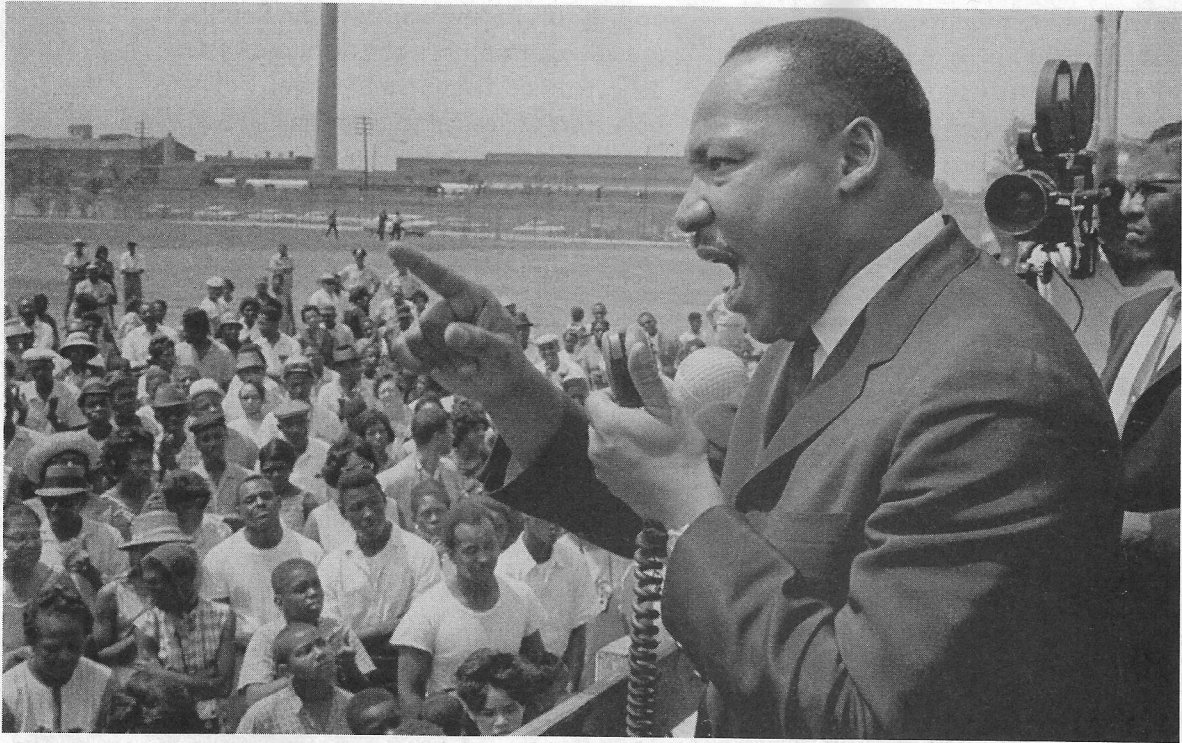
of the bosses, to better their standard of living in the United States. As a result of these new opportunities and new rewards, immigrants came to accept most of the values of the larger American culture and were in turn accepted by the great majority of Americans. For white ethnic groups, therefore, it has generally been true that their feeling of being a part of the larger culture—that is, *American*—has usually been stronger than their feeling of belonging to a separate ethnic group—Irish, Italian, Polish, etc.

The African-American Experience

- 17 The process of assimilation in the United States has been much more successful for white ethnic groups than for non-white ethnic groups. Of the non-white ethnic groups, Americans of African descent have had the greatest difficulty in becoming assimilated into the larger culture. African Americans were brought to the United States against their will to be sold as slaves. Except for the American Indian tribes who inhabited the United States before the first white settlers arrived, other ethnic groups came to America voluntarily—most as immigrants who wanted to better their living conditions.
- 18 The enslavement of African Americans in the United States was a complete contradiction of such traditional basic American values as freedom and equality of opportunity. It divided the United States into two increasingly different sections: the southern states, in which black slavery became the basis of the economy, and the northern states, which chose to make slavery against the law.
- 19 A minority of whites in the North insisted that slavery and freedom could not exist together in a free country and demanded that slavery be abolished.³
- 20 Abraham Lincoln was able to become president of the United States by appealing to both the white idealists who saw slavery as an injustice to African Americans and to the larger numbers of northern whites who saw slavery as a threat to themselves. Lincoln's argument was that if black slavery continued to spread westward, white freedom and equality would be threatened. Lincoln also believed that basic ideals such as freedom and equality of opportunity had to apply to all people, black and white, or they would not last as basic American values.
- 21 When Lincoln won the presidency in 1860, the southern states left the Union and tried to form a new nation of their own based on slavery. A Civil War (1861–1865) between the North and South resulted, which turned out to be the bloodiest and most destructive of all the nation's wars. When the North was finally victorious, black slavery ended in the United States.
- 22 Back in the 1830s, Tocqueville predicted trouble between blacks and whites in the United States:

