

# **Formulating a Cosmopolitan Approach to Immigration and Social Policy: Lessons from American (north and south) indigenous and immigrant groups**

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## **Abstract**

Throughout history the United States has been constantly confronted with the responsibility of integrating diverse groups of people into its society. This paper uses current and historical ideas about the complex nature of indigenous groups, globalization, and education as vehicles for promoting the adoption of cosmopolitanism, a paradigm that values inclusion, tolerance, and respect for the other. Cosmopolitanism is discussed as a plausible alternative to historical assimilationist/nativist practices. The paper uses the Otavalos, an indigenous population in Ecuador, as an instructive example of a community that successfully applies a cosmopolitan approach to its indigenous identity and immigration behaviors to integrate itself into a modern global society.

## **Introduction**

Before 1965, immigrants to the U.S. were primarily European (Takaki, 1993). More recent data show significant changes in the ethnic configuration and proportion of immigrants entering the U.S. According to the 2000 census, immigrants and their children constitute 20 percent of the total American population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Furthermore, Hispanics are overtaking African Americans as the largest minority, while non-Hispanic whites have declined to two-thirds of the population and have even become a minority in California, the most populous U.S. state. Based on the latest projections, ethnic groups of color will comprise approximately half of the U.S. population by the year 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Given this minority-majority trend, what macrosystems will be envisioned in order to promote relationships among immigrants, minority groups, indigenous groups, and the larger society? How might these relationships take into consideration a new world order in an era of globalization?

This paper responds to these questions by examining America's historical response to indigenous and immigrant populations. The purpose of the paper is to make a case for a more inclusive approach to community building. We focus on indigenous and immigrant populations because historically, those in power have put serious, overt pressure on these two groups to assimilate. We suggest cosmopolitanism, the practice of valuing all cultures equally, as a plausible alternative to the historical assimilationist/nativist practices. Finally, we look at the Otavalo indigenous in Ecuador, who are both indigenous and immigrant, as an example of a group coping with and taking advantage of globalization to strengthen their community both at

home and abroad. The Otavalos may teach indigenous, immigrant, and dominant groups how to embrace a more cosmopolitan perspective toward each other.

### **The Assimilationist Tradition in U.S. Immigration Policy**

The primary theoretical framework that social scientists and historians have traditionally used to analyze the relationship of the immigrant culture to that of the larger society has been assimilation. Scholars who write about assimilation often describe it as an evolutionary process in which immigrants gave up all traces of their old life in favor of the superior values of America (Hirschman, 1983). Although the term "assimilation" is a fairly new one in education, the concept itself has been influencing American education for centuries. The establishment of French and Spanish missions by colonists in the sixteenth century was clearly intended to transform indigenous Native American culture through the integration of Christian ideals. By the early twentieth century, educational policy toward those belonging to non-white groups was thoroughly assimilationist. One scholar, in speaking of the Native American experience, has summarized this phenomenon as follows:

In the early 1900s, federal boarding schools forbade native language use and religious practice, and they separated families. Policy makers calculated these to achieve far-reaching social goals, to civilize and Christianize young Indian people and so draw them away from tribal identification and communal living. (Lomawaima, 1993)

More recent stories of the "No Spanish Rules" in southwest schools as late as the 1970s indicate efforts to Americanize Mexican American students (Acuna, 1988). The consequences for speaking Spanish on school grounds, according to a study by MacGregor-Mendoza (2000), could include corporal punishment, and one individual reported that he was not only "beaten with a stick" when caught speaking Spanish, but also admonished by teachers for using "a filthy language" (Salazar, 1992, p. 330). Negative responses to students' language and/or culture that are deeply situated cultural practices of the community and family do little to facilitate the educational desired outcomes of assimilation. The case of Mexican Americans is particularly interesting because it blurs the line between indigenous and immigrant populations. Many Mexicans who cross the Rio Grande are entering a land their ancestors lived in for generations before the Mexican American war.

