



Ministry of Higher Education  
Mohamed Boudiaf University- M'sila  
Faculty of Letters and Languages  
English Department



# LECTURE 6

## Mechanism of Culture Change

Master One  
Dr, Boulanouar S,

## OUTLINE

- Definition of cultural change
- Characteristics of Cultural change
- Factors Influencing Cultural Change
- Diffusion
- Assimilation
- Acculturation
- Cultural relativism
- Ethnocentrism
- Cultural lag

# Mechanism of Culture Change

## Definition

Cultural change is the dynamic transformation of shared practices, beliefs, and behaviors within a community or society over time. It involves an alteration in the collective mindset, often in response to changes in the environment, technology, or social dynamics

# Characteristics of Cultural Change

- Dynamic: Cultural change is never static; it continually evolves and adapts
- Influence of External Factors: Changes often occur in response to technological advances, political shifts, or global events
- Variable Pace: Change can occur slowly through evolution or rapidly as a revolution
- Irreversible: Once a culture changes, it often cannot return to its previous state
- Inclusive: Cultural change affects almost all aspects of society, from language to social norms

# Factors Influencing Cultural Change

Cultural change is influenced by a myriad of interconnected factors that interact in complex ways. Here are some primary factors:

- **1. Technological Advancements**

Technology plays a significant role in shaping cultural norms by introducing new ways of communication, work, and leisure.

- **2. Economic Changes**

Economic fluctuations influence cultural change by altering social structures, roles, and interactions within a community. The growth of global economies has led to a shift in traditional roles and relationships.

### 3. Political Factors

Political systems, governance, laws, and policies directly impact cultural change, affecting everything from individual rights to the overall societal framework.

- ### 4. Environmental Factors

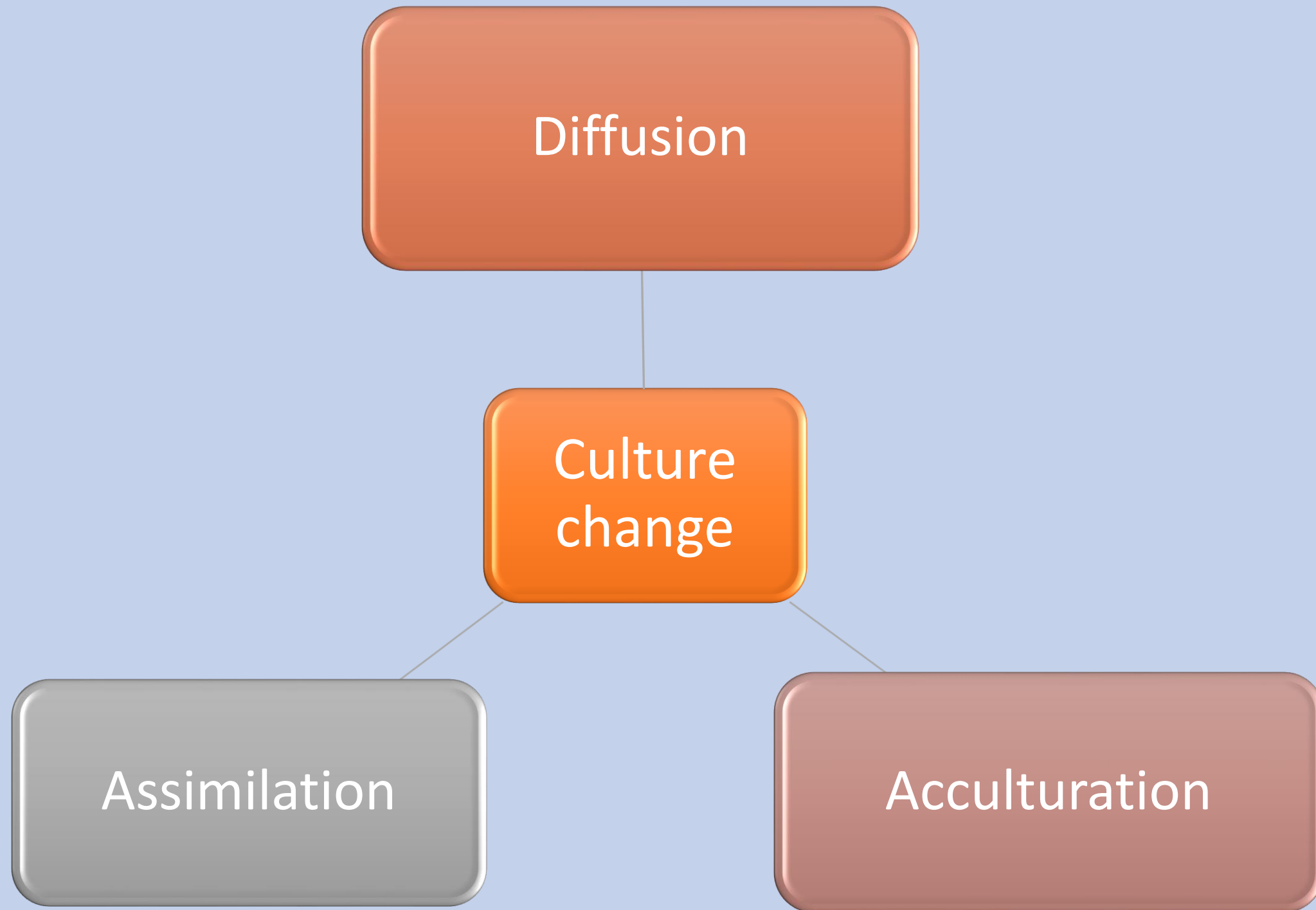
Climate change and environmental degradation have driven communities to adapt their cultural practices to sustainably interact with their surroundings.

