

Worksheet: How does a people keep its identity in diaspora?

Think about the many ethnic groups who have immigrated in large numbers to the United States over the past century and a half. Although this is oversimplified, why did the Italians, Irish, Poles, Germans, Hungarians, Portuguese, Greeks more or less assimilate to “American” identity, whereas African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Arab Americans retain much of their identity, at least in some larger communities? How can a community retain its identity in exile?

Some factors to consider:

1. Geography of the community in diaspora: Do the people live together, or are they scattered?
2. Language: Do the immigrants speak a language different from the host culture?
3. Education: Does the immigrant community have its own education system?
4. Discrimination: Is the host culture willing to allow the immigrant community to assimilate?
5. Culture: Are there elements of the immigrant culture that set them apart and make assimilation difficult?
6. Religion: Is religion shared with the host culture?

What examples of some of these considerations can you think of for contemporary immigrant groups that either encourage assimilation or encourage the preservation of a distinct identity?