Given the greater acceptance of racial diversity and inclusion in America following the ethnic revitalization programs of the 1960s and 70s (Banks, 2006), it would be comforting to believe that conformist-oriented policies are no longer given serious credence. Unfortunately, as evidenced by the recent success in banning bilingual programs from public schools in Arizona and California (Crawford, 2000; Galindo, 1997), such is not the case. This legislation reveals the resistant attitudes towards cultural difference that still pervade Americans today. "The problem," as Wuthnow (2006) points out, "is that large segments of white Americans still prefer to think in assimilationist terms, hoping against hope that a color-blind society can be created, in which all hues seem white" (p. 184). Having described the discriminatory, assimilationist nature of social policy in the U.S., as experienced by Native and Mexican Americans, the following discussion considers cosmopolitanism as a viable alternative response to the education of immigrant and indigenous groups.

### Expanding notions of Global Equity

Much greater attention has been devoted in recent years to the relationship between migration and education, and the implications this has for addressing the issues of integration, cohesion, language education, and multicultural education (Luchtenberg, 2004). Educators today have a responsibility to counteract the longstanding problems associated with assimilationist and nativist education in the U.S. by developing curricula that are sensitive to the concerns of the rapidly changing global ethos. As Banks (2006) points out, "Worldwide immigration and globalization raises new questions about how to prepare students for thoughtful and active citizenship" (p. 151), which essentially means teaching students to value difference in themselves and others. Some of the more significant effects of globalization on educational policy include the creation of greater international policy networks, more awareness of economic considerations, and a much greater convergence of discourse relating to educational policy objectives (George & Wilding, 2002).

Academicians and policymakers frequently offer new theories for how to transcend the ever-present politicization of race, ethnicity, and immigration in the U.S., with proposals ranging from the assimilationist plea for strengthening Western (namely, Anglo-Protestant) values (Huntington, 1996), to the more pluralist suggestion of restoring the "melting pot" (Barone, 2001). Others proclaim the necessity of a "new assimilation theory" (Alba & Nee, 2003), or more optimistically assert that the entrenched 'Anglo-American' culture has reached its apogee and is now on the decline (Kaufmann, 2004). However, one of the more intriguing proposals in the ongoing debate about immigration and assimilation is Hollinger's *Postethnic America: Beyond multiculturalism* (1995). In it, the author attempts to transcend the debate about multiculturalism in America by offering a "critical renewal of cosmopolitanism in the context of today's greater sensitivity to roots" (p. 5). The problem with multiculturalism, Hollinger contends, is that it has come to denote a set of obsolete arguments that no longer persuasively speak to contemporary conditions in the U.S. (p. 83). In his argument, Hollinger carefully sharpens the distinction between those advocating multiculturalism, a term which has come to be synonymous with pluralism, and those advancing cosmopolitanism; whereas both groups promote diversity and tolerance, pluralists accept ethnic segmentation as normative while cosmopolitans espouse the importance of multiple affiliations (Hollinger, pp. 3-4, 84-86; Vertovec & Cohen, 2003, p. 18).

Hollinger's discussion foreshadowed a considerable revitalization of interest in cosmopolitanism during the second half of the 1990s as globalization continued its ascendancy (e.g., Appiah, 2006; Carter, 2001; Dower & Williams, 2002; Heater, 1996; Hutchings & Dannreuther, 1999; Linklater, 1998; Nussbaum, 1996; Papastephanou 2002, 2005; Snauwaert, 2002). This sea change is largely attributed to a variety of social and political factors, which are enumerated by Turner (2002) and include:

the partial erosion of national sovereignty and the growth of dual and multiple citizenship; the growth of global markets, especially a global labour market and an expansion of migrant labour seeking forms of quasi-citizenship; the growth of multiculturalism and cultural hybridity as an aspect of mainstream contemporary political life; and the globalization of the politics of migrant communities, giving rise to diasporic cultures. (p. 58)

The critical point here is that cosmopolitanism encompasses a particular project that places a high value on the importance of inclusion, tolerance, and respect for the other beyond the debated and limiting concept of 'multiculturalism'. Given the nature of cosmopolitanism and its importance for considerations of inclusivity and diversity, it becomes necessary to determine more precisely what implications the concept has for addressing the complex challenges associated with international migration, indigenous populations, and education. Snauwaert (2002) discusses the direct implications that cosmopolitanism might have for citizenship education in his broad thesis: since a cosmopolitan perspective calls for the cultivation of "moral reciprocity" and "shared commonality" (p. 10), it is necessary to move beyond the imperatives of the nation-state and consider ways in which educational systems can specialize in the development of "empathetic, respectful, and wide-awake cosmopolitan citizens" (p. 12).

