Health  
Negative Case by Alisa Stringer



Assimilation and multiculturalism are inextricably linked to immigration. While this resolution does impact each of us, the impact is disproportionally felt by minority immigrant groups. It is immigrant groups that are asked, or told, to lose their cultural heritage and lifestyles whenever a society values assimilation.

This case examines the health impact of choosing assimilation. Since the decisions we make about culture affect us physically, spiritually, and mentally, there is a broad range of arguments for debaters to choose from. Health is about more than physical stability, and the arguments in this case attempt to examine the large range of health impacts that assimilation and multiculturalism can have.

The contentions in this article are simple. The first contention addresses assimilation’s impact on health. The second contention examines multiculturalism’s role in health. Debaters may note that the evidence used spans a long period of time. This is purposeful. The hope is that debaters will consider the different ways in which people have viewed multiculturalism and assimilation throughout time, rather than just how they are portrayed today.

When affirmative debaters prepare against this case, there are two main arguments they may want to consider. First, the resolution is not America specific. Some of the argumentation in this case focuses specifically on assimilation in America. What are the health effects of assimilation in other countries? Second, assimilation may be harmful in some health scenarios, but it is beneficial in others. What are the potential health benefits of assimilation?

This case takes a narrow view of the resolution, but its topic is an aspect of the resolution that is essential to any debate of cultural ideologies. Our health shapes our personal lives and our communities, so we need to make sure we engage in thoughtful and informed discussion on health in immigrant communities.

Health

Humans live in society because it is beneficial to our health. Or at least, our societies are supposed to be beneficial. Whenever a group requires that individuals give up their identity in order to be accepted, the society has ceased to fulfill its primary obligation. In order to protect the individuals within it, culture ought to value multiculturalism over assimilation.

# Definitions

## Culture

Oxford. "culture, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, June 2019, Accessed 5 July 2019. www.oed.com/view/Entry/45746

a. Chiefly as a count noun. The distinctive ideas, customs, social behaviour, products, or way of life of a particular nation, society, people, or period. Hence: a society or group characterized by such customs, etc.

## Assimilation

Guest, Kenneth J., 2018. Essentials of Cultural Anthropology: A Toolkit for a Global Age, W.W. Norton & Company, Print. Pp 166.

The process through which minorities accept the patterns and norms of the dominant culture and cease to exist as separate groups.

## Multiculturalism

Guest, Kenneth J., 2018. Essentials of Cultural Anthropology: A Toolkit for a Global Age, W.W. Norton & Company, Print. Pp 167.

A pattern of ethnic relations in which new immigrants and their children enculturate into the dominant national culture yet retain an ethnic culture.

## Resolutional Analysis: Societal Choice

The resolution asks us to consider what a “culture” ought to value. Within the resolution, then, culture is a society characterized by a set of customs or views. In America, that culture is what we know as the dominant American society.

It is important to recognize that when the resolution asks culture to choose between assimilation or multiculturalism, there is an implication that the overall society is making a choice. The resolution does not ask us to prove that individuals ought to choose to assimilate. Rather, it asks the affirmative to prove that society should demand that individuals assimilate.

# Value: Health

The ultimate goal of a society to is provide a space for individuals to live in health and happiness. Physical, mental, and spiritual health are essential goals for any individual and any culture. In order to foster a community that values the wellbeing of all its members, we ought to weigh our both resolutional ideologies on their ability to promote the health of the individuals involved.

# Contention 1: Assimilation Threatens Individual’s Health

Whenever an individual chooses to assimilate into a new community, they give up the habits and culture of their previous lives in order to adopt the habits and culture of their new neighbors. In terms of American communities, this often means that immigrants are exposed to new levels of obesity, drug use, and other unhealthy habits. But in addition to the cultural problems, the stress of the assimilation itself can harm immigrants.

## Application: Immigrants Are Healthier than other Americans

Powell, Alvin. 21 September 2015. “Measuring Assimilation.” The Harvard Gazette. Accessed 4 October 2019. https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2015/09/measuring-assimilation/

Young immigrant men with low levels of education commit fewer crimes than their native-born counterparts, the report said, and foreign-born men ages 18 to 39 are jailed at one-fourth the rate of native-born men. The impact of this is felt in cities where concentrations of new immigrants align with lower crime rates, Waters said.