- ### 5. Social Interactions and Migration

Social interactions, migration, and globalization contribute to the mixing of cultures, leading to mutual influences and the emergence of hybrid cultural forms.

## Recent Updates and Emerging Trends in Cultural Change

- 1. Digital Culture and Social Media
- 2. Climate Change and Sustainability
- 3. Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic
- 4. Globalization and Cultural Hybridization



Diffusion

Culture  
change

Assimilation

Acculturation



# I. Diffusion

## DEFINITION 1

One of the mechanism by which the substantial uniformity of sociocultural evolution was made possible

(Harris 1968:177)

## DEFINITION 2

Process by which discrete culture traits are transferred from one society to another through migration, trade, war, or other contact.

(Winthrop 1991:82)

## DEFINITION 3

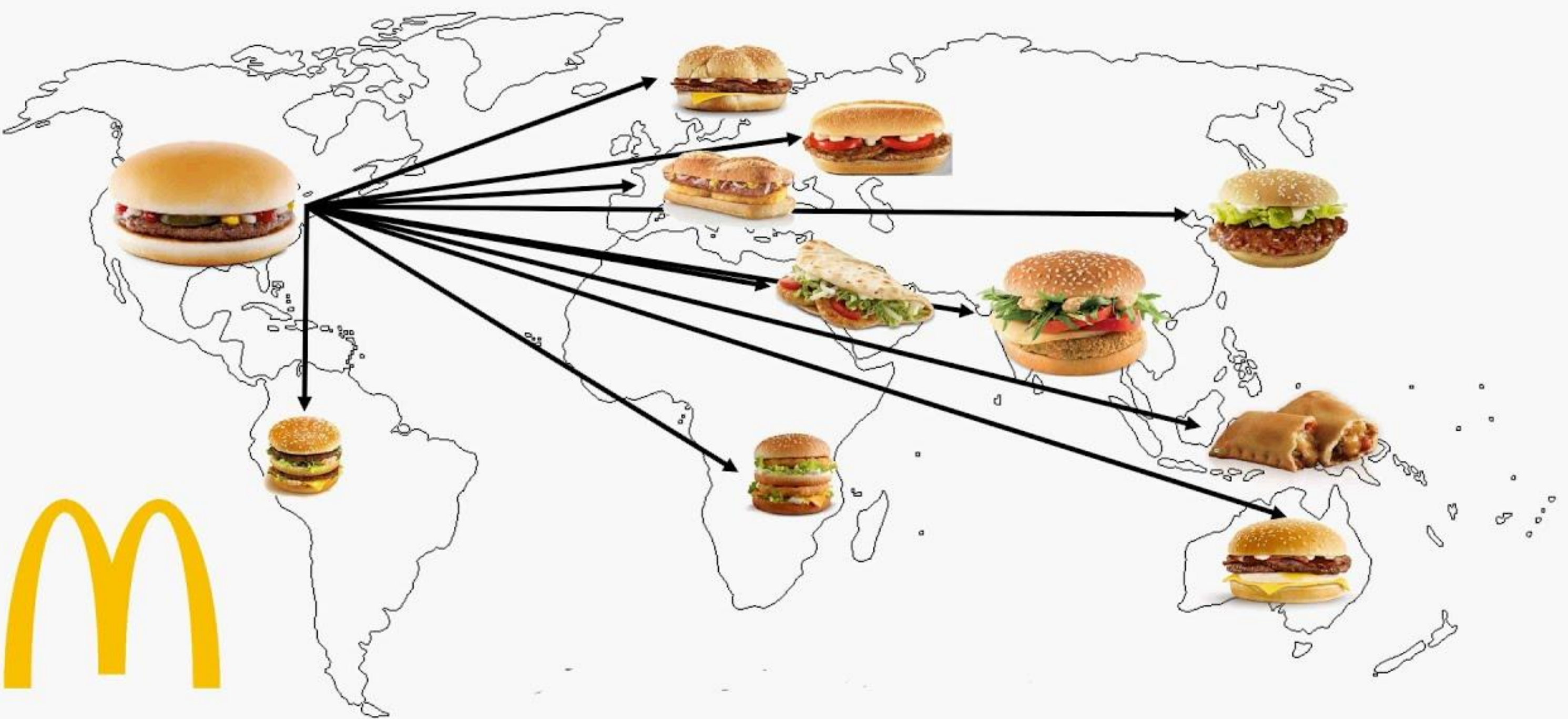
Spread of a culture item from its place of origin to other.

