Introduction

In the first decades of the twentieth century the United States experienced massive immigration from Europe—especially southern and eastern Europe. The sheer numbers of these immigrants and the fact that many of them came from illiterate peasant backgrounds made the task of assimilating them into American life seem overwhelming. The degree of discrimination against them and their children and the amount of isolation they experienced in urban ethnic ghettos threatened to keep them forever separate from the “core American culture.”

Immigrants and their absorption were thus an important political and social issue, and in the young and developing academic field of sociology, they became a focus of scholarly interest. Sociologists conducted valuable field studies of the ethnic ghettos in major American cities and theorized about the process of adaptation and assimilation in American life. The idea behind these theories was that with more time in America—more generations in the United States—the groups would become more assimilated—more Americanized.

The very success of the assimilation process these sociologists described makes it difficult for us to imagine the degree to which the question of the immigrant’s eventual assimilation was indeed an open one. While the United States had absorbed immigrants from northern and western Europe through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the immigrants from southern and central Europe, who started arriv-
ing in great numbers around 1870, faced harsh conditions and a great deal of prejudice and discrimination. Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers describe the degree to which these immigrants and their children were despised and excluded:

Italians...were one of the most despised groups. Old-stock Americans called them wops, dagos, and guineas and referred to them as the "Chinese of Europe" and "just as bad as the Negroes." In the South some Italians were forced to attend all-black schools, and in both the North and the South they were victimized by brutality. In 1875 the New York Times thought it "perhaps hopeless to think of civilizing them, or keeping them in order, except by the arm of the law."

Greeks and Poles were also not given a warm welcome:

The new immigrants were stereotyped as representatives of some kind of lower species...Greeks were physically attacked in Omaha, Nebraska, and they were forced out of Mountain View, Idaho. A New Englander, observing some Poles weeding rows of onions, commented: "Animals, they work under the sun and in the dirt; with stolid, stupid faces." (Dinnerstein and Reimers 1982, 36)

These new European immigrants were seen by many as a "race" apart and were certainly described in racial terms:

It is fair to say that the blood now being injected into the veins of our people is "sub-common."...You are struck by the fact that from ten to twenty percent are hirsute, low-browed, big-faced persons of obviously low mentality. Not that they suggest evil. They simply look out of place in black clothes and stiff collar, since clearly they belong in skins, in wattled huts at the close of the Great Ice Age. (Ross 1914; 285–86)

"The Slavs," remarks a physician, "are immune to certain kinds of dirt. They can stand what would kill a white man." (ibid., 291)

We all know that the situation has changed for these immigrants and their descendants. The historical process of those changes—the adaptation and assimilation of these immigrants and their gradual full acceptance into American society—was a subject of study by generations of American sociologists. Through ethnographic studies in ethnic ghettos, as well as social surveys and analyses of American attitudes, sociologists have chronicled the assimilation process for these vast waves of European immigrants and their children and grandchildren. As a result of these studies we have learned a great deal about ethnicity, ethnic groups, and ethnic identity. We know how immigrants who came to the United States gathered in ethnic neigh-
borhoods, created ethnic voluntary organizations, and imparted to their sons and daughters the old traditions and identifications of their past lives. We also know that ethnic identity and the vitality of the ethnic group decline in importance when the structural reasons for the maintenance of ethnic identity—such as discrimination, residential segregation, and strong religious identification—decline.

However, since the time of the original interest and theorizing done by sociologists about American ethnic groups, the number of immigrants from Europe has dwindled and the nature of American white ethnic groups has changed. In the 1920s restrictive immigration laws drastically cut immigration from all sources—especially southern and eastern Europe. As a result the groups that were so troubling and challenging to some Americans—Catholics and Jews from southern and central Europe—reduced their new members to just a trickle. This has affected the generational distribution of people of European origin in the United States. In each decade since the cutoff in European immigration in the 1920s, the population of European origin has aged generationally. Today the overwhelming majority of white ethnics of European extraction are third-, fourth-, and later-generation Americans.

