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Assimilation of Franco-Americans in Maine:
A Preliminary Reconnaissance

Madeleine Giguere

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ASSIMILATION AMONG THE FRENCH IN MAINE:
A PRELIMINARY RECONNAISSANCE

Assimilation theory in sociology comes in two major forms: A traditional model describes assimilation as the process of discarding one set of cultural traits for the set of cultural traits of the core group of the receiving society. This is sometimes called the Anglo-Conformity model. A second form of assimilation theory is cultural pluralism. In this model the ethnic groups remains sufficiently separate from the core group to guarantee the continuance of the ethnic group and some of its culture. The core group is sometimes defined as white Protestant of any class level, sometimes white middle class Protestant. Other authors use Anglo-Saxon as the label of the core group. Usually when writers use Anglo-Saxons they mean English. We will use Americans of English Ancestry in Maine as the core group and bearers of the core culture for purposes of judging the degree of assimilation. The closer the selected characteristics of the Franco-Americans are to the same characteristics of the English, the more assimilation has taken place.

Assimilation theory has been developed largely in reference to European origin migrants or at least assimilation theory better explains the process of change among European migrants than it does among racial groupings. On the other hand, ethnic conflict theories were developed initially to explain the situation of racial groups. While assimilation theory of both varieties,

Anglo-conformity and cultural pluralism tend to focus on cultural traits, ethnic conflict theory tends to focus on structural traits, particularly economic and power issues. One form of ethnic conflict theory which may be applicable to white ethnic groups is the split labor market view in which an ethnic group is restricted in its entry into society's better jobs both by employer and worker discrimination. It is the intent of this paper to examine the Franco-Americans in Maine in the light of these three theories: Anglo-conformity, cultural pluralism and ethnic conflict. Data from the 1980 census published in book form, as distinguished from being published on computer tape, will be used to test hypotheses drawn from each of these theories.

The question asked in the long-form of the 1980 census was "What is this person's ancestry?" Persons answering French or Acadian were classified as French and the data are reported in the regular volumes of the census. Persons answering French-Canadian or Quebec or Quebecois were classified as French-Canadians and not reported in the regular volumes of the census but rather on computer tape, both the summary tapes and the very flexible micro-data. I am preparing an analysis of the combined French and French-Canadian data from the micro-data for Maine. The Bureau of the Census did publish the numbers of persons in each state who reported themselves as of French-Canadian or Quebec ancestry. Consequently, we know that there were 26,205 persons in 1980 in Maine who reported themselves as of French-Canadian or Quebec ancestry, whereas 266,096 reported themselves

as of French or Acadian ancestry. In my paper I analyze data for the ninety-one percent of the combined French and French-Canadian ancestry population who reported themselves of French and Acadian origin.

Using the English ancestry group in Maine as the core group and bearers of the core culture, I compare two groups of French to the English and to one another. These two groups are the persons who answered only French in answer to the census question "What is your ancestry?" and those who answered French and some other group. Thus we have both a "purely" French ancestry grouping and a mixed French ancestry grouping. Obviously, the mixed French ancestry grouping is the product of intermarriage in previous generations. One authority, Milton Gordon considers intermarriage to follow assimilation in language, values and ways of life as well as interaction between ethnic group members. Anglo-Conformity theory would lead us to expect substantial similarities between the mixed French ancestry grouping and the English group. On the other hand, our assimilation theories lead us to expect that the single or pure French ancestry grouping will exhibit greater differences from the core group than do the mixed ancestry grouping. From ethnic conflict theory we derive the expectation that the French have restricted entry into better jobs and consequently to higher incomes as compared to the English. This effect would be greater for the single French ancestry grouping than for the mixed French ancestry grouping.

I will use indicators of fertility, education and family

structure to examine the applicability of the assimilation models to the Franco-Americans of Maine. Measures of occupation and income will test the applicability of the conflict model.

In the measure of fertility reported in the 1980 Census of Population, single French ancestry women have higher fertility (3.146 children per thousand married women aged 35-44) than English ancestry women (2,923) in the age groupings of 35-44. As predicted by Anglo-conformity theory, the fertility of the mixed French ancestry grouping (2,962) falls between the level of the pure French group and the English group, but closer to the fertility level of the English for the age group 35-44. In the age group 25-34, the fertility level of the mixed French ancestry group is very slightly lower (1,777) than the English group (1,781). The mixed French ancestry group seems to reflect Anglo values in their fertility. It is true the low fertility of the mixed French ancestry group is partially attributable to age since it is a younger group than either the single French or the English ancestry grouping, and consequently has not completed its fertility to the same extent as the other groups. In both of these age groupings single French ancestry reflect the traditional higher French fertility values. In other words the Anglo conformity model is seen in the mixed group and the cultural pluralism model is exhibited by the "pure" French grouping.

