

MORE ABOUT THE MELTING POT AND THE SALAD BOWL

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The Melting Pot

The great numbers of immigrants arriving in the United States forced the new nation to implement a policy of nation building. How should the immigrants be incorporated into the new nation? How should they become Americans? Thus one of the most persistent rhetorical questions in the course of American history has been: "What is an American?" And perhaps the most famous answer to that question was given by Crèvecoeur, a Frenchman, in 1783: "*Here individuals of all races are melted into a new race of men*". More than a century later these same ideas were expressed in the myth of "the melting pot." The term was coined by Israel Zangwill in his famous play *The Melting Pot* (1908). Zangwill illustrated how people from different nations were melted together and born again as Americans. The melting pot became the image of an assimilated American society. The immigrants had been transformed into Americans.

The Immigrant Experience

The Melting Pot

The melting pot is but one metaphor for the immigrant experience – the transition from one country to another. Other common metaphors that focus on the negative sides of the immigrant experience are those describing the immigrants as "uprooted" and "transplanted" in a strange country. They are living between two worlds, and "crippled by divided hearts and confused by two souls." Such metaphors imply that the immigrant experience is one of alienation and estrangement and focus on a dichotomy between the old and the new homeland. However, these metaphors have been reconsidered. Today they are often replaced by terms suggesting that immigrants have the advantage of drawing upon two cultural traditions, two ways of thought, and being at home in "a double landscape." In this way the immigrant experience has been transformed into an enriching ethnic experience. The relationship is not one of dichotomy but rather one of harmony and complementation.

The Salad Bowl

The term complementary identity is frequently used to characterize the immigrant possessing both an ethnic identity and a national identity as an American citizen. To explain this double identity we often use "salad bowl" as a metaphor. In the "salad bowl" metaphor each culture retains its own distinct qualities (the different ingredients in the salad), but has a sense of common national identity in the country of habitat (the salad). We also use the term hyphenated to illustrate the double identity e.g. a Norwegian American is a hyphenated American.

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