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CONTINUITY AND ADAPTATION
AMONG FRENCH LANGUAGE
PERSONS OF MAINE AND
CONNECTICUT IN 1970

by

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INTRODUCTION

The immigration literature tends to divide itself into that which emphasizes the adaption to the social environment in the receiving county (Oscar Handlin), and that which emphasizes the cultural continuity (the non-melting pot school) with the old county of the immigrants. More sophisticated analyses (Colin Greer) and (Rudolph Vecoli) posit an interaction between the cultural heritage of the immigrant, the social structure of the old country and the social-cultural environment of the new country. The immigrant, in this view, adapts some of his cultural and structural patrimony to the new world, emphasizing some aspects, while minimizing others, acquiring cultural and structural traits from their new surroundings but continuing the old patterns to some extent.

I believe the Franco-Americans to be a group which exhibits cultural continuity with its homelands of Quebec and Acadia while at the same time adapting to the new environment. One way to look at the relative impact of the traditional culture and new environment on the immigrants from French Canada is to compare the French Language populations of Maine and Connecticut.

In those social and economic characteristics where the French Language population of these two states is more like one another than to the total populations of their states, we find support for the impact of the traditional culture. On the other hand, where the social and economic characteristics of the French Language population are more like their fellow residents of their respective states, we find support for the hypothesis of the impact of the environment of the new society and the adaptation of the French to the new environment.
We can make a comparison of social and economic characteristics of Maine and Connecticut French Americans because the demographic study of language groupings began a new era in the United States with the 1970 census. For the first time since 1940 a sample of the total U.S. population was asked "What language, other than English, was spoken in this person's home when he was a child?" with the following alternative answers: Spanish; French; German; Other, Specify; None, English Only.

This question, combined with Public Use Samples of the Basic Records on magnetic programmable tape makes it possible to create tables of social, economic, and demographic characteristics for the French Mother tongue and French Language populations of each state and the United States as a whole. These Public Use Sample tapes are the equivalent of having a probability sample of the filled in census questionnaires without names in hand. The only figures on the French Mother tongue published by the U.S. Bureau of the Census either in printed form or on summary tape are geographic location figures. A full range of data are available in print for the Spanish Language population of each state including the 3,730 persons of Spanish Language in the State of Maine. But we have only geographic distribution figures for the 141,000 French Mother tongue persons in Maine and nothing at all for the 219,000 French Language persons in Maine, not even a total figure.

My first two studies "Number and Percent of Persons with French Mother Tongue" and "Social and Economic Profile of French and English Mother Tongue Persons: Maine, 1970" were on the French Mother Tongue population. The first was a summary of the data on French Mother tongue published in print or on
summary tape by the Bureau of the Census. The profile was generated by a program I wrote to use with the tape of the Public Use Sample of the Basic Records. My current work is with the French language population.

What is the difference between a mother tongue population and a language population? The Bureau of the Census defines a mother tongue population as those persons who said a language other than English was spoken in the person’s home when he or she was a child. Thus, persons who said Spanish was spoken in their home when they were children comprise the Spanish mother tongue population in any specified area. Persons of Spanish language comprise persons of Spanish mother tongue and all other persons in families in which the head or wife reported Spanish as his or her mother tongue. In Maine in 1970 we had 1,950 Spanish mother tongue persons and 3,730 Spanish language persons.

I have created my French language category in somewhat the same way as the Bureau of the Census created the Spanish language population. All persons in households where the head of the household was a French mother tongue person were included in my French language category. This yields a somewhat smaller population than if spouses of heads were also included as household labelling persons as they are for the Spanish language persons. Furthermore, in five Southwestern states, to this Spanish language population were added Spanish surname persons and for some tabulations, origin or descent (including Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American and other Spanish) identified the Spanish heritage population. Without a French descent question, or the use of a French surname list, it is
impossible to generate numbers of Franco-Americans equivalent to the Spanish language, or Spanish heritage group. It may be possible to decompose the Public Use Sample tape further to identify the French Mother tongue spouses of non-French heads of households and add these households to the French Language Sample, but as yet this seems problematical. What we have as a French Language Sample is an expanded French Mother tongue group substantially larger than the French-speaking population but also probably substantially smaller than the French descent population and not the definitional equivalent of the Spanish Language population as a whole and by definition much less extended than the Spanish language populations of the Southwest and the U.S. Spanish heritage populations. To repeat, the French language population of this paper is made up of persons who reported that French was spoken in their homes as a child and the persons in the households in which the head reported being brought up in a household in which French was spoken.