In education measures, the percent of persons 25 years and older with 4 or more years of college, shows a clear progression

in the percent of college graduates from the single French ancestry grouping (6.8%) through the mixed French (13.6%) to the English ancestry grouping (14.6%). Note that the mixed French group experience is very close to experience of those of English ancestry. Among persons 18-24, we also find a progression in percent going to college from "pure" French (2.8%) through mixed French (3.4%) to English (4.6%). For these younger people we find the mixed group closer in performance to the "pure" French. Looking at percent of high school graduates among persons 25 years old or older, we find just over one half high school graduates among the pure French, just over two-thirds for the English and somewhat over two-thirds for the mixed French grouping. Thus we see a distinctive pattern of lower levels of education among the single French ancestry grouping, substantially higher levels for the English and educational levels among the mixed French group approximating the levels of the English for the population over 25. For the population 18-24 we find the mixed French college level closer to the educational level of the pure French than the pure English. Again, Anglo conformity is exhibited by the mixed French ancestry grouping except for the younger group and continuation of traditional patterns illustrated by the "pure" French ancestry grouping.

This same pattern of Anglo conformity and cultural pluralism is found in the choice of industry worked in. The proportion of pure French employed in manufacturing and construction is substantially higher (41%) than among the English (32%) but the mixed French approach the English in choice of industry (33%).

Conflict theory in the form of dual labor market theory would lead us to hypothesize that the Franco-Americans would be excluded from better jobs. What does the record show? White collar work increases as a proportion of employed persons from the pure French (39%) to the mixed French (46%), where the percent white collar is virtually identical to that of the English ancestry groupings (46%). Again the pure French groups exhibits a distinctive pattern while the mixed French have the same percentage as the English in white collar occupations. When we review the percent employed in managerial and professional occupations, the closure between the mixed French heritage person and the English is less than for white collar occupations as a whole (French 14%, mixed French 17%, English 21%). However, when we look at the next highest category of white collar occupations, technical, sales and administrative support occupations, even the pure French have virtual identical percentages (25%) as the English (26%) and the mixed French (29%) surpass the English in their proportions employed in this field. The occupational data supports a dual labor market hypothesis only in a most attenuated form. A lower percentage of pure French ancestry and even of mixed French ancestry are in managerial and professional positions as compared to the English, however with regard to white collar work as a whole only the pure French have somewhat lower percentages than the English.

Median family income also does not support a conflict approach, in fact both French groups have median family income levels higher (\$15,865-pure; \$16,235-mixed) than the English

(\$15,786). This may be due to multiple family workers, for when we look at income of full-time workers, the English males do in fact have a higher median income (\$13,804) than do either the mixed French males (\$13,417) and the pure French males (\$13,621). The same is true of the females (\$8,415-French; \$8,816-mixed French; and \$8,845 for the English). However, the magnitude of the differences is not great enough to support a conflict hypothesis.

These data give minimal support to a conflict hypothesis of the position of the of the French in Maine in 1980. What we do have is substantial support of a cultural pluralist hypothesis in the data for the pure French group and substantial support for an Anglo-conformity hypothesis among the mixed French group. Both the cultural pluralist model and the Anglo-conformity see a change in the immigrant group towards the culture and structures of the core group.

Another indicator in terms of values is perhaps the most crucial one reported on in this paper. With regard to the percent of ever-married persons who are divorced, 22% of the English are divorced, 19% of the French and 25% of the mixed French group. Clearly cultural assimilation is reflected in the data for the pure French ancestry grouping which approaches that of the English. Traditionally, the divorce rate among the French was very low, how low I don't know, but for the percent divorce ratio to approach that of the English substantial change in values has had to have taken place among the Maine French.

In sum, indices of occupation and income for Maine in 1980 give little support to a hypothesis of ethnic conflict between the French and the core group of English ancestry. On the other hand, there is substantial support for an assimilation hypothesis in the indicators of fertility, industry and education. In general, the characteristics of the pure French ancestry grouping supports a cultural pluralism hypothesis while the characteristics of the mixed French ancestry group supports an Anglo-conformity hypothesis. But even among the pure French model we must assume substantial assimilation. Some indication of this assimilation of the group as a whole can be seen in the use of language. If we assume the unlikely condition that all the French spoken in Maine households is spoken by pure French ancestry persons only, than two thirds (69.5%) of these pure French ancestry people are speaking French at home. If we relate French-speaking at home to the total of the pure French and mixed French population then the proportion of French-speakers to the total French ancestry population in the state is more than a third (38.4%). Even under the most favorable assumptions thirty percent of pure French ancestry persons have adopted English as their home language and over sixty percent of all French ancestry persons have adopted English. Thus we must conclude that substantial assimilation has taken place-- even among the least assimilated fraction of the French ancestry population, persons of pure French ancestry.

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