The connection between cosmopolitanism and education has important implications for the relationships between immigration and schooling, particularly because of cosmopolitanism's emphasis on valuing difference. By teaching cosmopolitanism, educators encourage minority groups to view their differences as assets rather than deficiencies, thereby empowering these groups to use their differences to advance themselves. This is a stark contrast with earlier views of education which advocated the elimination of difference as the sole path to successful democracy. It is also particularly relevant considering the worldwide phenomenon of transnational migration and the unprecedented movement of diverse racial, cultural, ethnic, and religious groups across nation states. A model of cosmopolitan education is well equipped to address the needs of increasing numbers of students who have multiple national identities and will have professional and personal commitments around the globe (Banks, 2004; Banks, 2006; Papastergiadis, 2000). As such, well-envisioned educational innovations would consider students' intellectual, linguistic, cultural, and social welfare to be central when designing the experiences they would encounter in schools. Schools would take advantage of the linguistic and cultural understandings indigenous and immigrant students bring to the classroom to advance the education of all students. In the final section we turn to the Otavalos, an indigenous population in Ecuador, as an instructive example of a community that has taken the opportunities offered by global markets to secure, as well as expand their culture and identity into one that can be truly characterized as 'cosmopolitan'.

### **Cosmopolitanism, Globalization and Transmigration: The Case of Otavalo Indigenous**

Otavalo is two hours north of Quito, Ecuador in the Andean highlands. The town, popular among tourists, has a famous market well known for its local textiles and crafts. The Otavalos, similar to American Indian and Mexican American in the United States, have been accorded an inferior social status. As such, the Otavalos have suffered economically, politically, linguistically, socially, and culturally (Bebbington, 2000; Korovkin, 1998; Kyle, 1999; Meisch, 1997). As Buítron (1951) tells us, "they were conquered and dominated by the Incas, later by the Spanish, and now by priests, hacienda owners, lawyers and clerks, city officials and political officers, tavern owners, etc." (cited in Meisch, 1997, p. 85). As late as the mid-1970s the Otavalos experienced great discrimination in their native Ecuador. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, the indigenous population of Ecuador began organizing for their rights, and in addition to more conscientious legislation, opportunities for trade in Europe and the U.S. helped the Otavalos find markets for their textiles, crafts and music (Bebbington, 2000; Korovkin, 1998; Kyle, 1999; Meisch, 1997).

The Otavalos represent a minority cultural group that has managed to exist and in some cases prosper in an industrialized society using their traditional skills, social practices, language and belief systems to maintain their culture and language, while at the same time adapting new technologies and learning the language and culture of others' to survive at home, as well as in foreign lands (Kyle, 1999; Korovkin, 1998; Meisch, 1997). Otavalos' successful local economic development can, in part, be attributed to their past practices. A history of Otavalo and its people shows that weaving was a local tradition starting in pre-Inca times that has evolved and been modernized throughout the years (Korovkin, 1998). In addition to their textile and craft production, Otavalos were also merchants, and as such, they can be considered transnational as they build economic relationships at home and abroad. In the past they traveled across South America and, as early as the mid 1940s they traveled to international markets (e.g., northern Caribbean and the U.S.) to sell their textiles (Kyle, 1999). Today, they can be seen in Europe, the U.S., and throughout South America selling their textiles and handicrafts in outdoor markets and entertaining crowds with their distinctive Andean sounds on street corners (Meisch, 1997). According to Kyle (1999) Otavalo migrants travel "to at least twenty-three countries with an average time abroad of less than one year. In the course of the overseas marketing of their own products and those of other indigenous groups, Otavalos have carved out a global market niche for inexpensive handicrafts manufactured by household labour using pre-industrial and industrial technologies of scale" (p. 423).

