The Theory of Segmented Assimilation

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Overview

• What is Assimilation v. Integration, Incorporation
  – Normative v. Descriptive v. Explanatory

• Critiques of Segmented Assimilation
  – It’s Not True! Melting Pot Endures
  – It’s More Complicated Than That!
  – It’s True, But the Explanation Is Wrong

• What Is the Explanation of Segmented Assimilation?
Constructing Definitions

• Everything is vague to a degree you do not realize,
• Until you have tried to make it precise.
  - Bertrand Russell
Defining Assimilation

• Normative v. Descriptive Critical Distinction
  – Popular Discourse is Normative or Ideological
Political Discourse

- Emphasizes problems, implies that those who are problematic are the norm, representative of the whole
- Scapegoats
- Alleged failures of multiculturalism, integration policies
- Cultural Essentialism—religion—akin to racism (not biological)
- Assimilation or banishment

This multicultural approach, saying that we simply live side by side and live happily with each other has failed. Utterly failed.

(Angela Merkel)
Academic Perspective
Assimilation & Integration, Incorporation as Empirical

– Integration descriptive, empirical
  • Incorporation

– American Academic Discourse: Assimilation is Descriptive
  • Park & Burgess 1920s
  • Gordon 1960s
  • Alba and Nee turn of 21st C
Variations on a Theme

• Salad bowl, pizza
• Become Similar to versus
• Becoming a part of
  Multiculturalism, intercultural
Similar or Different, What Do You Mean?

• Culture
  – Language, Values
  – Berry’s Primary Focus

• Social Relations
  – Residential, Work, Friends, Marriage
    Segregation or Integration

• Educational Attainment

• Occupation & Income
Segmented Assimilation
Portes & Colleagues

• Simple Idea that Contained Complexity and Generated Controversy

• Remember this is Descriptive, not Normative

• Simple Version:
  – Not all 2\textsuperscript{nd} Generation immigrants are the same
Immigrants have segmented assimilation, elaborated up and downward, lower class separation marginalization. Berry’s reference primarily to culture.

Assimilation
Selective Acculturation Integration

Upward
Downward, Lower Class
Two Critiques of Segmented Assimilation

• It’s Not True!
  – Although obstacles, “everyone” eventually assimilates into mainstream
    • Alba and Nee
    • Waldinger and Perlmann
  – It’s more complicated than that: Vertovec’s Superdiversity and too much variation to capture

• Is the Glass Half-Empty or Half-Full; Does the description capture some meaningful variation?
What Does the Data Say?

• Not all immigrants are alike
  – In spite of populist backlash declaiming “Immigrants” are ___________

• Variation by National Origin (parental education, class), Country of Residence (Nordic generally better), Neighborhood

• Individual Variation, too
  – Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please (1852)
## Miami

### 2nd Generation Educational Attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>highest degree or year of school completed</th>
<th>Cuban Private</th>
<th>Cuban Public</th>
<th>Nicaraguan</th>
<th>Colombian</th>
<th>Haitian</th>
<th>West Indian--Jamaican</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drop Out H.S.;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate H.S.</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or 2 years post-H.S. vocational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finish 2-year-College or vocational</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 + years of University</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate University</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin Graduate</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Berry’s reference to only culture and social relations

Segmented Assimilation

Assimilation

15-20%

UPWARD
Compared to parents

10%

DOWNWARD, LOWER CLASS

70-75%

WORKING CLASSES

Integration

IMMIGRANTS

Separation Marginalization

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Segmented Assimilation
The Complex Version
A Cultural Explanation

- Emphasized culture for both Upward & Downward Immigrant Mobility
- Selective Acculturation (emphasis on education and parental respect) promotes upward mobility
- Oppositional Acculturation in poor, racial minority neighborhoods that produces downward mobility
Second Critique

• It’s true, but the explanation is wrong
  – Segmented Assimilation reminiscent of Oscar Lewis’s Culture of Poverty
  – Also, recalls Ogbu’s early work contrasting voluntary migrants and “involuntary” migrants

• Style v. substance
  – Opposition of “all” adolescents
Explanation for Segmented Assimilation

- Structure (as opposed to Culture)
- Parental SES
  - Cuban Private Schools in Miami
- Family Structure
- Authoritarian v. Authoritative
- Context of Reception
  - Legality
  - Structure of Schooling

Sweden v. Germany v. US
Co-Ethnic Community

- Enclave, Co-Ethnic Solidarity
  - Cross-Class Solidarity
  - Sharing Cultural & Social Capital
Assimilation/Integration as Description

- Descriptive Assimilation, Integration largely taking place
- Some Upward: 15-20%
- Some Downward: 10%
- Most in the Middle: 70-75% (generally better than parents)
Revised, Limited Formulation of Segmented Assimilation

- Not Culture
- Context of Reception—welcome v. rejection
- The Upwardly Mobile: Immigrant Success Story
  - Legal Status, Access to Quality Education
  - High parental SES
  - Co-ethnic community that shares resources
- Downward Mobility
  - No Legal Status, Unequal Education
    - 3% Chinese, 20% Black Immigrants in Miami
- Little attention to the vast middle
  - Better than Immigrant Parents, but at or below Natives
Explanation of Assimilation/Integration

• Revised Segmented Assimilation
  – Inner City Minority Youth Culture *not* determinative

• Parental SES, often reflected in National Origin Differences

• Context of Reception: National, plus School and Neighborhood Climates
WHAT DO YOU THINK?