Immigrants are in much better health than native-born Americans, with lower rates of obesity, smoking, and cancer, which all went up as they assimilated. Also, Waters said, immigrants are likelier to be raised in two-parent families than native-born Americans of similar background.

## Application: Assimilation is connected to Increased Mortality Rates

Hayes-Bautista, David E., and Gregory Rodriguez. 17 December 1995. “California: Cultural Assimilation is Bad for Your Health.” LA Times, Accessed 4 October 2019. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-12-17-op-16182-story.html.

The cultural mores linked to social well-being are frequently the same as those that benefit health. In the past, immigrants’ “old-world” ways lost their influence as each successive generation “Americanized.” The gradual erosion of culturally rooted attitudes has been linked to increased mortality rates among culturally assimilated Asian Americans, as well as a slackening in study habits among third-generation Asian American youth. U.S.-born Latinas, who have higher incomes and greater access to prenatal care than immigrant women, have had higher infant mortality rates than their foreign-born counterparts. Teachers in Los Angeles’ elementary schools say third-generation Mexican American children are much more likely to have disciplinary problems than immigrant children.

The American culture that immigrants must adapt to is not as robust and ascendant as it once was. The sad reality is that cultural assimilation has become bad for your health. While the “huddled masses” have never had it easy, the version of American culture that many of today’s immigrants come to know first is the poisonous combination of dysfunction, decay, automatic weapons and drugs that characterizes inner cities.

# Contention 2: Multiculturalism Protects Individuals

When individuals are allowed, and even encouraged, to respect and value their heritages, they embrace a more gradual change in habit, one that allows for a blended of cultural identities, rather than an abrupt change in identity. In addition, if society is more supportive of diversity, there is less social stigma attached to minority immigrant groups, which means that these immigrants are less stressed and more mentally healthy.

## Application: Multicultural Immigrants Have Better Mental Health

“3 Effects of Immigration and Assimilation." National Research Council. 1996. Statistics on U.S. Immigration: An Assessment of Data Needs for Future Research. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. doi: 10.17226/4942

Intriguing questions have been raised by research on the mental health of ethnic minorities in the United States, including immigrants. In a review of mental health prevalence rates reported in research over the past two decades (Vega and Rumbaut, 1991), studies suggest that rapid acculturation does not necessarily lead to conventionally anticipated outcomes, i.e., that improved adjustment to American society and a decrease in the mental health problems are associated with immigration. Instead, mental health studies suggest that assimilation—in the various forms it can take—can itself be a traumatic process rather than a simple solution to the traumas of immigration.

For example, results from the Hispanic-HANES study (Moscicki et al., 1989), with an exceptionally large regional sample, indicate low symptom levels of mental health disorders for Mexican-Americans in the southwestern United States and significantly lower rates of depressive symptoms and major depression for Cubans in Miami, compared with all other Hispanic groups. The Los Angeles Epidemiological Catchment Areas study also reported lower rates of major depression among Mexican-Americans than among non-Hispanic whites (Karno et al., 1987). Significantly, among Mexican-Americans, immigrants had lower rates of lifetime major depression than native-born people of Mexican descent; and among Mexican immigrants, the higher the level of acculturation, the higher was the prevalence of various types of psychiatric disorder (Burnam et al., 1987). Furthermore, the native-born Mexican-Americans and non-Hispanic whites were much more likely than immigrants to be drug abusers.

## Application: Assimilated Children Suffer in Terms of Health

Akbulut-Yuksel, Mevlude and Adriana Kugler. 17 October 2016. “Assimilation and the health of immigrants: US evidence.” Vox CEPR Policy Portal. Accessed 4 October 2019. https://voxeu.org/article/assimilation-and-health-immigrants-us-evidence

We find evidence that there is substantial persistence in health status for both natives and immigrants. Between 50% and 70% of children’s BMI is inherited from their mother, but immigrant children’s weight and BMI tends to resemble that of their mothers more than native children’s weight and BMI do. By contrast depression is more persistent for native than immigrant children.

Importantly, we find that as immigrants remain in the US for more generations their children’s health tends to resemble their mothers’ health less and less and to instead resemble native children’s health. Unfortunately, since recent immigrant arrivals tend to have healthier habits, this means that as immigrants assimilate they tend to look less healthy as well.

