Exploring Ethnic and Racial Diversity in the US

Instructions: It's time to discuss the content of the article you read for your Culture Learning Journal this week. Read the text and answer the questions for each section. You do not have to write.

Metaphors: The process of assimilation of immigrants into US culture has been referred to as the "melting pot" but the authors say it can also be thought of as a salad bowl, "where the various groups have remained somewhat distinct and different from one another, creating a richly diverse country."

- *Based on what you have personally experienced or what you have seen in the media, which metaphor do you prefer when thinking about the US?*
- *Which metaphor would you choose to describe the assimilation process in Costa Rica?*

Creation of Dominant Culture: The authors say that the dominant culture of the US was largely defined by the middle-class WASPs (white Anglo-Saxon Protestants) of the late 1700's after the independence of the US from England. "Their characteristics became the standard for judging other groups". Immigrants with a similar ethnic, linguistic, and religious background found it easier to assimilate and join the dominant culture than those from other backgrounds.

"The dominant American culture that grew out of the nation's early history, then, was: English-speaking, Western European, Protestant, and Middle-class in character."

- *Which communities helped form the dominant culture in your country's history?*
- *How would you describe the features of that early dominant culture in terms of linguistic, ethnic, religious, and socio-economic background?*
- *To what extent do those groups continue to represent the dominant culture?*

The African American Experience: "The process of assimilation in the United States has been much more successful for white ethnic groups than for nonwhite ethnic groups. Of the nonwhite ethnic groups, Americans of African descent have had the greatest difficulty in becoming assimilated into the larger culture."

- *In what ways was the African American experience different to the experience of other ethnic groups in their integration in mainstream American culture?*
- *Even after the abolition of slavery in the US, African Americans continued to experience hardships that other ethnic minorities did not experience to the same degree. What do you remember about this from the reading or what you have learned from other sources?*
- *What do you know about historical experiences of racial and ethnic groups in Costa Rica that did not form part of the original dominant culture?*

American Paradox: Although the amount of diversity in the US continues to grow, geographic and community segregation according to race and ethnicity continues to exist. Most Americans believe that segregation is bad but the principal ethnic and racial groups (whites, blacks, Asians, and Hispanics) tend to live in separate neighborhoods, maintain separate social groups, and attend separate churches and schools. There are ethnically diverse communities but most communities tend to be dominated by a single majority group.

- *Why do you think communities in the US still tend to separate along ethnic and racial lines even while the majority of Americans agree that diversity is good and forced segregation is wrong?*
- *What are the benefits and drawbacks of groups separating in this way?*
- *To what degree do different communities integrate or segregate in Costa Rica along ethnic or racial lines?*