even if this meant war with the South. A much larger number of northern whites believed that freedom and equality of opportunity needed to be protected for white people only, but they were afraid that black slavery would eventually take away their economic freedom. If, for example, the slave system of the South were allowed to spread into the frontier regions of the West, poor and middle-income whites could no longer look to the western frontier as a land of equality and opportunity where people could better their position in life. Rather, whites would have to compete with unpaid slave labor, a situation that they believed would degrade their work and lower their social status.

³abolish: officially end a law or system



Martin Luther King, Jr., addresses followers at a civil rights protest.

These two races are fastened to each other without intermingling; and they are unable to separate entirely or to combine. Although the law may abolish slavery, God alone can obliterate⁴ the traces of its existence.

- 23 Although slavery was abolished in the 1860s, its legacy⁵ continued and African Americans were not readily assimilated into the larger American culture. Most remained in the South, where they were not allowed to vote and were legally segregated from whites. Black children were not allowed to attend white public schools, for example, and many received an inferior education that did not give them an equal opportunity to compete in the white-dominated society. Many former slaves and their families became caught in a cycle of poverty that continued for generations. Although conditions were

much worse in the segregated South, blacks continued to be the victims⁶ of strong racial prejudice in the North as well.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s

- 24 This state of affairs remained unchanged until after World War II. Over one million African Americans had served in segregated units during the war. After the war was over, black leaders began to lead a civil rights movement for equality with whites. In 1948, President Harry Truman ordered that the military be fully integrated. Then in 1954, the United States Supreme Court declared that racially segregated public schools did not provide equal educational opportunities for black Americans and were therefore illegal. Incidentally, Thurgood Marshall, Chief Counsel for the National Association

⁴obliterate: to destroy something so that almost nothing remains

⁵legacy: a situation that exists as a result of things that happened at an earlier time

⁶victims: people who suffer bad treatment even though they have done nothing to deserve it

for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) argued the case before the court, and in 1967 he became the first African-American Supreme Court Justice.

25 Black leaders throughout the United States were greatly encouraged by the 1954 decision to desegregate the schools. They decided to try to end racial segregation in all areas of American life. The most important of these leaders was Martin Luther King Jr., a black Protestant minister with a great gift for inspiring⁷ people. From the late 1950s until his assassination⁸ by a white gunman in 1968, King led thousands of people in nonviolent marches and demonstrations against segregation and other forms of racial discrimination. King's goal was to bring about greater assimilation of black people into the larger American culture. His ideals were largely developed from basic American values. He wanted greater equality of opportunity and "freedom now" for his people. He did not wish to separate his people from American society, but rather to gain for them a larger part in it.

26 Some black leaders, such as Malcolm X, urged a rejection of basic American values and complete separation of blacks from the white culture. Malcolm X believed that American values were nothing more than "white men's values" used to keep blacks in an inferior position. He believed that blacks needed to separate themselves from whites, by force if necessary, and build their own society based on values that they would create for themselves. Because he saw Christianity as a "white" religion, Malcolm turned to a faith based on Islam, and he became a leader of the "black Muslim" faith (founded in 1930). The great majority of American blacks,

however, shared Martin Luther King's Protestant religious beliefs and his goal of assimilation rather than separation. Most African Americans continued to look to King as their leader.

27 Largely as a result of King's activities, two major civil rights⁹ laws were passed during the 1960s, which brought about great changes in the South. One law made it illegal to segregate public facilities. The other law made it illegal to deny black people the right to vote in elections.