The success and social mobility of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of that massive wave of immigrants from Europe has been called “The Ethnic Miracle” (Greeley 1976). They are doctors, lawyers, entertainers, academics, governors, presidential and vice presidential candidates, and Supreme Court justices. But contrary to what some of the theorists and politicians predicted or hoped for, these successful and mobile 1980s Americans have not completely given up ethnic identity. Instead, they have maintained some connection with their immigrant ancestor’s identities—becoming Irish-American doctors, Italian-American Supreme Court justices, and Greek-American presidential candidates. In the tradition of our cultural pluralism, successful middle-class Americans in the late twentieth century maintain some degree of identity with their ethnic backgrounds.

In fact, precisely when the descendants of the turn-of-the-century immigrants were moving into the third and later generations and experiencing more social mobility than ever before—in the 1960s and 1970s—there were many academics and popular writers challenging the predictions made earlier that ethnicity would decline in importance. The publication of Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s Beyond the Melting Pot in 1963 was a watershed event, opening a
debate that raged for the next few decades over whether ethnicity would ever disappear as a powerful political and social force in American life.

The academic debate over whether Americans would ever lose their ethnic identities in the melting pot was characterized as one between the “assimilationist” and “pluralist” perspectives on ethnicity (Yancey et al. 1976). The assimilationist school argued that for later generations of Americans, further removed in time from the original immigrants, ties to the ethnic group are increasingly less important.¹ They point out that the structural forces that maintain ethnic group solidarity and cohesiveness have been waning. The declining residential segregation of white ethnic groups, declining occupational specialization, increasing intermarriage, social mobility, and distance in time and generations from the original immigrants all decrease the isolation of the ethnic group that has maintained its cohesiveness. As the descendants of the original immigrants leave the ethnically homogeneous ghettos of urban areas, it is argued, their social world is increasingly ethnically mixed and their ties to the original ethnic culture are reduced. Without political or economic reasons for maintaining ethnic solidarity, the importance of ethnic identification and allegiance for the individual declines and other means of identification and political and economic organization develop (Hechter 1978). For instance, if occupations are increasingly assigned in the society based on more universalistic criteria, such as ability and education, instead of the ascriptive criterion of ethnic origin, individuals will identify increasingly with class or status characteristics rather than ethnic ones.

The crucial factor for writers in the assimilationist perspective is the degree of structural assimilation of members of the ethnic group. Milton Gordon argues that acculturation can take place as immigrants and their children adopt the culture of America, but that ethnic groups cannot survive structural assimilation. As long as the world of primary relationships—neighborhood, friendships, and marriage—remains ethnically homogeneous, the salience of ethnicity remains strong. Once the world of primary groups becomes ethnically heterogeneous, however, assimilation proceeds and the ethnic groups begin

¹. This expectation was the product of the influential work done by sociologists in the Chicago School (Park and Burgess 1925; Wirth 1928). Thus, for example, Park’s diffusion theory suggests that assimilation should occur as a function of length of residence in the United States (Park 1950).
to disappear (Gordon 1964). Following this logic, the suburbs were predicted to be the great mixer of immigrants and their children because the move away from the ethnic neighborhood increases the chances that friendships and other close associations will occur with people from outside the ethnic group.

The pluralist perspective, on the other hand, argues that ethnic assimilation is not inevitable. Andrew Greeley (1971, 1974) and Michael Novak (1973), for example, challenge the concept that the importance of ethnicity necessarily rests on continued ethnic segregation within the broader society. Greeley argues that even when such primary relationships as ethnic intermarriage occur, there is still evidence that ethnic identity is maintained. He points to continued high endogamy rates, continued socioeconomic and attitudinal differences among ethnic groups even into the third and fourth generations, and continued self-identification of individuals as ethnics on sample surveys as evidence that assimilation is not imminent. The continued ethnic identification of suburbanites is also cited as evidence that ethnic cultures do not automatically disappear with the move away from traditional urban neighborhoods (Cohen 1977, 998; Agocs 1981). For instance, Winnetka, Illinois, attracts Chicago's upwardly mobile Irish-Americans, while other suburbs such as Oak Park attract newly rich Poles.

