

# Summary



In the last presidential elections, the vice-presidential candi for the Democratic Party, Senator Joseph Lieberman, was a Jewish American and, atthe moment, one of the Republic Party's presidential primary nominees, Rudy Giuliani, is an Italian American. These two examples serve as a testament to the extent to which Jews and Italians have, over the course of the century, assimilated into American mainstream culture and society. There is little doubt that Italians and Jews, despite remaining pockets of racism and prejudice, have been assimilated into mainstream America but, attainment of the said integration entailed the battling and resistance of WASP America's discrimination and prejudices.

The history of Italian immigration to America provides a context for understanding the reason why they initial occupied the lower tier of the European ethnic immigration groups. Quite simply stated, Italian immigration to the United States did not begin in earnest until the late nineteenth century, lasting to the early twentieth, making this one of the last of the European ethnic groups to immigrate to this country. As both late immigrants and, of course, Catholics, they stood out from mainstream, White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, America.

Italian immigrants did not only stand out because of their religious affiliation or their late arrival to America but because of their association with organized crime. The linkage, real and not assumed, between leading members of the Italian American community and the Sicilian mafia, and their transplantation of the Sicilian organized crime model to the United States, fuelled mainstream America's prejudices towards Italian immigrants.

Perceived of as either Mafioso or petty criminals, they were relegated to the bottom of the social hierarchy and actively barred from public office, a

significant number of educational institutions and even social clubs.

By the third generation, however, prejudices had eroded. The Italian American community had gradually inserted itself into mainstream America through the adoption of the core culture. The third generation's evident Americanism significantly facilitated this group's integration and their increasing success at upward social mobility solidified their status as Americans who happened to be of Italian descent, as opposed to Italian Americans. At the present time, this ethnic group stands at or above the national average insofar as all of income, education and occupation are concerned.

As with the Italians, the Jews are late arrivals to America and their assimilation into the mainstream and subsequent acceptance by society, similarly entailed the battling of prejudices and the deconstruction of negative stereotypes. Eastern European Jews had immigrated to America to escape the pogroms and the systematic, often government-spearheaded, discriminatory practices which targeted the Jews. They came to America, not only as late arrivals but as an ethnic-religious group whose physical arrival had been preceded by negative stereotypes and conceptualisations.

Consequent to the fact that Jewish immigrants generally tended to be skilled and educated, their integration into public and economic life was somewhat facilitated by the need for their talents. Acceptance was also somewhat eased by the fact that members of the American-Jewish community, amongst whom one may mention Albert Einstein and the Rothchilds, were internationally renowned members of the global scientific, business and artistic communities. In other words, the contributions which members of this community made to science, art and business, positively impacted societal

perceptions of this group. That does not mean to say that American Jews did not face racial prejudices and stereotypes but that they confronted them through their contributions to public life.

By the third generation, and just as is the case with the Italian Americans, Jewish immigrants had become assimilated into American mainstream society. Their remarkable upward mobility and their participation in almost every facet of American life, whether political, social or economic, eased society's acceptance of them as Americans with a specific religious identity, as opposed to Jews who immigrated to America. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration were one to say that, as a group, the socio-economic mobility experienced by American Jews is the quintessential representation of the realization of the American Dream. At present, the American Jewish population stands above the national average as regards education, income and occupation.

On the basis of the above stated, one may safely conclude that the two groups discussed represented the potential for the overcoming racial and ethnic stereotypes and of successfully integrating into mainstream society.