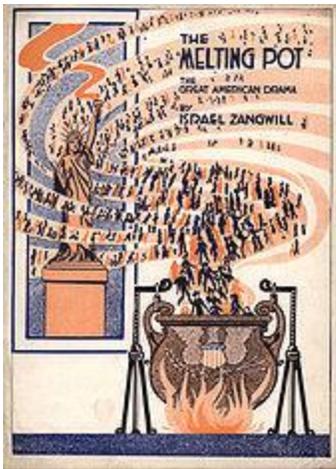


Melting Pot

The **melting pot** is a metaphor for a heterogeneous society becoming more homogeneous, the different elements "melting together" into a harmonious whole with a common culture. It is particularly used to describe the assimilation of immigrants to the USA. The melting-together metaphor was in use by the 1780s.

After 1970 the desirability of assimilation and the melting pot model was challenged by proponents of multiculturalism, who assert that cultural differences within society are valuable and should be preserved, proposing the alternative metaphor of the *mosaic*, *salad bowl* or "American Kaleidoscope" – different cultures mix, but remain distinct



The first use in American literature of the concept of immigrants "melting" into the receiving culture are found in the writings of J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur. In his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) Crevecoeur writes, in response to his own question, "What then is the American, this new man?" that the American is one who "leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great Alma Mater. Here individuals of all nations are *melted* into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world."

“ ...whence came all these people? They are a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes... What, then, is the American, this new man? He is neither a European nor the descendant of a European; hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. . . . The Americans were once scattered all over Europe; here they are incorporated into one

of the finest systems of population which has ever appeared." – J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*.

The newly popularized concept of the melting pot was frequently equated with "Americanization", meaning cultural assimilation, by many "old stock" Americans. In Henry Ford's Ford English School (established in 1914), the graduation ceremony for immigrant employees involved symbolically stepping off an immigrant ship and passing through *the melting pot*, entering at one end in costumes designating their nationality and emerging at the other end in identical suits and waving American flags

The First World War heightened tensions between Anglo-American and German-Americans. The war and the Russian Revolution, which caused a "Red Scare" in the US, also fanned feelings of xenophobia. During and immediately after the First World War, the concept of the melting pot was equated by Nativists with complete cultural assimilation towards an Anglo-American norm ("Anglo-conformity") on the part of immigrants, and immigrants who opposed such assimilation were accused of disloyalty to the United States.

In the early twentieth century, the meaning of the recently popularized concept of the melting pot was subject to ongoing debate which centered on the issue of immigration. The debate surrounding the concept of the melting pot centered on how immigration impacted American society and on how immigrants should be approached. The melting pot was equated with either the acculturation or the total assimilation of European immigrants, and the debate centered on the differences between these two ways of approaching immigration: "Was the idea to melt down the immigrants and then pour the resulting, formless liquid into the preexisting cultural and social molds modeled on Anglo-Protestants like Henry Ford and Woodrow Wilson, or was the idea instead that everyone, Mayflower descendants and Sicilians, Ashkenazi and Slovaks, would act chemically upon each other so that all would be changed, and a new compound would emerge?". Nativists wanted to severely restrict access to the melting pot. They felt that far too many "undesirables," or in their view, culturally inferior immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe had already arrived. The compromises that were reached in a series of immigration laws in the 1920s established the principle that the number of new arrivals should be small, and, apart from family reunification, the inflow of new immigrants should match the ethnic profile of the nation as it existed at that time. National quotas were established that discouraged immigration from Poland, Italy and Russia, and encouraged immigration from Britain, Ireland and Germany

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European immigration to the US became increasingly diverse and increased substantially in numbers. Beginning in the 1890s, large numbers of Southern and Eastern European immigrant groups such as the Italians, Jews, and Poles arrived. Many returned to Europe but those who remained merged into the cultural melting pot, adopting American lifestyles. By contrast, Chinese arrivals

met intense hostility and new laws in the 1880s tried to exclude them, but many arrived illegally. Hostility forced them into "Chinatowns" or ethnic enclaves in the larger cities, where they lived a culture apart and seldom assimilated. The acquisition of Hawaii in 1898, with full citizenship for the residents of all races, greatly increased the Asian American population.