Maine and Connecticut were selected not only because they are the Northern and Southern outposts of "Franco-Américaine" but also because Maine's French mother tongue population was stable between 1940 and 1970 increasing by only two percent while Connecticut increased its French language population by one hundred and thirty-seven percent in the same period. A substantial proportion of this increase is undoubtedly due to immigration from other New England states including Maine. By 1970 Maine and Connecticut had virtually the same size French mother tongue populations, but of course this is a larger proportion of Maine's population than Connecticut's, 14.2% and 6.4% to be exact.
In making the comparison between the French population and their respective state's populations and between the French populations of Maine and Connecticut, there are two possible types of comparisons to be made: first, direction of differences; second, extent of the differences. Thus, if in both states the level of the particular indicator is higher than for the state population as a whole we may take this as reflecting something specific to the French group. Also, if there is less difference in the indicator as between the French groups as compared to the difference between the French indicator and the total state indicator, then again we have identified a characteristic specific to the French group. If both of these indicators (direction and extent of difference) point to an effect peculiar to the French then we can be surer of the impact of the French heritage, then if only one indicator is operative. Where neither direction nor extent of differences point to a French influence, we find support for a social environmental explanation of the behavior. The characteristics where one but not both of the criteria indicate a French influence will be considered as evidence of on-going adaptation to the residential environment.

COMPARISON OF SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS

Scrutinizing the list of selected characteristics we find in sex composition and residential stability no effect of the French background. The higher sex ratio of the French in Connecticut and their lower residential stability suggest a migratory population.

Patterns specific to the French are found in residence, occupation, education, fertility, and marriage. There is little
or no difference between Maine and Connecticut in the percentage of French language population in urban areas, but this percentage is substantially more than the fraction of the total Maine population in cities and less than the urban fraction of the total Connecticut population. Many believe that the bulk of the French-Canadian immigrants came from rural farm origins if this was so they become largely urban with their migration to the mill cities of New England. Yet, a substantial fraction of the immigrant population found residence in the rural areas. They typically moved to the smaller cities and smaller metropolitan areas of New England. Thus, the urban residential pattern of the Francos can be said to be a product of their first entry into the New England social structure. However, urban residence is not contrary to their cultural heritage, by one of Kingsley Davis' criteria, New France was highly urbanized as early as 1713. Furthermore, there are some analysts who claim that it was the village and small town population of Quebec which was most likely to move to the United States, during the last half of the nineteenth century. Both the cultural heritage and the social structure of the mother country can be added to the structure of the receiving society as explanatory factors of the urban residence of French language persons. Today this pattern of urban residence seems to have become part of the cultural baggage of the Franco-Americans.

Occupationally, the French language populations in Maine and Connecticut in 1970 were still concentrated in the occupational areas and industry groupings which originally attracted the French-Canadian to New England, i.e., blue collar work and construction and manufacturing industries. Furthermore, they have remained concentrated in the private employee sector and
have not moved in proportionate numbers into self-employment and governmental classes of workers. Here we find clear evidence of the impact of the social structure of the society receiving the original immigrants to the United States. That they are in these secondary sectors today also reflects the contemporary industrial structure of New England with its continued emphasis on manufacturing. Employment in manufacturing is subject to seasonal lay-offs (e.g., shoe industry) cyclical lay-offs (e.g., machine tool industry) and to lay-offs when orders are not received. Thus earnings of manufacturing and construction workers tend to be erratic as compared to workers in trade and finance and in many service industries including public service. The industrial concentration of Francos and their earning patterns may be related to lower educational levels of the Francos.

Without the higher incomes of the small business man or stable incomes of governmental employees the French language population could not afford or plan for higher education. In both states there is evidence that there is a lower education level among the French language population than in the population as a whole. College enrollments among Francos had not caught up with the total population in 1970.

