Integrating Immigrant Children in the United States

Overview

Society's mainstream changes as immigrants became part of it. They impact several elements of our communities, including neighborhoods and school culture. To understand the evolving nature of our nation, Jimenez and Horowitz conducted an atypical study. Instead of using minority success as the basis for measurement, Jimenez and Horowitz studied how the third-plus generation adjusted to change driven by immigration.

Historically, whiteness denoted academic success. Nowadays, immigrants are turning to traditionally subordinate groups as models of success. Since the influx of high-skilled Asian immigrants in suburbs, standards of academic achievement have been raised while nonacademic activities have experienced a decline in importance (Jimenez and Horowitz 2013, 850). This onset of a high-achieving mindset among students has shifted the benchmark of success from college attendance to the type of college attended. However, getting into elite schools now involved activities in which third-plus generations hardly participate, but are routine for Asian immigrant-origin students (Jimenez and Horowitz 2013, 858). In turn, in areas of the United States where Asian students set academic standards, the stereotypes assigned to whites began to resemble those regarding minorities in other environments with an inversed ethnoracial composition. For instance, white students were more likely to participate in sports, less academically oriented, underrepresented in Advanced Placement classes, and overrepresented in remedial classes (Jimenez and Horowitz 2013, 858). Using these observations to make assumptions about students' intellectual abilities based on their ethnic or racial background left negative effects on white students, who now felt they had to prove their

intelligence, as well as third-plus generation Asians, who, despite losing touch with their native culture, still felt the burden of living up to stereotypes.

Despite the increasing Asian population in the United States, the Latino population remains the largest minority group. To address their assimilation in the country, Tran analyzes the state of second-generation Latinos by comparing them to their native peers, their parents, and those in traditional gateways. In doing so, Tran was able to determine whether second-generation Latinos are at an advantage or disadvantage, whether they are declining or progressing, and whether their destination location impacts their outcome.

When evaluated against their native peers, second-generation Latinos can be classified into five groups: second-generation advantage, long-distance social mobility, short-distance social mobility, stagnation, or second-generation disadvantage (Tran 2017, 162-163). After assessing the high school dropout rate and college completion rate for each ethnoracial group, Tran discovered that Mexicans and Puerto Ricans fall under the second-generation disadvantage category, as they have not achieved equality with the native minority groups. This observation was hypothesized to be related to low levels of human capital, lack of legal status, and run-ins with discrimination (Tran 2017, 164). However, other Latino groups have found themselves in the long-distance social mobility category, since they have achieved equality with the native majority group (Tran 2017, 173).

From a differing perspective, when evaluated against their first-generation parents, second-generation Latinos can be classified into three groups: second-generation decline, second-generation stagnation, or second-generation progress (Tran 2017, 163). After assessing the average years of education and occupational status for each generation,

Tran found that there was no evidence of a second-generation decline, but there was clear evidence of second-generation progress.

In modern day, more Latinos are making their way to new destinations because of economic restructuring and job opportunities. Yet, in new destinations, Latinos are generally more disadvantaged than their counterparts in traditional gateways. For instance, there is a smaller gap between natives and immigrants in new destinations, suggesting it might be easier to achieve equality (Tran 2017, 165). However, Latinos are met with a more negative response from natives in new destinations due to a lack of prior familiarity with immigration (Tran 2017, 165). Another consequence of this is fewer institutions and less infrastructure capable of meeting immigrants' needs. By comparing the socioeconomic attainment of each ethnoracial group in both new and traditional destinations, Tran revealed that there is no difference in outcomes among second-generation Mexicans based on destination type.

Instead of studying immigrants' convergence to the norm, Zhou and Lee proposed that researchers investigate intergenerational mobility. The former focuses on education, income, occupation, and homeownership in order to draw conclusions about assimilation based on the extent to which immigrants converge to the mean for native-born Americans. The latter, on the other hand, makes it possible to learn how second-plus generations are moving beyond the socioeconomic status measures of their parents. Zhou and Lee justify this by shedding light on issues with how society perceives assimilation, success, and identity. Zhou and Lee suggest that researchers inquire how members of the second-generation define success, against whom they measure their progress, and who they understand themselves to be. Assuming this method of inquiry, Zhou and Lee found

that second-generation Latinos and Asians are pursuing divergent pathways to mobility. Furthermore, they found that adopting multiple identities does not challenge what it means to be American.

To describe this segmented assimilation and socioeconomic integration, Zhou discussed how contemporary Chinese immigrants are met with a different host society than their predecessors. In particular, Zhou highlighted how behavioral standards have become unclear, how immigrants' social ties have been disturbed, and how parental authority has been compromised. This brought attention to the fact that in the modern assimilation process, multiple paths exist with divergent outcomes (Zhou 2014, 1172). Additionally, Zhou analyzed the role of ethnic communities, focusing on characteristics, such as enclave economies, which lead to a growth in the presence of ethnic social and cultural institutions. This revealed how ethnic communities offered positive contributions to immigrant adaptation.

