As you read earlier in this unit, the first immigrants to North America are believed to have come from Asia. They are thought to have crossed a land bridge that existed in what is now the Bering Strait thousands of years ago. Since that time, millions of people from countries all over the world have immigrated to the United States and Canada. They have come in search of a new life in a new homeland. The challenge for citizens and governments of both the United States and Canada is to make sure that these diverse peoples continue to remain unified.

“Mosaic” or “Melting Pot”

After centuries of immigration, the United States and Canada are culturally diverse. They contain large populations of the world’s cultures. Ethnic neighborhoods with populations of Asians, Eastern Europeans, and Latin Americans are found in most large cities of both countries. In New York City alone, immigrant schoolchildren speak more than 100 different languages. The arrival of so many peoples over the years left the United States and Canada with the difficult task of forming a unified society. Each country approached the task of unifying its many cultures differently.

**Canada’s Cultural “Mosaic”**

Canada’s earliest settlers were its native peoples. Its first European settlers came, as you have learned, from two distinct cultural groups—French and English. All of these groups kept their separate identities as the nation developed. Also, Canada encouraged immigration from all over the world. It wanted to fill its vast lands and expand its workforce and its domestic markets. These immigrants also were encouraged to retain their cultural heritage.

As a result, many Canadians have strong ethnic ties. In fact, as you read in Chapter 7, the ethnic identity of French-speaking citizens in Quebec has been so strong that at times they have even considered separating themselves from the Canadian confederation.

The Canadian government has officially recognized the multicultural nature of Canada. In 1988, it enacted the Canadian Multiculturalism Act to protect and promote diversity. Many Canadians believe that this policy ensures equality for people of all origins and enriches their nation. But not all agree. Some Canadians feel that diversity has promoted difference at the expense of “Canadianness.”

The diverse heritage of the United States is evident in this group of students in California.
**AMERICA’S “MELTING POT”** For many years, people in the United States believed that assimilation was the key. It was thought to be the best way to build one nation from many different peoples. Assimilation occurs when people from a minority culture assume the language, customs, and lifestyles of people from the dominant culture. Native Americans were an example. In the late 19th century, they were encouraged and even forced to learn English, adopt Western dress, and become Christians to assimilate into the dominant white culture.

People expected immigrants to assimilate, too. Those who did not could face prejudice because of their cultural differences. Immigrants soon learned that life would be easier if they adopted the ways of their new country—if they underwent “Americanization.” Most of these immigrants had come from Europe. Many wanted to assimilate. They wanted to adopt a common language and culture—to become Americans.

**New Immigrants Challenge Old Ways**

The immigrants who came to the United States in the late 20th century brought different attitudes. They came mainly from Latin America and Asia. They were culturally or racially unlike earlier immigrant groups, who had come mainly from Europe. These later immigrants were less willing to give up their traditions and beliefs in order to assimilate.

**DIVIDED OPINION** Some Americans felt that the new immigrants did not understand what made the United States unique. According to this point of view, America’s strength has come from blending its diverse cultures to create something new—an American. They also believed that encouraging different languages and customs would promote separation, not unity. In response, they wanted immigration limited and English made the official language.

Other Americans, including many educators, held different views. They thought that American society would benefit by stressing multiculturalism, as the Canadians do.

As you can see, bringing many cultures together is a continuing challenge both in the United States and in Canada. So, how can cultural diversity be preserved and national unity forged? The Case Study Project and primary sources that follow will help you explore this question.
PRIMARY SOURCE A

Newspaper Article  In 1998, the Washington Post published a series of articles titled The Myth of the Melting Pot. Staff writer William Booth offered the following comments about immigration and cultural identity in his piece, “One Nation, Indivisible: Is It History?”

The immigrants of today come not from Europe but overwhelmingly from the still developing world of Asia and Latin America. They are driving a demographic shift so rapid that within the lifetimes of today’s teenagers, no one ethnic group—including whites of European descent—will comprise a majority of the nation’s population. . . .

[Many historians argue that there was a greater consensus in the past on what it meant to be an American, a yearning for a common language and culture, and a desire—encouraged, if not coerced [forced] by members of the dominant white Protestant culture—to assimilate. Today, they say, there is more emphasis on preserving one’s ethnic identity, of finding ways to highlight and defend one’s cultural roots.

PRIMARY SOURCE B

Social Commentary  Michelle Young is a writer and editor. Much of her work has focused on issues of multiculturalism. In the following excerpt from a 1996 article in the online publication Career Magazine, Young contrasts assimilation with multiculturalism.

The melting pot concept spoke of all Americans being part of the enormous “cultural stew” we call America. . . . Many people . . . saw the United States of America as a place where historical hurts from their homelands could be erased. . . .

But America was not the nation they’d been promised, where the streets were paved with gold. Many newcomers knew that from experience because “they” were doing the paving! As a result, people began to realize that the concept of the melting pot just wasn’t realistic. . . .

In contrast to the melting pot, multiculturalism encourages us to take pride in our own roots first, in our ingredients we’ve added to what has become America’s multicultural stew. The nation’s promise lies in that multicultural stew, and by appreciating our own cultures, we develop an eagerness to learn about others’ origins.
**Political Commentary** Patrick Buchanan is a politician who was the presidential candidate of the Reform Party in 2000. Buchanan was a strong supporter of immigration reform and assimilation, as is evident in these words posted on his Web site on August 6, 2000.

If America is to survive as “one nation,” we must take an immigration “time out” to mend the melting pot. As President, I will: Halt illegal immigration by securing our borders. Stand with the three-in-four Americans who agree that mass legal immigration must be reduced by restoring the 20th century average of 250,000 to 300,000 immigrants per year. Support a national campaign of assimilation to teach newly adopted Americans our culture, history, traditions, and English language.

**Government Law** The Canadian Multiculturalism Act was passed by the Canadian parliament in 1988. Its purpose was to make the preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada the law of the land.

“. . . It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Government of Canada to . . . (b) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and that it provides an invaluable resource in the shaping of Canada’s future; . . . (c) promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society and assist them in the elimination of any barrier to that participation; . . . (f) encourage and assist the social, cultural, economic, and political institutions of Canada to be both respectful and inclusive of Canada’s multicultural character; . . . (g) promote the understanding and creativity that arise from the interaction between individuals and communities of different origins.”

**Government Document** The 2000 census form contained detailed racial and ethnic classifications, showing the diverse peoples that make up the population of the United States.