This debate between proponents of the melting pot and those of cultural pluralism in the 1960s and 1970s was fueled in part by developments among white ethnics of European origin, but was also very much a result of the new wave of largely non-European immigrants ushered in by changes in the immigration law in 1965—as well as by the experience of the civil rights movement and the general political mobilization of America's racial minorities.

The question of whether ethnicity would cease to matter for the later generation was assumed to provide an answer to what would eventually happen to the new wave of non-white immigrants and what could happen to the newly empowered—but long-time American—blacks, Indians, and Chicanos.

Some analysts argued that the success of these earlier immigrants was a reason to welcome diversity in our immigrant streams—pointing out that the xenophobic fears of the 1920s were unfounded, and in fact seem ridiculous from the vantage point of today. Other writers used the success of the descendants of European immigrants to oppose
programs such as affirmative action and the Voting Rights Act, arguing that if the European ethnics could achieve social mobility with no government help, none was needed for America's racial minorities.

These debates were all based on an assumption—only sometimes made explicit—that what happened to white immigrants from Europe would provide a model or a comparison point for the experience of other ethnic and racial groups. In fact, the models of assimilation and cultural pluralism used by American sociologists were developed based on the experiences of these European groups—and especially important in these models is the concept of movement through generations. The further removed in generations from the earlier immigrants, the more assimilated the descendants would be.

Thus the debate that began in the 1960s and 1970s about the relative importance of ethnicity for groups of European origin had a great deal of significance. Theoretically it was important because it extended our knowledge of the processes of ethnic assimilation. The general models of assimilation based on these white ethnic groups made definite predictions about the later generations. If these predictions were not coming true, some argued, we needed to reexamine our general theories about ethnicity in America. Politically and socially it was also a crucial question. Since the generational distribution of Italians, Irish, Poles, and others in the United States was increasingly concentrated in later generations, the issue was one of real survival for these groups, and there was much emotion on all sides of the debate. If fourth-generation Italian-Americans ceased being "Italian" in any meaningful sense, and ceased identifying as Italian, then white European ethnicity was reaching the end of the road in the United States.

**THE NEW ETHNICITY**

Several theories emerged in the 1970s as it became clear to both assimilationists and pluralists that some type of ethnicity was persisting in suburban areas and among the middle class. Some analysts trivialized the importance of this "new ethnicity." At one extreme, Howard Stein and Robert Hill (1977) argued that Americans of later generations and of mixed ancestry had what they call "dime store ethnicity." That is, they can choose a grandparent to identify with and thus become symbolically a descendant of that group, much as one might shop for a product in a dime store. Stein and Hill
distinguish that sort of “unreal” ethnicity from what they character-
ize as “real” ethnics among this same population. The “dime store
ethnics” are fake because they consciously choose an ethnicity and
parade it in public. The “real ethnics” are real precisely because they
are not conscious of the subtle influence their ethnic heritage con-
tinues to assert in their daily lives.

Other writers recognize that while ethnicity has not been so im-
portant in people’s lives as it once was, it is not a trivial or unreal
phenomenon. Morton Weinfeld (1981, 79) points out that even with-
out group political or social activity, individuals can have a very real
and meaningful attachment to an ethnic collectivity, which may
manifest itself as a symbolic attachment to a remembered phrase, a
favorite song, or some other small symbol of a remembered past.
Richard Coleman and Lee Rainwater (1978, 111) argue that ethnicity
adds spice to an otherwise bland postindustrial existence, and that
ethnic identity is important to people because “it gives a sense of
heritage and roots to a highly mobile population.” If people no longer
perceive a threat to their individual life chances from ethnic discrimi-
nation, their ethnic identity can be used at will and discarded when its
psychological or social purpose is fulfilled.

