Urban Appalachians and Canadian Maritime Migrants: A Comparative Study of Emergent Ethnicity*

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Studies of North American ethnic groups have generally concentrated on the conditions and processes which contribute to either their endurance or decline over several immigrant generations. By contrast, little focus has been placed on their structural emergence and development. Our purpose in this paper is to investigate the processes of ethnic group formation, or what we will refer to as ethnicization, as they apply to two internal migrant groups, Appalachians in the United States, and Maritimers in Canada. These two groups display key social similarities despite their distinct societal contexts and may be seen as appropriate comparative cases to shed light on the social conditions which give rise to, or impede, the development of ethnicity.

In looking at the processes of ethnicization, two assumptions are made. First, ethnicity is not a constant or uniform social experience either for individuals or for groups. Rather, it is a variant, processual, and emergent phenomenon and will therefore reveal itself in different forms and with varying degrees of intensity in different social settings. Several ingredients of ethnicity are fundamental, however, though variable from case to case. In- and outgroup perceptions of a common origin and culture, and an institutional structure or community based on that perceived commonality, are the major components of ethnic groups as they have traditionally evolved in industrial societies. Not only is each component a variable, evident in a variety of combinations and degrees, but each may develop naturally through socio-historical

* This is a revision of a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Sociological Society in Memphis, Tennessee, April 14-17, 1982.
circumstances, or may be created in basically artificial form for political or economic purposes.

Second, ethnic group formation in North America is primarily an urban phenomenon, particularly among groups which emerge as a result of voluntary migration, either internal or external. It is in the heterogeneity of the city that ethnic identity and community emerge, the products of confrontation and competition amongst a variety of groups for the society's rewards—jobs, housing, education, etc. Here the interaction of collectivities and individuals of varied origins and behavioral modes leads to the development of ascriptive and voluntary identities, which in turn create in-group cohesiveness and out-group ethnic categorization. It is thus to the urban environment that we must look to investigate the processes by which ethnic groups are established and subsequently mature. We have chosen to focus on two contemporary internal migrant groups since, within their respective societies, they are cases which seem to most closely reflect the formative stages of ethnicization.

Models Of Ethnicization

While the processes of ethnic group formation have been largely neglected in the literature, several theoretical approaches to these processes are implicit in most analyses of North American groups.

The most traditional model of ethnicization assumes that migrants come to the host society with particular cultural characteristics which, as an adaptive response, are gradually modified by, and fused with, traits of the society's dominant group. Particularly in the urban environment, a hybrid (i.e., ethnic) culture evolves which becomes the attractive bond around which an institutional structure is molded and sustained, and which thereby fulfills the psychological and social needs of migrants (Francis, 1976; Gordon, 1964; Handlin, 1951). The chief focus of ethnicity in this view is the collectivity's distinctive culture.

A second model emphasizes the synthesis of host and immigrant group perceptions as the basis of ethnic group formation (Barth, 1969; Sarna, 1978; Shibutani and Kwan, 1965). In this view, the host or dominant group prescribes an ethnic identity to immigrants who respond with the development of an ethnic cohesiveness, partially as a protective device and partially as a means of establishing an identity within a pluralistic environment. Ethnicity is, in this view, not a particular array of culture traits, but a form of social organization, the boundaries of which are flexible in various social contexts. Perceived cultural features may disappear with little or no damage to the continuation of ethnicity (Barth, 1969; Patterson, 1975). More simply, so long as people define themselves and/or are defined by others in ethnic terms, they constitute an ethnic group. To understand the emergence of ethnicity, it is necessary to look primarily at how group identities are formed and the manner in which persons manipulate and deal with those identities.