

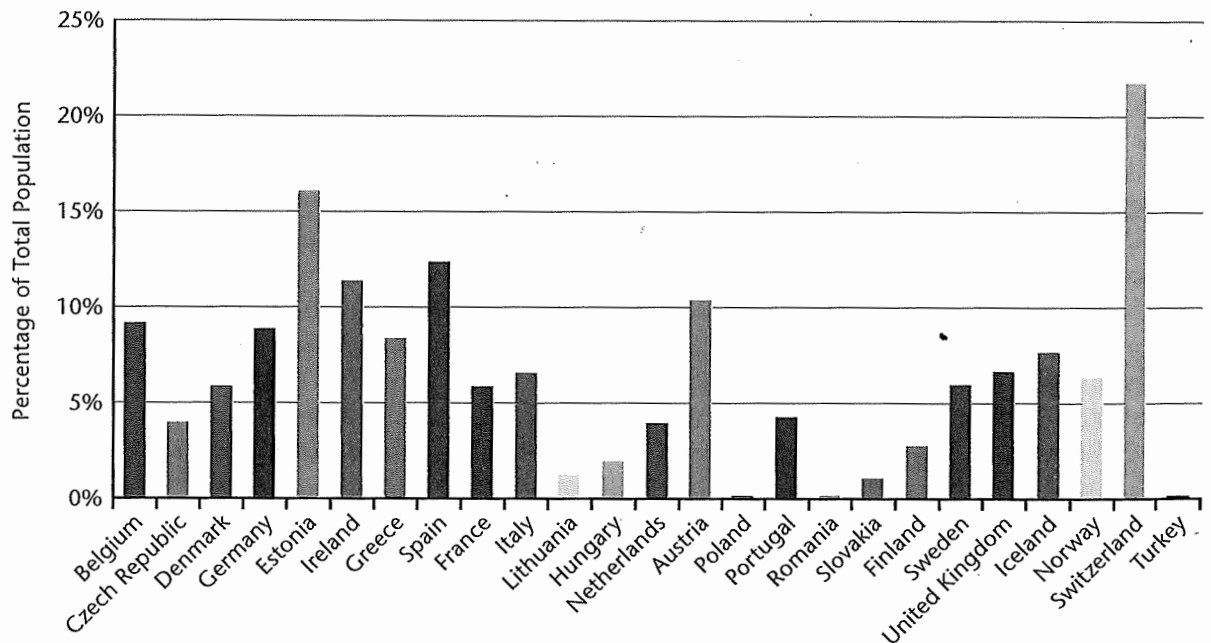
The Meeting of Cultures

- 1 In the last few decades, the world has become more culturally diverse than at any time in its history. Much of this diversity is the result of migration, both voluntary and involuntary. In Canada, according to census data, one in five people are foreign born, which is the highest proportion since the 1930s. In fact, between 2001 and 2006, the number for the foreign-born population increased by over 13 percent, 4 times faster than the Canadian-born population. Australia is another example, with 22 percent of the population originating from other countries. In the United States, the figure is 12 percent. Immigrants come to new countries from an array of different nations, bringing with them their hopes and dreams. They also bring their cultures. This meeting of cultures can add to the richness of a society, but it can also generate serious challenges.
- 2 Culture has been described as one of the most complicated concepts to explain. Generally, it refers to the entire way of life of a group of people. More specifically, material culture refers to language, clothes, and food, whereas symbolic culture refers to ideas, beliefs, and customs. Culture shapes the way people view their world. It is so closely connected to a sense of personal identity that it feels innate* rather than **learned**. However, it is learned, and learned so gradually that people are unaware of the process. When exposed to another culture, however, a person can immediately identify differences. Within today's culturally diverse societies,

WHILE YOU READ 1

Use context to choose the definition of *sense* in this sentence.
 a) Good judgment
 b) A feeling
 c) Ability to see, hear, etc.

Figure 2.3 Percentage of Foreign Citizens



Source: Guardian.co.uk chart

the challenge facing everyone, from individuals to governments, is how different cultures can best interact with one another.

- 3 One approach to interaction among cultures is assimilation. This refers to a minority group that gradually changes so that it can absorb into the dominant culture. Assimilation is often explained through the “melting pot” metaphor. During the twentieth century, immigrants to the United States were eager to adapt to the American way of life. There was widespread assumption that this was a necessary step in realizing the economic rewards of the American **Dream**. Immigrants from Ireland, Italy, and Eastern Europe learned English, became citizens, and gradually merged into the dominant culture. Their children accelerated this process as they self-identified as American rather than as their parent’s nationality.

WHILE YOU READ 2

This is a continuing idea marker. Highlight the idea it repeats from the previous sentence.



Learning the language of the new country can help immigrants assimilate.