In an influential article on this subject, Herbert Gans (1979)
addresses this central issue of what the continued identification of
whites with an ethnicity, seemingly in isolation from a wider ethnic
group, can mean. He suggests that later-generation white ethnics may
have merely a “symbolic identification” with their ancestry. He views
this symbolic identification as more or less a leisure-time activity.
Individuals identify as Irish, for example, on occasions such as Saint
Patrick’s Day, on family holidays, or for vacations. In other words, for
later-generation white ethnics, ethnicity is not something that influ-
ences their lives unless they want it to. In the world of work and
school and neighborhood, individuals do not have to admit to being
ethnic unless they choose to. Ethnicity has become a subjective
identity, invoked at will by the individual. Yet its very subjectivity and
voluntary character lead to fundamental questions about its future
viability, given increasing intermarriage and the resulting mixed an-
cestries in people’s backgrounds. Gans also wonders how such sym-

dolic ethnicity can continue when the actual ethnic collectivity that
the individual claims to belong to continues to recede. When a
fourth-generation individual of Italian heritage tries to “be Italian,”
where does his or her notion of what being Italian means come from?
Are media images of Italians providing the only role models or “collectivities” with which to identify?

These writers made some interesting suggestions about the nature of ethnicity among later-generation individuals that bridge the gap between the assimilationist and pluralist perspectives. Theorists of a “new” or “situational” ethnicity try to explain the existence of middle-class, suburban later-generation ethnic identity: the ethnicity that the assimilationists predicted should not exist anymore in any meaningful sense, and that the pluralists argued meant quite a lot in ways that might be hard to measure or document. But these theories contain more conjecture and theorizing than hard evidence, in part because the population at the heart of the debate—suburban, middle-class later-generation descendants of European immigrants—is difficult to reach. The very suburbanization and social mobility that assimilation theorists predicted would undermine ethnic identity also make it much more difficult for researchers to study this population.

The rich texture of life in ethnic ghettos has been chronicled through participant-observation studies seeking to explain and explore the life of the ethnic group. Studies such as Gans’s The Urban Villagers (1962), a portrait of Boston’s Italian West End, describe situations in which the ethnic group and ties of ethnicity were still quite salient for individuals. But the suburbanization of white ethnics in the 1980s makes it difficult, if not impossible, to assess their ethnic identities through the types of field studies done in Little Italy or Polish urban neighborhoods in the 1920s to the 1960s. Scattered in suburbs and working in jobs that are not assigned on the basis of ethnicity, the majority of the descendants of the European immigrants cannot easily be studied through a study of neighborhood groups. Sociologists interested in white ethnics of European extraction have had to change both their methods and their focus of study. Instead of their studying the “ethnic group” as a collectivity, attention has shifted to the “ethnic identity” of the individual, and instead of participant observation and field methods, the sample survey has become the preferred research tool.

MEASURING ETHNIC IDENTITY

The information we have about later-generation ethnicity in the 1980s comes from studies that rely on “ethnic identification” of individuals of later generations in national sample surveys such as the
General Social Survey (GSS) of the National Opinion Research Center (NORC); the National Survey of American Catholics in 1963; and political and voting studies that ask for ethnic affiliation, such as the Michigan Election Survey. Despite assimilationist theories that predicted that forces such as diminished residential segregation and occupational specialization would lead to decreased importance of ethnicity in the lives of later-generation ethnics, these surveys show that a majority of later-generation individuals do indeed identify with an ethnic group in the surveys, and their ethnicity does seem to correlate with certain attitudes, behaviors, and voting patterns (Greeley 1971, 1974; Alba 1976; Abramson 1973).

