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BRIDGING THREE WORLDS: THE IMPACT OF ETHNIC PRESS ON THE POLITICAL
ADAPTATION PROCESS OF AMERICA'S NEWEST IMMIGRANTS.

*"Surprisingly, no comprehensive assessment
of immigration's impact on American politics exists."*

H.G. Nicholas "The Nature of American Politics".

RESEARCH PLAN.

INTRODUCTION.

According to the 1990 census, there are now nearly 20 million foreign-born in America. The United States experienced the largest flow of immigration since the turn of the century. Changes in immigration law during the last decades opened the gates to immigration from Asia and Pacific. The new mix of diverse newcomers became an essential ingredient in the transformation of community life.

Once again, America is changing. For many Americans these changes are personal. Immigrants, though usually willing converts to the American political creed, are not always capable of fully comprehending it. The socialization experiences of the homeland, as well as the immigrant's cultural exoticness, prevent easy adoption of the host polity's value system.

The immigrants' world has always been a difficult one, torn between old loyalties and new realities. Consequently, learning to live simultaneously in two social worlds is a requisite of "successful" immigrant adaptation.

BACKGROUND.

In analyzing the economic, political and social consequences of immigration there is an understandable tendency to take for granted the ethnical and racial categories. Even when the problem of assimilation is discussed, it rarely shifts in the ethnic categories themselves. Theories that sought to explain the assimilation of yesterday's immigrants are hard to illuminate the nature of contemporary immigration.

So too has immigration been surveyed from the prospect of assimilation, a process, in light of the extraordinary cultural diversity of American society as enhanced and replenished by successive flows of immigration, that is widely regarded as the crucial unifying, and arguably moderating force of the American polity.

Throughout the history of American immigration, a consistent thread has been the fear that "alien elements" would somehow undermine the institutions of the country and lead it down the path of disintegration and decay.

The major fears are that these new immigrants would alter quality of life in the United States, would lower the wage levels and standard of living of the United States workers, would increase the crime, the illiteracy, and pauperism rates, and would lower the level of culture. They would overcrowd American cities and make them dirty, ugly, and dangerous, and they would fragment U.S. values and loyalties.

The current debates about immigrants illustrate these fears. In point of fact, it is precisely the lack of adequate information and lack of knowledge about ethnic populations that generally contributes to groundless generalizations.

Whether these apocalyptic events ever come to pass, it is clear that stereotypes

held about ethnic populations reveal and project the hopes and fears of American society.

A comparative study of the immigrant experience, necessary to establish the arguments general theoretical significance, has yet to be done. To date, almost all research on the immigrant issues have focused on the impact that immigrants have on the American economy. Numerous scholars has documented immigration's contribution to nation's vitality. What has been missing, however, is a forceful statement of immigration 's political, social, and cultural values and influence. The researches fail to capture the full range of interaction among newcomers and society. Missing still is effort to pull together the many strands of our available knowledge about these matters, to grasp at once the diversity and the underlying structures of the new immigration, and to make it accessible to a general public.

The valuable and unique knowledge about immigrants' communities might be found in the history and content of ethnic/immigrant press. Over the course of American history, the ethnic newspaper world has been a necessary element in the lives of their respective peoples. Just as schools, churches, community meeting places, etc. were essential in the effort to recreate Old World societies in microcosm, the press too was a necessary ingredient in that recreation. The press gave its readership information that it wanted and needed. The press, as made linguistic, social, and political adjustments to the new environment, led its readers to the same direction.

Media coverage provides useful insights into beliefs about how immigrants are beneficial or hurtful to American society. Media shift the process of immigrant adaptation to the United States , polity, economy, culture, and are remarkably powerful in determining what readers believe to be the most important problems - the "agenda-setting effect" - and the standards by which all problems are judged.

Nevertheless, the immigrant or ethnic press has not received the scholars' attention. Given its importance in the various communities, especially in the non-English-speaking, and the vitality and growth of ethnic studies over the last decade, the scant attention is paid to the press and the limit of bibliography is remarkable.. The only comprehensive work remains the classic by sociologist Robert Park "*The Immigrant Press and Its Control*", published in 1922. The other book - "*The Ambivalent Welcome: Print Media, Public Opinion, and Immigration*", published recently, portrays American mass media reflections of immigration theme, and reveals the tension, the ambivalence, and the confusion in U.S. beliefs, attitude, perceptions, and policies vis-a-vis immigration. Nevertheless, its authors did not even mention any ethnic press.

