

From Immigrants to Americans: Race and Assimilation during the Great Migration

By Vasiliki Fouka, Soumyajit Mazumder, & Marco Tabellini

By Dylan Baker

Context

- Historical Context
 - In the early 20th century, many European immigrants were viewed as culturally distant from native born Americans and faced discrimination.
 - The Great Migration was a period of mass migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North in the US from 1910-1970.
 - Historians have argued that the Great Migration fueled the change from structuring race around ethnicity to structuring it around skin color.
- Academic Context
 - This paper builds on a large psychology literature on self-categorization (Turner et al. (1987)) and outgroup bias (Tajfel et al. (1971)).
 - In economics and political science, Bordalo et al. (2016) argues for the context dependence of group stereotypes and Shayo (2009) develops a model of social identity oriented around perceived distance between groups.

Question

- How does the introduction of a social group (Black migrants) perceived to be more culturally distant to the majority (native-born white Americans) affect the assimilation of a traditionally marginalized group (European immigrants)?

Data

- Census Data: Decennial US Census Data from 1900-1930 from the 108 non-Southern MSAs with positive inflow of Southern Black migrants.
 - Key variables: Naturalization status, marriage status (dummy for marriage with native-born American), and ethnic distinctiveness of children's names.
- Newspaper Data: Articles compiled from Newspapers.com from 71 MSAs.
 - Key variables: Usage of immigrant-oriented and anti-Black language

Analytical Technique

- DiD: Compares change in Black population across MSAs within region

$$Y_{inrt} = \underbrace{\alpha_n}_{\text{MSA FE}} + \underbrace{(\delta_r \times \gamma_t)_{rt}}_{\text{Time} \times \text{Region FE}} + \beta_1 \underbrace{B_{nt}}_{\substack{\text{Black Pop} \\ \text{in } n \text{ at } t}} + \beta_2 \underbrace{\text{Pop}_{nt}}_{\substack{\text{Total Pop} \\ \text{in } n \text{ at } t}} + \underbrace{\mathbf{X}'_{inrt}}_{\substack{\text{Individual} \\ \text{controls}}} \Gamma + u_{inrt}$$

- Shift-Share Instrument for Black Population

$$Z_{nt} = \sum_{s=1910}^t \sum_{j \in \text{South}} \underbrace{\alpha_{jn}^{1900}}_{\substack{\text{Share of Black migrants} \\ \text{from state } j \text{ living in} \\ \text{MSA } n \text{ in 1900}}} \underbrace{O_{js}}_{\substack{\# \text{ of Black migrants} \\ \text{who left state } j \\ \text{between } s-1 \text{ and } s}}$$

- Migrants tended to move to the destination MSAs of past migrants from their region.
- Uses cross-sectional variation over n in 1900 Black migrant state-of-origin mix & time-series variation in out-migration from each Southern state post-1900.

Results

An increase in the Black population led to:

- Heightened Assimilation Efforts by European Immigrants
 - Increased Naturalization Rates: Rose 1.5 p.p. per 1 S.D. ($\sim 45,000$ people) increase
 - Less Ethnically Distinct Names: A 100,000 increase led to a name distinctiveness decline among Italians equivalent to changing Luciano to Mike
- Greater Acceptance of European Immigrants Among Native Born White People
 - Increased Inter-marriage Rates: Rose 0.54 p.p. (7.5%) per 1 S.D. increase
 - Decreased Anti-immigrant News Coverage
- Elevated Anti-Black Sentiment
 - Increased the Frequency of Anti-Black Stereotypes in the Press