In addition to these periodic national sample surveys, a new data source became available in the early 1980s. The U.S. census has only recently become a resource for research on later-generation whites. The decennial censuses through 1970 asked questions about the individual’s birthplace and his or her parents’ birthplaces. This made it possible to identify the first generation—immigrants themselves—and the second generation—the children of immigrants. (Together these two generations were known as the “foreign stock.”) Yet the grandchildren and later descendants of immigrants were not identifiable in these censuses and were classified simply as “native white of native parentage.” As the population of European origin progressed generationally, a smaller proportion of it consisted of “foreign stock” and a greater proportion disappeared into the category “native white of native parentage.”

In the late 1970s leaders of organizations of white ethnic groups such as Irish-Americans, Italian-Americans, and Slavic-Americans pressured the government to change the census form by adding a question that would allow them to identify their potential members—the third and later generations. This move was resisted by the Bureau of the Census on the grounds that it would not produce “hard” enough data. In earlier tests of questions on ethnic identity, the Census Bureau’s monthly Current Population Survey had found that ethnic identity was not very reliable—people changed their minds about it from survey to survey. However, at the last minute, responding to pressure from these ethnic organizations, the Census Bureau did add a question on ethnic ancestry (reproduced in Appendix A).²

² The question appeared on the long form of the census that was sent to one out of every five households in the country. There was a blank line to record the ancestry of
The 1980 census asked people to describe their ancestry, allowing them to give up to three responses. For the first time, then, the ethnic ancestry of every individual was ascertained—not just that of the first and second generations. A total of 83 percent of Americans gave some ethnic response: a single ancestry was reported by 52 percent and multiple ancestry by 31 percent. The remaining 17 percent did not give a specific response about ancestry: 6 percent said American, 1 percent named a religious group or gave some other answer that was not codeable, and 10 percent gave no response at all (Bureau of the Census 1980a, 1–2).

These data provide valuable information for assessing the degree of assimilation and continued differences among white ethnicities in later generations, making it possible to ascertain the degree of intermarriage, socioeconomic differences, and residential dispersion among white ethnicities (Alba 1985a, 1985b; Lieberson and Waters 1985, 1988). The census data are an improvement over previously available sample survey data because the census allows identification of multiple ancestries. The census also provides coverage for the whole population—allowing analysis of ancestry data in small geographic areas.

However, there are various problems with both sample surveys and the 1980 census as sole sources of information on the ethnic identity of later-generation whites. Most important, the data reveal neither the strength nor the extent of ethnic identification. Presumably some of the people who answer that they are of a particular ethnic ancestry will attach a great deal of importance to that identity. For others, ethnicity is intermittently important, and still others will assume the label but little else. For example, it cannot mean the same thing for a fourth-generation Italian-American in a California suburb to say “I am Italian” as it does for a second-generation resident of Boston’s North End, for whom chances in life, primary and secondary relationships, and so on are to a large extent bounded by the world of the ethnic group. These surveys affirm that individuals do maintain an ethnic identity, but cannot tell what this identity means to the individual, how and why people choose a particular ethnic identity from a

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each person listed in the household. Multiple responses were accepted and the answer “American” was discouraged. The census coded two ancestries for each person who supplied two on the form and coded three ancestries for an individual if he or she was among the seventeen most common triple combinations reported to the census. For an in-depth analysis of these ancestry data for whites, see Lieberson and Waters 1988. Bean and Tienda 1987 discusses the results for people of Spanish origin, and Farley and Allen 1987 discusses the responses of blacks.
range of possible choices; how often and in what ways that ethnic identity is used in everyday life; and how ethnic identity is intergenerationally transferred within families.

In order to delve more deeply into these processes of ethnic identification for white Americans, I conducted in-depth interviews with sixty third- and fourth-generation white ethnics in suburban communities outside of San Jose, California, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1986–87. These personal interviews provide an exploratory account of the nature and meaning of ethnicity for a population that has proved very elusive to in-depth analysis. Very little research has been done on the ethnicity of people who live in suburban areas that are not segregated by ethnic origin.3 In fact, sociologists tend to equate suburbanization and residential integration with assimilation. Yet we know that later-generation suburban residents do continue to answer census or survey questions on ethnicity. Were respondents just inventing an answer to a census question when they said they were Irish-Italian, or did this identity have some meaning in their day-to-day lives?