There are some useful articles published respectively last decades in *Population Studies*, and in Joshua A. Fishman's "*Language Loyalty in the United States: The Maintenance and Perpetuation of Non-English Mother Tongue by American Ethnic and Religious Groups*", published in 1966. Edward Hunter's "*In Many Voices: Our Fabulous Foreign-Language Press*" (n.d.) appeared at the end of the McCarthy era and had very limited scholarly value due to its xenophobic assumption. During the last decade various bibliographic works and directories of ethnic newspapers and periodicals have appeared.

By far the most ambitious project to assess the impact of the immigrants on American Society was carried out in 1987-91. Ford Foundation sponsored a *Changing Relations Project* to study the relationship and everyday interactions among recent immigrants and long-term residents in six U.S. communities.

Nevertheless, there have been virtually no sociological or mass communication studies of the impact of the ethnic media on American society, or, for that matter, on any society. In the same time the range of cultures present in the United States have

been enormously broadened by the entrance of newcomers from developing nations, especially those from Latin America and Asia. For all immigrants, America is a foreign world, but the hues in which this world is painted and the emotional reactions it elicits vary widely under the influence of forces often removed from the will or knowledge of the newcomers. Press can play and plays here extremely important role.

A fundamental fact about America's newest settlers is that they are not a fixed categories, but are progressive, socially determined and changing phenomena. This project seeks to view what may be familiar about immigrants and immigration in a new way - **through the lens of the history and content of ethnic mass media**. In fact, we may be on the verge of a new society, and this emphasizes the particular urgency of this study now.

Apart from literature relevant to the proposed study, one facet of the principal investigator's experience should be mentioned as part of the background for this proposal. Earlier in her career this author was associated with another studies that are quite relevant to the present research. One of these was a study of the rural ethnic press in Africa, when the other study explored the utilization of multinational Soviet journalism experience by Third World countries (See enclosed list of author's publications). Thus, the principal investigator has considerable experience in this problem what will strengthen the proposed research in this respect.

OBJECTIVES.

This project focuses on the process of political adaptation of newest immigrants with particular attention to the ethnic press and its audience. As the ethnic press is the best primary source for understanding of the world of non-

English-speaking groups in the United States, their expectations and concerns, their background and evolution, the proposed research has **two fundamental objectives.**

First, through the mass media ability to provide a multidimensional overview we plan to examine the ways of political adaptation of specific ethnic groups. The immigrant press, whether printed in English or non-English, has been a conspicuous and influential part of community life in America. It contributes to the social cohesion of the community, fostered language maintenance, cultivated ethnic pride, and nourished a sense of identity and survival in an alien environment. But at the same time, despite its role as a carrier of ethnicity, the immigrant press has also been a means of assimilation. Hence, the questions here are:

How integrated immigrants have become into the larger society, and what are the ethnic press impacts on the adaptation and relative success that different immigrant communities have achieved? What are political and cultural conceptions of American identity and life, and how do these take shape through ethnic press?

The second major objective of this research is to document in systematic way how the ethnic press promotes the electoral participation which reinforced group solidarity and identity, and how this promotion helps immigrants to become a social and political actors. The main questions here are:

How ethnic newspapers build activities that involve ethnic community into political life? Is it any gap between communities and local/national policymakers?

Modern American history provides ample documentation: big local/national machines **did rely** on the particular affinities of immigrant-stock voters, and in

comparison to their followers among native-born Americans, political radicals have been overrepresented within the immigrant community. How important is the role of immigrant press here? After immigrant communities have been in the United States more than two generations, how differently they behave from other ethnic groups and from natives, and how similar or different are the values they espouse? **All these questions are the heart of the project.**

This study should also find , how the ethnic press solves the problem of proliferation of new forms of inequality in the communities where immigrants concentrate, what is the nature of relations between ethnic media and their audiences, and what role do ethnic media play in the situation, when some group are moving into dynamic sectors of economy and society, while others are stagnating?

Thus, our focus on today's immigrants is on the diversity of their origins and contexts of exit and on the diversity of their adaptation experiences and contexts of incorporation. The ultimate propose of this research is to provide information that will be extremely useful to policymakers who must weight not only how immigrants have been instrumental in the preservation of the American democracy.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES.