Traditionally, Otavalos come from a non-literate society. However, their increased economic success and travel crystallized the need for formal education to learn "some Spanish and arithmetic" in order to communicate and better understand the market system (Korovkin, 1988, p. 135). They adopted new goals of sending their children to colleges and universities. As education increased, rates of illiteracy decreased from 44% in 1950 to 14% in 1990 (Korovkin, 1988; Meisch, 1997). Educational problems such as lack of textbooks, overcrowded classrooms, language barriers, and inadequate teacher wages led the community to enlist the help of the university, government agencies, and international governments to generate a creative solution (Korovkin, 1988). These efforts resulted in community-based bilingual educational programs that were eventually staffed by indigenous college graduates. Otavalos also study abroad through foreign government programs and their population now includes highly educated individuals who are able to campaign for a continued emphasis on bilingual and cultural education (Korovkin, 1988; Meisch, 1997). Education is not flawless and illiteracy rates remain high, especially among older Otavalos. However, the educated Otavalos serve as a baseline that support educational programs for the population at large and influence local, political, and social responses to education.

As a result of their transnational interactions and cosmopolitan approach, the Otavalos have improved the development of their social group through an expansion of their international connections, none of which would have been possible without the appreciation for difference espoused in cosmopolitanism (Portes, Guamizo & Haller, 2002). The Otavalos are neither confined to their past existence nor coerced to assimilate to mainstream culture. Indeed, they create and recreate their own identity as they control their own situations (de la Torre, 2006). According to Kyle (1999), the Otavalo example "illustrates that transnational corporations are not the only ones able to take advantage of economic opportunities spread around the globe by virtue of their large budgets and organizational prowess" (p. 424). For immigrants and

indigenous groups, finding niche markets may be easier in today's globalized economy, especially if a group has unique commodities to sell.

There are exciting lessons to be learned from the success of this small 'peasant' group that has taken the opportunities offered by global markets to secure, as well as expand their culture and identity. As a result of their weaving and merchant traditions, Otavalos have continually forged new ways of succeeding, even in adverse situations. They have managed to organize a bilingual education system, as well as affect changes in policies that have constrained their opportunities within Ecuador and across foreign lands. Throughout their struggles and adaptations, the Otavalos managed to hold on to their indigenous identity both at home and abroad. Their economic solvency has allowed them to become more concerned with education and government, and has increased their advancement in the two domains.

## **Conclusion**

Our goal in this paper was to propose a more cosmopolitan response to policies and education of immigrant and indigenous groups as a way to respond to social policy needs at home and abroad. Many of the U.S. educational policies have focused on assimilating indigenous and immigrants into the status quo so as to maintain the notion of "one nation," without considering that a nation's oneness is not in opposition with diversity. Contrasting with the U.S. historical assimilation response to education, the Otavalos are a more cosmopolitan example. While it might be thought that the more 'cosmopolitan' a group becomes there will correspondingly be less attachment to parochial/indigenous values and customs, the Otavalos disprove this thesis altogether. Inasmuch as they entered the global market, traveled around the world selling their wares, and became more 'cosmopolitan,' they did so in a manner that confirmed the value of their indigenous roots. Indeed, this is further illustrated by Meisch's (1997) suggestion that the concept of an Otavalo diaspora is applicable to the group because they have dispersed throughout the world while retaining their Otavalo identity.

In an era of globalization, the U.S. will be confronted with ever-larger numbers of documented and undocumented minority immigrants. As such, we will take up the responsibility of educating the new immigrant population to understand our democratic society. To accomplish such a goal, we suggest that schools become familiar with cosmopolitanism as an organizing concept for schooling. We expect that designing experiences using this concept will create more efficient learning environments where students share their histories, beliefs, languages, and intellectual capabilities. By embodying the concept of a cosmopolitan identity, global students transcend the more parochial/pluralist conceptions that have often characterized the debate on multiculturalism in the U.S. In the process, they become, in effect, "rooted cosmopolitans," embracing their origins even as they move beyond their traditional physical boundaries (Tarrow, 2005).

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