



Reinventing the Melting Pot: The New Immigrants and What It Means To Be American

By Tamar Jacoby

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In *Reinventing the Melting Pot*, twenty-one of the writers who have thought longest and hardest about immigration come together around a surprising consensus: yes, immigrant absorption still works-and given the number of newcomers arriving today, the nation's future depends on it. But it need not be incompatible with ethnic identity-and we as a nation need to find new ways to talk about and encourage becoming American. In the wake of 9/11 it couldn't be more important to help these newcomers find a way to fit in. Running through these essays is a single common theme: Although ethnicity plays a more important role now than ever before, today's newcomers can and will become Americans and enrich our national life-reinventing the melting pot and reminding us all what we have in common.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In 1908, English immigrant Israel Zangwill coined the term "melting pot" as a title for his newest play, a vision of America as an Eden where all races and ethnicities melted happily into a harmonious whole. One of the most enduring catchphrases in our lexicon, the "melting pot," as both ideal and reality is discussed and dissected in this collection of 22 essays from an appropriately diverse assortment of writers. Divided into five sections, the book examines the process of assimilation through historical, political, economic and racial lenses, and scrutinizes the impact of immigration on contemporary American society. This variety of perspectives makes the book an engaging and enlightening look at a phenomenon—immigration—that has often been plagued by misunderstanding. With contributions from journalists like Pete Hamill and Michael Barone—who examines the acute challenges faced by immigrants after September 11—the book achieves a deep richness. Brimming with statistics (e.g. second-generation Latinos earn 50% more than first-generation Latinos; more than half of Asians and Hispanics now marry whites), the collection offers fresh viewpoints on modern immigration trends. Most of the writers agree that the words "melting pot" do not accurately describe the process of assimilation, or of Americans' national identity. With tempered optimism, contributor Herbert J. Gans offers a new metaphor, comparing the ethnic makeup of the country to a kaleidoscope "in constant flux" that creates "the overall pattern of the nation." Much at issue among the writers is the idea of assimilation, which can be seen as either a positive force or as a threat to the cultural identity. Most concur, however, on its inevitability. Editor Jacoby concludes that "we are a unique nation: defined not by blood or ancestry, but by a set of shared ideas." The acclimation to these ideas is an ongoing and difficult process, at once changing the countenance of the country and confirming the notion of yet another noteworthy catchphrase, *e pluribus unum*—from many, one.

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From [Booklist](#)

Jacoby has assembled a thoughtful, provocative collection of essays that reconsiders and ultimately attempts to reinvent the traditional myth of the American melting pot. With the immigrant population continuing to increase and the demographic landscape of the nation rapidly altering—one in nine Americans is now foreign-born, and blacks, Hispanics, and Asians now constitute more than 30 percent of the population—it seems to be an appropriate time to challenge an outmoded set of beliefs and values. These 21 essays endeavor to provide unique and often unorthodox answers to conventional immigration and citizenship questions. As the various social scientists, journalists, and writers included discuss the nature and the practicality of twenty-first-century assimilation and cultural identity, the reader is treated to an exciting new vision of what it means to be an American in an increasingly global and richly diverse society. *Margaret Flanagan*

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Review

"An exciting new vision of what it means to be American in an increasingly global and richly diverse society." -- *Booklist*

"Careful, reasoned assessments of the current state of immigration and immigrants in a nation that constantly renews itself with newcomers." -- *Los Angeles Times*

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