28 The civil rights laws of the 1960s helped to bring about a significant degree of assimilation of blacks into the larger American culture. Most important, the laws eventually helped to reduce the amount of white prejudice toward black people in all parts of the country. A federal program called affirmative action required employers to actively seek black workers and universities to recruit black students. As a result of the civil rights laws and affirmative action, the number of African Americans attending the nation's colleges and universities, holding elective public office, and earning higher incomes increased dramatically in the late 1960s and 1970s. Today, African Americans are sports and entertainment heroes, university professors, medical doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs, and reporters. There is now a sizable black middle class, and there are a number of wealthy African Americans.

29 African Americans are active politically and voted in large numbers in the elections of 2008 and 2012. They are now mayors of major cities and members of Congress; they hold offices in all levels of government—local, state, and national. In 2008, Barack Obama became the first black American president, truly a dream come

⁷ *inspiring*: encouraging people to achieve something great

⁸ *assassination*: the murder of an important person

⁹ *civil rights*: rights that every person should have, such as the right to vote or to be treated fairly by the law, whatever his or her sex, race, or religion

true for many who had worked in the civil rights movement. Congressman John Lewis, himself a black civil rights leader, reflected on what Obama's election meant to him personally:

When we were organizing voter-registration drives, going on the Freedom Rides, sitting in, coming here to Washington for the first time, getting arrested, going to jail, being beaten, I never thought—I never dreamed—of the possibility that an African American would one day be elected President of the United States. My mother lived to see me elected to the Congress, but I wish my mother and father both were around. They would be so happy and so proud, and they would be so gratified. And they would be saying that the struggle, and what we did and tried to do, was worth it.

Diversity in the Twenty-first Century

30 The civil rights movement benefited not only African Americans, but all minorities in the United States—American Indians, Hispanics, Asians, and others. Racial discrimination in employment and housing was forbidden by law. The civil rights laws also advanced the rights of women, and these laws have reinforced the ideal of equality of opportunity for all Americans. Recently, sexual orientation entered

the picture. President Obama called for equality for gays in his second Inaugural Address and for laws that permit them to marry. Public opinion polls showed that a majority of Americans agreed with him. The Congress that took office that year was the most diverse ever, although it was not as diverse as the nation as a whole. Among its 535 members, it included 98 women, 43 African Americans, 31 Latinos, 12 Asian-Americans or Pacific Islanders, seven openly gay or bisexuals, two Muslims, one Buddhist, and one Hindu.

31 Although African Americans represent about 13 percent of the population, they are still grossly underrepresented in Congress, and the same is true of Hispanics. The median income of a married black or Hispanic man working full-time is still significantly less than that of a married white man. Segregation and discrimination are against the law, but residential patterns create largely segregated neighborhood schools, particularly in many urban areas. Whites are more likely than blacks and Hispanics to live in the suburbs, where the neighborhood schools are usually in better condition and offer a better education. Many blacks and other ethnic minorities in the inner city are trapped in cycles of

IMMIGRANT GAINS IN INCOME AND EDUCATION FROM 1ST TO 2ND GENERATION

Median annual household income of . . .



Percent who have graduated college (among those ages 25 and older)



Income figures adjusted to a household size of three.

Source: 2012 Data from Pew Research Center analysis of Current Population surveys, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMs) file

poverty, unemployment, violence, and despair. Blacks are the most frequent victims of violent crime, and as many as one in five young males may have a criminal record. A larger percent of black and Hispanic children than white children live in poverty and may have only one parent at home.

- 32 On the other hand, Americans continue to believe strongly in the ideal of equality of opportunity and to search for ways to give everyone an equal chance at success. The American Dream still attracts immigrants and inspires people of all races and ethnic backgrounds. In reality, some immigrant groups have more success than others. As one would expect, history shows that immigrants who come with financial resources, a good educational background, and the necessary work skills are likely to do the best. For example, immigrants from the Middle East tend to have a higher socioeconomic level than the average white American. So do Asians, as a group. Those who come without financial resources and a strong educational background do not do as well. However, studies show that the second generation does significantly better than the first. The adult children of immigrants have a higher standard of living:

A new analysis of the 20 million adult U.S.-born children of immigrants finds they are substantially better off than immigrants themselves; they have higher incomes, more are college graduates and homeowners, and fewer live in poverty. Among Latinos and Asian Americans, the second generation are more likely than immigrants to speak English, have friends outside their racial and ethnic group, and think of themselves as "a typical American."