- 4 Many people claim that there are advantages to the process of assimilation. Assimilation creates a national identity, a sense that regardless of racial or ethnic background, people feel part of the country in which they live. If everyone within a society belongs to the same group, then conflict will decrease. It can be argued that this sense of national identity has served the United States well for many years. In a country where 79 percent of the population is white, 16 percent Latino or Hispanic, 12 percent African American, and 4 percent Asian, this diverse group of people shares a strong sense of national identity. Although some conflicts between different cultural groups have occurred, this sense of national identity has allowed the United States to enjoy a relatively peaceful domestic history compared to many other countries.
- 5 However, not all ethnic groups are invited to assimilate into the mainstream culture. Laws have even restricted the rights of specific immigrant groups. In the United States, laws segregated African Americans from the white population, particularly in the southern states, until the Civil Rights

legislation of the 1960s corrected these unjustified practices. Another example is South Africa where, prior to 1994, the government believed that white South Africans were superior to black South Africans. Strict laws were passed to separate black South Africans from the dominant white culture. As a result of this belief, immigration was limited to only those who the government believed could successfully assimilate into the dominant culture. Since this culture was based on race (white) and language (English and Afrikaans), Africans from neighboring countries were prohibited from entering as immigrants. Instead, the government classified them as migrant workers and severely restricted their rights.

- 6 In the last few decades, people have begun to question the concept of assimilation, even when it is open to all. Many people have come to view assimilation as a flawed process since it assumes that the dominant culture is superior. People began to question whether assimilation was the best approach to diversity. As the number of immigrants has continued to rise in many countries and as globalization has encouraged more travel and openness between nations, the traditional image of the melting pot has been replaced by the metaphor of a “mosaic.” A mosaic is comprised of hundreds of small pieces, which together make up a complete picture. This mosaic represents multiculturalism, an attitude that encourages people to embrace cultural differences rather than expecting minority cultures to assimilate into the dominant one.
- 7 Legal equality together with respect and tolerance of racial and ethnic differences are at the core of multiculturalism. Canada provides a good example. Canadians are among the most diverse populations worldwide. Its minorities include European, Chinese, Indian, and Middle Eastern immigrants as well as native people, the First Nations. It has two official languages, French and English. National and local governments have passed many laws aimed at encouraging multicultural harmony. In 1988, for example, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act declared equal access for all Canadians within economic, social, cultural, and political life.
- 8 This strong legal foundation for multiculturalism might suggest that Canada has fully embraced its diversity. Yet a 2010 poll reveals a different picture. In this poll, 30 percent of Canadians believed multiculturalism has been bad for Canada. In addition, 54 percent believed the melting pot was preferable to the mosaic, claiming that all cultures should merge into one Canadian **culture**.
- 9 In the United States, multiculturalism is also integrated within political, social, and economic life. In particular, it is closely connected to education. However, as in Canada, embracing cultural differences within schools is not without controversy, as history of bilingual education has shown. A bilingual education program uses the native language of immigrant children to teach them math, science, and social studies while they are learning English. These programs have caused disagreement both within immigrant communities and in the wider American public. Education in

WHILE YOU READ 3

Reread the previous sentence. Highlight the reason why immigration was limited.

WHILE YOU READ 4

Look back in this paragraph. Highlight the contrast marker and the view marker.

California has been at the heart of this debate. Before 1998, many English language learners there were taught in a mix of their native language and English instruction. Supporters of bilingual education claim that forcing immigrant children to learn all subjects in English causes them to fall behind in school. Opponents, however, argue that the best way to learn a new language is to be fully immersed in that language. In 1998, the issue was brought to a vote. The majority of Californians chose an English-only teaching policy. With many second language students still struggling in school, the controversy continues today. Bilingual education illustrates that multiculturalism in practice is not always easy.

10 Why is multiculturalism such a divisive issue? Some people argue that the poll results and votes against bilingual education are evidence of growing intolerance toward immigrants in Canada and the United States. However, such an interpretation appears unjustified since in both countries, the majority of citizens claim that immigration has been good for their **countries**. A more likely explanation may be the confusion around the term *multiculturalism*. One common interpretation of this term is that immigrants should retain their own culture and language and need not adapt to their new country. Canadians and Americans who define multiculturalism in this way oppose it. On the other hand, the majority of citizens interpret it differently. For them it means accepting American or Canadian cultural traditions and learning the new languages while retaining their own culture to enjoy in private and family life.

11 Migration has had a long history, and it is far from ending. A 2011 poll of people from 150 countries found that 630 million adults have the desire to move permanently to another country; another 1.1 billion wish to relocate for temporary work. It is very likely that in the future, countries will become even more culturally diverse as individuals and governments continue to work toward racial and ethnic equality, harmony, and respect.

WHILE YOU READ 5

Look back at the previous two sentences. Highlight the view marker and the common view.



Many immigrants become citizens of their new country.