The two suburbs I chose for the fieldwork were on opposite sides of the country. The first, a California suburb, was an area where a sociologist would least expect to find ethnicity. I tried to discover what kind of ethnicity exists when the structural forces that maintain it are not evident. Then a suburb outside of an older northeastern city—Philadelphia—was chosen, in part to see whether or not the same patterns held there as in California—whether somehow the ties of ethnicity would be stronger in the East, where the original immigrants from Europe first settled in great numbers. Since the general trend in the country has been toward increased mobility, higher educational achievement, and social mobility into the middle class for white ethnic groups, these middle-class suburbs could be seen as the cutting edge of the future development of white ethnicity. In fact, the respondents were at that very interesting point where they fall off the sociologist’s map—having moved from urban neighborhoods that were previously ethnically defined, in many cases, to a suburb that was not ethnically defined.

The suburban areas were chosen specifically because they were not

primarily populated by any one ethnic group. Both areas are overwhelmingly white and upper-middle-class. The respondents were lawyers, engineers, managers, teachers, nurses, stockbrokers, and the like. Most were the first generation in their family to have professional jobs. Most, but not all, were college-educated.

Although I deliberately added the Philadelphia sample after I had completed the interviews in California because I thought there might be some ways in which living in California dampened ethnic identity —through geographic mobility away from extended family ties and European immigrant communities, I actually found very few differences between the two samples. The stories people told about family and ethnicity were very similar in these two suburban communities. Because the two samples were so very similar, I do not distinguish between them in the narrative that follows.

The samples were restricted to whites of European extraction and to Roman Catholics. The choice to interview only Americans of European origin was made because the theoretical question of interest was the meaning or lack of meaning of ethnicity to people in the last stages of assimilation—people for whom ethnicity is an option rather than an ascribed characteristic. As many sociologists have noted, racial identity as a non-white has had very different consequences for individuals in our society (Blauner 1972; Takaki 1987), and so I would expect that the processes and experiences I describe here would generally be different for that population.

The sample was drawn from Roman Catholics for three reasons. First, because I wanted to control for the effects of religion independently from those of ethnicity, I decided that comparing levels and content of ethnic identification within one religion would introduce fewer confounding factors than considering all religions at once. Second, the groups that experienced ethnic resurgence in the 1970s—Italians, Poles, and Irish—are mostly Roman Catholic. By interviewing Catholics the research would focus on a population that was the subject of much debate between the assimilationist and pluralist approaches to ethnicity (Alba 1976, 1044). Finally, I did not want to specify in advance which ethnic groups to interview because I was

4. The area of the California parish was approximately 80 percent white, 11 percent Asian, 7 percent Hispanic, and 2 percent black. The most common ancestries among whites were English, German, Irish, Italian, and Portuguese. The Philadelphia sample was chosen from an area that was 93 percent white, 5 percent black, 1.1 percent Asian, and .9 percent Hispanic. The most common ancestries among the whites there were German, Italian, Irish, English, Russian, and Polish.
particularly interested in people with mixed ethnic backgrounds and the process by which they either chose one of their ethnicities or chose not to identify with any ethnicity. By using a population of Catholics, I was sampling from among “potential ethnics,” but was not pre-selecting any degree or kind of ethnic identification.

The question of whether the processes described here are different for other religious groups in the United States will ultimately have to be answered through further research with other samples. Jews may be more aware of and identified with their ethnic identity than the suburban Catholics I interviewed. Protestants may be further removed from their ethnic ancestries than Catholics owing to patterns of immigration to the United States, with northern and western Europeans coming before the more heavily Catholic central and southern Europeans. This would mean less ethnic identification overall for Protestants, and less societal sensitivity to that identification. Overall, then, one might assume that the patterns described here for Catholics will generally be true for other groups, but the intensity of feeling and attention to ethnicity will vary, depending on factors such as the degree to which religion overlaps with ancestry and the number of generations in the United States, which will vary by religion.