- 33 Sonia Sotomayor, the first Hispanic Supreme Court Justice, is an inspiring

example of the success some Hispanic Americans have achieved. In her book, *My Beloved World*, she describes being born into and growing up in a world that was "a tiny microcosm of Hispanic New York City." Her grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins lived in a few square blocks of the South Bronx:

My playmates were my cousins. We spoke Spanish at home, and many in my family spoke virtually no English. My parents had both come to New York from Puerto Rico in 1944, my mother in the Women's Army Corps, my father with his family in search of work as part of a huge migration from the island, driven by economic hardship.*

- 34 Sotomayor's father died when she was a child and her family had a difficult time financially. They lived in low-income housing and both she and her brother worked part-time jobs during the school year and full-time in the summer to help with the family's finances. She knew little of the world outside her neighborhood as a child, and the Perry Mason TV show inspired her to want to become an attorney. Sotomayor was an excellent student, but she was surprised by the number of great universities that offered her admission and even full scholarships. She says for the next several years, she "lived the day-to-day reality of affirmative action." As a Hispanic minority woman, she benefited from the affirmative action law that was just beginning to cause universities to recruit minority students. Out of many offers, she chose Princeton, and then went to Yale for her law degree.

- 35 Today, immigrants with all kinds of backgrounds and skill levels find their way to the United States. Some of them are highly educated, and they may find employment in fields such as technology, medicine, and science. Others may come from poor rural or urban areas and have

*People who live in Puerto Rico are citizens of the United States.

a limited education. Many of these are young people who risk their lives to come without documentation to do agricultural or construction work. Others find work taking care of children or cleaning homes or buildings. Often, they are paid less than a documented worker would be. However, what they are able to earn in dollars and send back to their countries can support many family members there. Many of these individuals do not want to become U.S. citizens; their only wish is to be able to work here. Americans are trying to find ways to accommodate these workers, while still protecting the interests of U.S. citizens.

A Universal Nation

- 36 It is important to remember that the dominant culture and its value system established by the early settlers had its roots in white, Protestant, western Europe. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, millions of immigrants came from eastern and southern Europe, bringing cultural traditions perceived by the dominant culture as quite different. By the 1920s, Americans had decided that it was time to close the borders to mass immigration, and the number of new immigrants slowed to a trickle.¹⁰ In spite of the worries of those in the dominant culture, the new immigrants did assimilate to life in the United States. They greatly enriched the cultural diversity of the nation, and they ultimately did not cause major changes to its system of government, its free enterprise system, or its traditional values.
- 37 In 1965, the United States made important changes in its immigration laws, allowing many more immigrants to come and entirely eliminating the older laws' bias in favor of white European immigrants. As a result, the United States now takes

in large numbers of new immigrants who are non-white and non-European. The majority are from Asia and Latin America. In addition to the large numbers of legal immigrants, for the first time the United States has significant numbers of immigrants without legal documentation. Many worry about what the impact will be on American society. Can the American economy offer these new immigrants the same opportunities that others have had? What will be the effect on the traditional value system that has defined the United States for over 200 years?

- 38 Many Americans see wonderful benefits for their country. Ben Wattenberg, a respected expert on American culture, believes that the new immigration will be of great help to the nation. According to Wattenberg, something very important is happening to the United States: It is becoming the first universal nation in history. Wattenberg believes that the United States will be the first nation where large numbers of people from every region on earth live in freedom under one government. This diversity, he says, will give the nation great influence and appeal to the rest of the world during the twenty-first century.
- 39 Perhaps the United States will be described not as a "melting pot" or a "salad bowl," but as a "mosaic"—a picture made up of many tiny pieces of different colors. If one looks closely at the nation, the individuals of different colors and ethnic groups are still distinct and recognizable, but together they create a picture that is uniquely American. *E pluribus unum*—the motto of the United States from its beginning—means "one composed of many." Out of many, one.

¹⁰ trickle: a movement of people or things into a place in very small numbers or amounts