# Conclusion

Any culture ought to have the wellbeing of its members as its primary objective. While assimilation may seem appealing for social cohesiveness, it is often detrimental to individuals. Since the primary goal of a culture is to protect individuals, culture ought to value multiculturalism over assimilation.

Opposition Brief: Health

# Opportunities in Assimilation

Assimilation and Increased Opportunity

Pettus, Ashley. May 2007. “End of the Melting Pot?” Harvard Magazine. Accessed 4 October 2019. https://harvardmagazine.com/2007/05/end-of-the-melting-pot-html

AT THE TURN of the twentieth century, America faced a profound crisis of identity. Streams of Europeans who didn’t look, sound, or behave like Americans crowded into chaotic city neighborhoods and took on low-paying, often dangerous jobs. While industrialists profited, a growing clamor of anti-immigrant voices accused foreigners of lowering wages, threatening the social order, and undermining the country’s racial standards.

The subsequent story of European assimilation offers a message of hope and caution for contemporary times. Between the 1920s and the 1970s the mainstream expanded to absorb new elements. The boundaries of “otherness” shifted far enough so that Italian-Americans could afford to rediscover their “ethnic roots” from their secure position as fully “white” Americans.

It’s too soon to tell whether newer immigrant groups will make a similar journey from the margins to the center of American society. Some clearly have already forged upward paths by gaining access to higher education and leaving their parents’ enclaves behind. But for many others, the future will largely depend on the success of policy efforts to slow the tide of immigration and address the hard realities at the bottom rungs of the economy. “Nobody sets out to assimilate,” Mary Waters explains. “They set out to have a better life. So they need to go to college, and then move to a better house in a more integrated neighborhood. If economic mobility is blocked, then all the small decisions are going to be blocked, and you will have the formation of harder boundaries around national origins than we’ve had before.”

Assimilation Helps Immigrants and Nation

Rangel, Juan. 15 May 2017. “Assimilation, not victimization, for Mexican Immigrants.” Chicago Tribune. Accessed 4 October 2019. https://www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/commentary/ct-perspec-immigrants-0515-md-20170515-story.html

The Mexican-American community would be better served by a different argument, one that harkens back to another president's more eloquent flair — John F. Kennedy's "ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." It's a perspective that calls for the full assimilation of immigrants into the broader American family in a manner that is positive, patriotic and productive for immigrant families, and also for our nation. Such a position promotes immigrants as civically engaged, not as victims of American society in need of restitution, rather as proactive stakeholders in America's continued development and prosperity. This is a centrist view that may even encourage unexpected political alliances.

# Bridges and Barriers

Assimilation Lowers Cultural Barriers

Tabellini, Marco. 29 May 2019. “Cultural assimilation is a crucial part of reducing anti-immigrant sentiment in native populations.” World Economic Forum. Accessed 4 October 2019. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/05/gifts-of-the-immigrants-woes-of-the-natives-lessons-from-the-age-of-mass-migration/

In the last part of the paper, I seek to reconcile the seemingly contrasting economic and the political effects of immigration. I show that natives’ political reactions were increasing in the cultural distance between immigrants and natives, suggesting that backlash had, at least in part, non-economic foundations. I proxy for cultural diversity using both religion and linguistic distance. The use of religion, in particular, is motivated by the historical evidence that, at that time, nativism often resulted in anti-Semitism and anti-Catholicism (Higham 1955). I find that, while immigrants from Protestant and non-Protestant countries had similar eﬀects on natives’ employment, they triggered very diﬀerent political reactions. Only Catholic and Jewish, but not Protestant, immigrants induced cities to limit redistribution, favoured the election of more conservative legislators, and increased support for the 1924 National Origins Act.

The findings in my paper may be specific to the conditions prevailing in US cities in the early 20th century, but they could be relevant for the design of policies aimed at dealing with the economic and political effects of immigration today. My results suggest that when cultural differences between immigrants and natives are large, opposition to immigration can arise even if immigrants are on average economically beneficial and do not create economic losers among natives. Thus, favouring the cultural assimilation of immigrants and reducing the (actual or perceived) distance between immigrants and natives may be at least as important as addressing the potential economic effects of immigration.