Using the “snowball” sampling technique, I started by interviewing active parishioners in the two suburbs chosen. At the conclusion of each interview, I asked if the respondent knew of another member of the parish who would be willing to be interviewed. If so, I then called the latter to set up an interview. Whenever possible, I also attempted to interview more than one generation in a family. Accordingly, I contacted the grown-up children of middle-aged respondents and the parents of younger respondents.  

The interviews were conducted in the respondents’ homes and lasted between one and three hours. In addition to the formal interviews, I was invited to social events in both areas, including family gatherings, christenings, and holiday celebrations. These occasions provided opportunities for me to informally interview other extended family members and to observe family rituals and interactions.

Despite the restriction of the sample to white, suburban, middle-

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5. I was not as successful as I would have liked in this endeavor, only interviewing two generations in six families—the Alberts, the Scottos, the Binets, the O’Keeves, the Williamses, and the Gilligans. In five other families I did not conduct in-depth interviews with more than one generation, but I did ask adult respondents about the ancestries of their children.
class Catholics, much of the diversity of ethnicity in America appeared in my sample. The majority of my respondents were of Irish, Italian, and Polish descent, but the final sample included people of Portuguese, Scottish, Welsh, English, German, French, Slovenian, Lithuanian, Serbian, Norwegian, Dutch, American Indian, Spanish, Russian, and Czech origin. (Of course, some people had only a small fraction of one of these ethnicities present in their backgrounds.) The degree of intermarriage in the family backgrounds of the sample was relatively high—with only 40 percent of the sample describing only one ancestry in their backgrounds.

I began each interview with the census form and asked respondents how they would answer the ancestry question, reading them the instructions the Bureau of the Census provided. Next I asked the open-ended question, "Why did you answer in that way?" Then followed a series of questions about family history and ethnicity. The responses to those questions and further probing into the process of self-identification reveal some of the complicated mechanisms people use to shift and choose ethnic or ancestral affiliation. The interview schedule is reproduced in Appendix B, and a list of the respondents, along with information on their ancestry, occupation, age, residence, and education is presented in Appendix C. The names and all other identifying characteristics have been changed.

These in-depth interviews, together with quantitative data on ethnic identification from the 1980 census, are used in the following chapters to explore the evolution and content of ethnic identity for later-generation whites in America. Sociologists have speculated about the extent of the persistence of ethnic identity beyond the third generation, and about the meaning of such identities for those involved. The 1980 census confirms that some degree of identity does persist, but only provides the beginning pieces of the puzzle of what this new or "symbolic" ethnicity entails. The interview material provides a rich exploratory account of the nature and meaning of ethnicity for this heretofore elusive population.

Chapter 2 describes two of the most important characteristics of

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6. Although the sample was restricted to Americans of European origin, two individuals did describe some portion of Native American ancestry in their backgrounds.

7. In the process of changing the names for my respondents, I tried to make the new names reflect the ethnic connotations of the respondents' real names. Thus if a respondent had an Irish first name and an Italian last name, I gave them a similar pseudonym.
Introduction

later-generation ethnicity in the United States: it involves choices and is dynamic. The influences on the choices people make about their own ethnic identity are discussed in chapter 3. Chapters 4 through 7 describe the content and meaning of ethnicity for the people interviewed. Chapter 4 explores the declining significance of the boundaries separating white ethnic groups in terms of socio-demographic phenomena such as intermarriage, socioeconomic discrimination, and residential segregation. Chapters 5 and 6 examine the cultural and social psychological significance that ethnic identity retains for the respondents. The last chapter discusses how the process and content of ethnic identification reinforce each other, and the implications and consequences ethnicity holds for this population and for society as a whole.