Trajectories of Immigrants

The aforementioned papers describe general social and economic trajectories for immigrants of differing backgrounds. Asians tend to avoid the negative outcomes associated with other minorities because they have the mindset and work ethic that other non-whites allegedly lack (Jiménez and Horowitz 2013, 851). For instance, despite second-generation Filipino Americans achieving lower levels of educational and occupational achievement than their parents, signifying downward mobility, they nonetheless assimilate into the middle class because they have the advantage of their parents' high levels of human capital (Zhou and Lee 2007, 192). On the contrary, second-generation Mexican Americans obtain noticeably higher levels of educational and

occupational achievement than their parents, signifying upward mobility, yet they remain below the mean of the overall population (Zhou and Lee 2007, 192). In this case, while Filipinos achieved a higher level of convergence to the native-born mean, Mexicans reached a higher level of intergenerational mobility. This also shows how Mexicans are at a disadvantage, even in comparison to the native minority groups. However, many other Latino groups have achieved equality with their native majority peers (Tran 2017, 156).

To supplement these trends, my additional sources described more refined social and economic trajectories of immigrants. Regarding academics, immigrant students who faced social adversity, primarily caused by a language barrier, were reported to disengage from school, which ultimately led to lower achievement and was hypothesized to lead to lower school engagement in future years (Motti-Stefanidi 2014). Fortunately, second-generation Spanish-speaking immigrants displayed positive signs of their transition into the English language; however, first-generation Spanish-speaking immigrants displayed negative signs of adaptation (Leider 2018).

From another perspective, Asian immigrants achieved high levels of homeownership soon after arrival, whereas, Latino immigrants demonstrated sustained advancement into homeownership (Myers 1998, 593). Additionally, contrary to popular belief, immigrants were found to be comparable to their native-born counterparts in terms of crime, as they maintain low levels of involvement in crime throughout their lives (Bersani 2012). By the second-generation, immigrants have merely caught up in respect to offending.

These social and economic trajectories are calculated based on exit factors, or things immigrants possess following their departure from their homelands, and reception

factors, or things immigrants are met with upon arrival at their destination (Zhou 2013, 1173). In terms of exit factors, the resources that immigrants bring with them, such as money, knowledge, and skills, have much influence over the types and number of opportunities initially available to them. The legal status of immigrants and their English proficiency also have a large impact. In terms of reception factors, where the ethnic group lies in the system of racial stratification, meaning whether they affiliate better with whites or blacks, controls how they are perceived in society. In turn, government immigration policies may have been instated that are more detrimental to one group over another. Additionally, the conditions of the labor market as well as the strength of ethnic communities plays a role in determining the outcomes of different groups. In other words, when they have sufficient resources and a heightened sense of belonging, immigrants often show signs of positive trajectories of social and economic assimilation in the United States.

Overall, different ethnicities and races displayed different pathways to and degrees of adaptation in the United States, indicating segmented assimilation. Considering the majority arrived in their destination country with some amount of resources, Asian immigrants were consistently better off than their Latino counterparts, who oftentimes came with less human capital. However, this allowed second-generation Latino immigrants to show greater signs of progress when compared to their parental generations.

Future Descendants of Immigrants

Based on these trends and the observed outcomes of previous immigrants, looking into the future, I see the second-generation and future descendants of today's immigrants

continuing to experience an immigration process unlike their European predecessors. European immigrants showed significantly more similarities to native-born Americans in terms of lifestyle and appearance, which positively contributed to their assimilation in the United States. I consider this drastic fundamental difference to be the underlying cause of a longer, more adverse integration process for Asian and Latino immigrants.

If the benchmark of success is obtaining better economic standing than what is possible in their homeland, I believe the majority of second-plus generation immigrants will make it. However, if the benchmark of success also includes surpassing their parental generation's economic status, I imagine this will be a slow-paced achievement for immigrants of Asian origin, but a significantly faster-paced advancement for immigrants of any other origin. On the contrary, if the benchmark of success includes matching or exceeding their native counterparts' economic status, then I believe this will be easier for immigrants of Asian descent than it would be for immigrants from other regions.

Recognizing the plethora of racial and ethnic differences that exist among immigrants and understanding how we, as members of the destination country, have historically operated around ethnic peoples offers a relatively pessimistic view of immigrants' non-economic futures. Despite being a melting pot, communities within the United States lack the ability to adjust to the rapid changes brought about by recent immigration, especially since a widely accepted binary racial system already exists. With insufficient knowledge on the backgrounds of these new waves of immigrants, as well as uncertainty about where they fall on the racial spectrum, we resort to using stereotypes to establish detrimental generalizations. I believe this will negatively impact Asian and

Latino assimilation into the social dimension of the United States. For instance, the language barriers will hinder communication and the ability to establish social relationships. With no third-party force to instigate nationwide change, people will be forced to segregate themselves into communities where they share ethnic characteristics. This is true for neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. Moreover, despite there being diversity within these areas, there is a chance that the differences will blur, and the rest of the population will perceive the inhabitants as being one and the same: not American. Even as some immigrants begin to branch out into American culture, their values that they brought from their homelands will keep them tied to their own culture, leaving them incapable of ever fully Americanizing. However, I do not think this is the true American fashion of assimilation. I do not expect immigrants to relinquish all ties to their homelands to "become American". Instead, I see them bringing their cultures to the United States and establishing a place for them here. That being said, the assimilation of Asian and Latino immigrants will simply take time because it is dependent on native-born Americans and third-plus generations becoming educated on and coming to terms with the new cultures that are making their way into our country.

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