Multiculturalism is Bad for Society

Malik, Kenan. March 2015. “The Failure of Multiculturalism.” Foreign Affairs. Accessed 4 October 2019. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/western-europe/2015-02-18/failure-multiculturalism

But the truth about multiculturalism is far more complex than either side will allow, and the debate about it has often devolved into sophistry. Multiculturalism has become a proxy for other social and political issues: immigration, identity, political disenchantment, working-class decline. Different countries, moreover, have followed distinct paths. The United Kingdom has sought to give various ethnic communities an equal stake in the political system. Germany has encouraged immigrants to pursue separate lives in lieu of granting them citizenship. And France has rejected multicultural policies in favor of assimilationist ones. The specific outcomes have also varied: in the United Kingdom, there has been communal violence; in Germany, Turkish communities have drifted further from mainstream society; and in France, the relationship between the authorities and North African communities has become highly charged. But everywhere, the overarching consequences have been the same: fragmented societies, alienated minorities, and resentful citizenries.

Strength in Assimilated Numbers

Riley, Jason L. 6 August 2019. “Can America Still Assimilate Immigrants?” Wall Street Journal. Accessed 4 October 2019. https://www.wsj.com/articles/can-america-still-assimilate-immigrants-11565131670

Chris DeMuth, a former head of the American Enterprise Institute, sees European-style nationalist impulses as something conservatives should harness rather than discourage. Amy Wax, a law professor and veteran of the first Bush administration, wants the U.S. to accept fewer nonwhites from underdeveloped nations because, among other things, multiculturalist elites “resist the assimilation of immigrants to a uniform American way.” She’s right, they do. So, isn’t her real beef with the multiculturalists and not the immigrants? As David French of National Review noted, Indian-Americans, who hail from a country that is neither Caucasian nor part of the First World, haven’t had a problem assimilating economically. According to census data, they have the highest median household income of any group in the U.S., including whites.

What’s worth preserving is not “American culture” but American values, which emphasize freedom and opportunity rather than some tribal notion of collective solidarity. Our values aren’t threatened by immigration, but they could be threatened by those who would have America follow Europe’s lead.

Assimilation is Natural

Abramitzky, Ran. April 2017. “What History Tells us about Assimilation of Immigrants.” Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research. Accessed 4 October 2019. https://siepr.stanford.edu/research/publications/immigrants-assimilate

The contemporary migration wave is highly regulated, favoring those with money, education, and skills and drawing migrants primarily from Asia and Latin America. Selection of immigrants today is often positive, meaning those who come here are more highly skilled than their compatriots who stay in their countries of origin. In the past, immigrants were sometimes negatively selected, meaning they were less skilled than those who stayed behind. Finally, legal immigration now is accompanied by a large undocumented inflow, which complicates efforts to study immigration effects.

Much work remains to be done to understand the cultural and economic dimensions of immigration and the differences between the past and the present. My research colleagues and I recently got access to California birth certificate records, which will allow us to compare immigrants from current and historical periods to see whether assimilation patterns are similar.

Overall though, lessons from the Age of Mass Migration suggest that fears immigrants can’t fit into American society are misplaced. It would be a mistake to determine our nation’s immigration policy based on the belief that immigrants will remain foreigners, preserving their old ways of life and keeping themselves at arm’s length from the dominant culture. The evidence is clear that assimilation is real and measurable, that over time immigrant populations come to resemble natives, and that new generations form distinct identities as Americans.

# Assimilation Benefits

The Benefits of Assimilation

Gonzalez, Mike. 23 May 2019. “The Real Inclusive Approach to Immigrants.” Heritage Foundation. Accessed 4 October 2019. https://www.heritage.org/immigration/commentary/the-real-inclusive-approach-immigrants

As it is often the case with those whose proposals actually lead to a reduction in our freedoms, Santiago wraps her argument as a rousing defense of liberty: Assimilation would mean “the end of the romantic notion that we are a free people who can speak as we like, feel as we feel, be who we are, without fear of government reprisals,” she writes.

Let me make three points about this. First, the survival of political liberty and a political community depends on a shared culture and the habits of character that protect it. Second, the leading thinkers of the multiculturalism Santiago defends no longer even pretend to be on the side of political liberty. And third, the comparison she draws between America and totalitarian Cuba gets things exactly backward.