The higher fertility of the French language population explains the higher percentage of the population under the age of fifteen and the low percentage of the population in the age grouping of 65 and over and the smaller proportion of widowed among the French as compared to the total population. Also the small percentage of households among the French with no related children under 18 in them is an indicator of higher fertility.
However, when we study other indicators of fertility such as the proportion of the population less than age five, the number of the children born, we find the French indicators higher than the state indicators but French indicators are more similar to the respective state figures than they are to one another which seems to indicate an adaptive fertility pattern among the French of Connecticut. Furthermore, in both Maine and Connecticut there is a higher proportion of French households with no children under six than in the total state population, again an indicator of declining fertility among the French. This lower fertility may then be related to lower proportion of the French language population in the single state in Connecticut, as compared to Maine. Later marriage has been used by the French population of Quebec as a means of fertility control just as it has been in Ireland. But with the use of other means of fertility control earlier marriage can be practiced, without straining the economic resources of the couple. The impact of the traditional familialistic values can be seen in lower proportion of the heads of households living alone or with unrelated persons among the French as compared to the total population in both Maine and Connecticut.

The pro fertility position of the Catholic Church is well-known and prior to World War II the influence of the Catholic Church in Quebec was pervasive. In fact, it was this cultural value which along with the limited amount of land available in Quebec by the mid-nineteenth century which led to the great migrations "aux états." The limited evidence available (Bouvier) would indicate a decline of levels of fertility among Franco-Americans very soon after migration to the United States. The 1970 statistics definitely show the lower levels
of fertility in Connecticut, the state which is further away from the influence of Quebec. Furthermore, in the number of related children under age 6 as compared to under age 18, we have an indicator that French fertility patterns have changed sharply in a relatively short period of time. In both states, the French percentage with no children under 6 is greater than the percentage for the total population which was not true for the percentage with no children under 18. It is true that by 1960 the net reproduction rate was lower for Quebec than for any other province, but since Quebec has long since stopped having any influence on Franco-Americans, one must explain the decline in French language fertility as a reflection of American values.

Another area of adaptive behavior is found in the occupation data. Although the Francos have lower concentrations of white collar workers in both Maine and Connecticut, the percentages among Francos in Connecticut are higher than the total state percentage for Maine. There is very little difference in the service occupation area between the Francos and their respective total state populations. The same is true of industry figures for trade and finance in both states. My interpretation of these data is that in these areas (service, and trade and finance) the Franco-Americans reflect the occupational configurations of their respective states and that they are changing towards the state employment patterns in white collar occupations as a whole.

With regard to income, both the persons total income and percent of persons living in families below the poverty cutoff point indicate a distinct French language pattern. A substantial
parity in proportions in the lower income brackets as between Francos and all persons, greater proportions of Francos in the next to the bottom classes, and a smaller proportion of Francos in the upper income bracket. However, the level of incomes are so drastically higher in Connecticut as compared to Maine among the Francos that we must put levels of income as environmentally determined. While the limited higher incomes among the French can be explained by the limited aspirations which Peter Wolfson has identified as being characteristic of the French in his Vermont study, the French plan for the future, but once a given economic level is reached they tend to concentrate on living not doing "being in becoming" is the label Wolfson gives this pattern.

SUMMARY

In comparing the indicators of selected social and economic characteristics for Maine and Connecticut, French language and total populations generated from the Public Use Samples of the 1970 Census we find a definite pattern specific to the French language populations in occupation, education, fertility, marriage and income. Occupational patterns seem to be determined almost exclusively by the economy of Maine and Connecticut. The impact of the industrial structure at the time of the great migration prior to World War I is still pre-eminent as seen in the concentrations of Francos in manufacturing and construction. The impact of current industrial patterns is seen in trade and finance, and service occupations and in the differential pattern of white collar workers among the French in Connecticut as compared to Maine. The continued lower educational levels of the French seem to be the product of traditional
values reinforced by the occupational experience in the states.

Certainly the fertility performance is the product of traditional values, clearly modified today by an American value orientation. Related to fertility are the marital patterns, in which the Connecticut French represent an adaptive response to lower fertility and to American values. While the Maine French represent a more traditional cultural pattern in marriage, except for divorce and separation.

The overall level of income is determined by the economic structure of the environment but the pattern of distribution of the French by income level reflects a traditional culture. Thus we find that the Franco-American social and economic characteristics reflect both continuity with the Canadian experience and adaptation to the American environment.