(Titiev 1959:446)

# Definition of Diffusion

It refers to the spread of cultural beliefs, practices, and ideas from one society to another. It occurs when different cultures come into contact with each other, leading to the exchange and adoption of cultural elements.

“Cultural diffusion” is used to make sense of how cultural elements, like technology, language, religion, and even cooking methods, moved from one society to another.



# Some monumental Instances of Cultural Diffusion Throughout History.

**The Silk Road:** This was not a single road but a **network of trade routes connecting East Asia to the Mediterranean**, active from the 2nd century BCE to the 14th century CE.

Imagine traders from ancient China introducing silk, tea, and porcelain to people in the Middle East, who, in turn, offered spices, wool, and precious metals. But it wasn't just goods that were exchanged; philosophies, religious beliefs, and technologies also spread along these routes.



- **Alexander the Great's Conquests:** When **Alexander the Great** from Macedonia conquered vast regions from Greece all the way to India in the 4th century BCE, he didn't just bring armies.
- He introduced **Hellenistic culture**, which blended elements of Greek and local cultures, especially in places like Egypt and Persia. This Hellenistic culture became a foundation upon which later Western cultures were built.

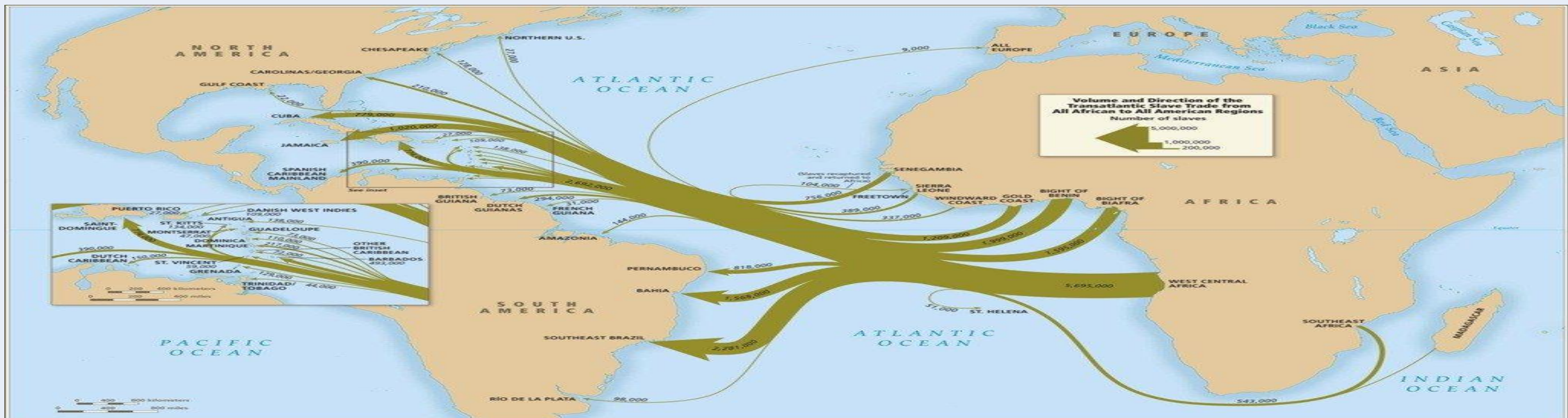
- **The Age of Exploration:**

Starting in the late 15th century, European explorers set sail to unknown lands, culminating in the "discovery" of the Americas by Christopher Columbus in 1492.

Though this period is marred by colonization and the exploitation of indigenous peoples, it also led to the exchange of crops, animals, and cultural practices between the Old World and the New World in what is termed as the Columbian Exchange.



- **The African Diaspora:** The enslavement and forced migration of millions of Africans to the Americas and other parts of the world also serves as an example, albeit a painful one, of cultural diffusion.
- Despite the inhumane conditions, enslaved Africans brought with them various cultural elements, such as music, religion, and culinary traditions, that have significantly influenced American culture and beyond.



## The Renaissance :

A time of “rebirth” and Explosion of creativity that both drew from classical Greek, Roman, and Arabic culture and spread throughout Europe.





# Types of Diffusion:

## **Direct Diffusion**

When two cultures are in close proximity, leading to frequent interactions.