Let’s start with the survival of political liberty. Some cultural traits and habits are necessary to self-rule, and others undermine it. A government charged with protecting our freedoms must promote the former and discourage the latter.

Thrift, self-reliance, a strong work ethic, perseverance, volunteerism, and moderation are qualities that make a population free and prosperous. These also are virtues long associated with America, a nation a historically free and prosperous. They must be instilled and practiced. They don’t come in the bloodstream.

A statist, bureaucratic mindset that does not prize the right to private property, the right to freedom of speech and conscience, or the belief that all humans are born free and equal, would on the other hand render our society less free. Immigrants who come freighted with these habits of mind must be invited to forget them and take up new ones.

Assimilation Improves Lives

Preston, Julia. 2015. “Newest Immigrants Assimilating as Fast as Previous Ones, Report Says.” The New York Times. Accessed 4 October 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/22/us/newest-immigrants-assimilating-as-well-as-past-ones-report-says.html

The newest generations of immigrants are assimilating into American society as fast and broadly as the previous ones, with their integration increasing over time “across all measurable outcomes,” according to a report published on Monday by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine.

Immigrants’ education levels, the diversity of their jobs, their wages and their mastery of English improved as they lived for more time in the United States, and the gains were even greater for their American-born children, the report concluded.

“The force of integration is strong,” said Mary C. Waters, a sociologist at Harvard who led the panel of 18 immigration scholars who wrote the more than 400-page report. “However we do it, we are good at it,” she said.

# Assimilation Not at Fault

Harm in Discrimination, not Assimilation

Gordon, Dan. 1 December 2014. “Life in America: Hazardous to Immigrant’s Health?” UCLA Newsroom. Accessed 4 October 2019. http://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/life-in-america-hazardous-to-immigrants-health

While assimilation may be a significant factor in immigrants’ worsening health, other factors, such as culture, genetics and socioeconomic status, play an important role. “But they don’t fully explain the health disparities we see,” noted Gilbert Gee, a professor at the Fielding School and member of the UCLA Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Equity. In fact, Gee believes that some of what is attributed to assimilation may actually be the result of the way immigrants are looked upon in their new home.

“Another aspect of being here a long time is that you experience more discrimination,” said Gee, who seeks to measure the impact of that discrimination on mental and physical health. He points out that immigrants go from feeling at home in their country of origin to being viewed as a racial minority.

“Suddenly you’re not Sri Lankan but simply Asian,” Gee said. “It can be stressful enough to come to a new society and learn a new language, but it’s doubly stressful when you’re also dealing with these negative stereotypes.”

In a study of Asian American immigrants, Gee’s group found that clinical depression was more likely to be predicted by experiences of discrimination than by acculturation. Gee suggests that more recent efforts to pass English-only laws have created a hostile climate for immigrant groups, potentially to the detriment of their health.

Multiculturalism Increases Immigrant Challenges

Thornton, Bruce. 26 October 2012. “Melting Pots and Salad Bowls.” Hoover Institution. Accessed 4 October 2019. https://www.hoover.org/research/melting-pots-and-salad-bowls

Multicultural identity politics worsen the problems of illegal immigration. Many immigrants, legal or otherwise, are now encouraged to celebrate the cultures they have fled and to prefer them to the one that gave them greater freedom and opportunity. Our schools and popular culture reinforce this separatism, encouraging Americans to relate to those outside their identity group not as fellow citizens, but as either rivals for power and influence or oppressors (from whom one is owed reparations in the form of government transfers or preferential policies). The essence of being an American has been reduced to a flabby “tolerance,” which in fact masks a profound intolerance and anti-Americanism because the groups that multiculturalism celebrates are defined in terms of their victimization by a sinful America.

No matter how the laws of Arizona and other states fare, this problem of assimilation will remain. Millions of the illegal immigrants in this country are no doubt striving to become Americans despite the obstacles multiculturalism has put in their path. Many others have not developed that sense of American identity, nor have they been compelled, as immigrants were in the past, to acknowledge the civic demands of America and give her their loyalty. Their relation to this country is merely economic or parasitic. Figuring out how to determine which immigrants are which, and what to do with those who prefer not to be Americans, will be the challenge of the years ahead.