The idea that will be used during our investigation is somewhat novel in the field of research, but classical in the methodology of the measurement of communication behavior. This project makes use of **two well established research strategies:** (1) **a case studies** in the form of interviews with 100 representative ethnic readers, and (2) **a content analysis** of 5 ethnic newspapers currently published in the United States. Both strategies were chosen because analyzing large amount of data, interviews and content analysis can be done fairly quickly and without substantial financial resources. We limit our research to only theme - "Reporting

Elections-93 in the Five American Ethnic Newspapers” for objective and graphic example of press impact on the process of political adaptation of newest American immigrants.

Four cities will be selected to represent the diversity of ethnic populations and its media - New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Philadelphia. A random sample of readers - newsettlers will be interviewed according to the number of chosen ethnic newspapers. Each 20 people will represent each of Italian, Russian, Chinese, Indian and Jewish newspapers. We will focus on groups which typically chose to immigrate to the U.S. and underwent the subsequent adjustment process. The papers included in this research are: “*Novoye russkoye slovo*” (Russian), “*Hadassah Magazine*” (Jewish), “*Italian news*” (Italian), “*India abroad*” (Indian), and “*Free China Weekly*” (Chinese). These papers are circulated widely throughout relevant ethnic groups.

Content analysis might be diligently pursued in order to understand the histories of various groups as they are revealed in publications. Through this strategy we can examine social structure and analyze groups’ mores as they are distinguished from those of mainstream society. This section will contain also a summary of the ethnic media coverage of the elections-93 and will also provide a profile of each of the newspapers included in this study.

The research’s findings can serve as the basis for the pursuit of common goals through the American political system: by mobilizing the collective vote and by electing their own to office, immigrant minorities learn the rules of the democratic game and absorb its values in the process.

The research methods employed in the proposed study aspire to the quantitative sophistication necessary to place the research on the firm empirical ground. In the same time the approach is consciously exploratory, appropriate given the somewhat speculative nature of the questions under consideration.

Along with a quantitative examination of political behavior or attitudes, the proposal research will undertake what might be termed qualitative social research. The *case studies* will explore the validity of the findings obtained through the *content analysis* of newspapers' coverage. Certainly, the effect of immigrant status on political orientations is the causal relationship at the heart of the theme. But the evidence which might be revealed seeks only to demonstrate the possibility of the relationship: farther than that it cannot go.

Our intent is only to illuminate the ideas in a manner that might guide further investigations and to develop some recommendation for the immigrants' social and political advancement. Besides this **an unique typology of contemporary ethnic press** that serves to organize the subsequent analysis of their processes of economic, political, social, cultural, and psychological adaptation will be presented.

In short, a careful study of the impact of ethnic media on political behavior of newest America's settlers will provide **unique insights into the future directions of American society**, which, in turn, will be of great value to all levels of policymakers.

The end of the Cold War has led to the collapse of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, has threatened the breakup of the other nation-states such as India, and unleashed racial and ethnic violence in the United States and other multiracial and multiethnic societies. Conflicts arising from ethnic, political, and religious differences are proliferating. As the election campaign gathers steam and political competition intensifies, tremendous new tensions will be generated.

This study has placed a **heavy emphasis on immigration issue** since the ethnicity rises now as a central problem of peace and security. Thus, the ethnic community-level structures should be strengthened to be transformed from a

“debate societies” into a mechanism for the reducing such tensions. Internal peace within country along with international cooperation are basic ingredients for a better social, psychological and moral climate.

This author hopes that the data and research finding will contribute to the public debate and to the making of informed decisions about immigration policy. Finally, apart from its value to policymakers who must devise programs that will help people cope with their problems, we envision our research as making an important contribution to knowledge.

FINAL REPORT.

The first 7 - 8 months of the proposed study will be spent on analyzing in detail the empirical studies, carrying out interviews, and conducting the content analysis of selected newspapers and periodicals. During the last months the research report will be written. It supposed to be of book length and suitable for publication.

CONCLUSION.

The United States possesses a political ethos able to integrate immigrants, both the cause and effect of an ethnically diverse population. In principle, this enables all immigrants, regardless of cultural background, to aspire to membership in the political community. American society is essentially conflicted due to a large variety of differing interests - with respect to age, sex, class, region, religion and race - competing for recognition and support in the public interest, above all and beyond language and ethnicity. Immigrant press may be highly effective in protecting the ethnicity's members from the traumas of cultural adaptation or in dialoguing with local governments. It can bring people together, it may serve as a mechanism for change and accommodation.

A new chapter in the history of immigration to America is about to begin. Like the previous it is fraught with controversy, conflicting demands, and pressing human needs. Although problems are inevitable along the way, in the long run the diverse talents and energies of newcomers will reinforce the vitality of American society and the richness of its culture.