## **Indirect Diffusion**

Involves the transfer of cultural elements through third parties, it happens over greater distances and can take longer periods of time

## **Forced Diffusion**

where one culture imposes its elements on another, typically through conquest or colonization.

## **Stimulus Diffusion**

occurs when an idea or a practice from one culture inspires a new, adapted form in another culture.

# Positive and Negative Impacts of Cultural Diffusion?

## POSITIVE

- Enrichment of Cultures
- Technological Advances
- Culinary Diversity
- Enhancement of Language (language borrowing)
- Promotes Tolerance and Understanding

## NEGATIVE

- Loss of Traditional Culture
- Cultural Appropriation
- Economic Disparities
- Spread of Harmful Practices
- Social Conflicts (because of interaction)

## • II. ASSIMILATION

- Cultural assimilation is the concept in sociology in which an ethnic minority adopts the beliefs, languages, and customs of the dominant community, losing their own culture in the process.
- This phenomenon usually occurs when two or more communities come into contact with each other, due to a shared geographical boundary, or immigration.
- Cultural assimilation may be a voluntary process or a forced one, depending on the situation in which the communities interact

## What Does the Term "Melting Pot" Mean?

- This melting pot theory is a common analogy used to describe cultural assimilation.
- It is used to describe how different cultures "melt" together to form a new culture, just as metals are heated together to form a new, stronger compound.

# Voluntary vs. Forced Cultural Assimilation

Cultural assimilation comes in two primary forms:

## Voluntary Assimilation

- Integration into the dominant culture over generations
- Occurs over time
- Often in response to pressure from a more predominant culture, and conformity is a solution for people to remain in safety

## Forced Assimilation

- Minority groups are forced to give up their identities
- Involves a threat of violence
- Occurs quickly
- Non-consensual
- Example: The residential school system in the USA and Canada

# Is Cultural Assimilation a Good or Bad Thing?

Research into its effects has been mixed.

- It can promote inclusivity, cultural exchange, and social cohesion. However, it can also lead to cultural erosion, marginalization of minority groups, and the loss of traditional customs and values.

# III. Acculturation

The processes of change in artifacts, customs, and beliefs that result from the contact of two or more cultures.

## 1 Cultural Exchange

Acculturation involves the exchange of cultural practices, beliefs, and values between different groups.

## 2 Identity Transformation

It often leads to changes in identity, where individuals incorporate elements from their original culture and the new culture.

## 3 Interplay of Power

The process can be shaped by power dynamics, with the dominant culture influencing the less dominant culture.

## 1. Incorporation

The free borrowing and modification of cultural elements and occurs when people of different cultures maintain contact as well as political and social self-determination.

May lead to **Religious Syncretism** and **Adaptation** .

## 2. Directed Change

Occurs when one group establishes dominance over another through military conquest or political control; thus, imperialism is the most common precursor to directed change.



# Factors Influencing Acculturation



## Social Environment

The level of acceptance and support in the host community can greatly influence the acculturation process.



## Family Dynamics

The role of family in preserving cultural traditions or encouraging adaptation can shape an individual's acculturation experience.



## Educational Context

Opportunities for education and exposure to diverse cultures can influence the acculturation process among students.

# Positive and Negative Outcomes

## Positive Outcomes

Cultural enrichment, increased adaptability, and enhanced creativity are among the benefits of successful acculturation.

## Negative Outcomes

Challenges such as identity conflicts, discrimination, and loss of cultural heritage can occur during the acculturation process.

# Challenges in the Acculturation Process

## 1 Language Barrier

The inability to communicate effectively in the new language can hinder acculturation and social integration.

## 2 Cultural Bias

Preconceived notions and stereotypes about different cultures can lead to misunderstandings and hinder the acculturation process.

## 3 Loss of Social Support

Moving away from familiar networks and support systems can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness.

# Some Key terms Related to Culture Change

1

## Cultural Relativism

Cultural relativism is the principle of regarding the beliefs, values, and practices of a culture from the viewpoint of that culture itself.

2

## Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism refers to the tendency to view one's own cultural or ethnic group as superior and to judge other groups based on the values and standards of one's group

3

## Cultural Lag

Phenomenon in which culture takes time to catch up with technological innovations, causing social problems

# CULTURAL LAG

- The concept of cultural lag was first proposed by American sociologist William F. Ogburn in the 1920s. His work *Social Change with Respect to Culture and Original Nature* introduced the main idea (Ogburn, 1922).
- According to Ogburn, cultural lag is a common societal phenomenon due to the tendency of material culture to evolve and change rapidly and voluminously while non-material culture tends to resist change and remain fixed for a far longer period of time.
- Cultural lag is an important concept in sociology and anthropology, as it helps explain how societies change and adapt over time. It also highlights the importance of considering the social and cultural impacts of technological and other types of change.

CAN YOU THINK OF SOME EXAMPLES ?

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