Swarthmore Undergraduate History Journal

Volume 5 | Issue 2 Article 6

2024

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Recommended Citation

Proia, Gabriel S. (2024) "Poles and Puerto Ricans: Immigration and Assimilation in the Pioneer Valley," *Swarthmore Undergraduate History Journal: 5* (2), 162-196. 10.24968/2693-244X.5.2.6
https://works.swarthmore.edu/suhj/vol5/iss2/6

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Poles and Puerto Ricans:
Immigration and Assimilation in the Pioneer Valley

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This paper attempts to explain why Polish immigrant farmers who came to the Pioneer Valley around the turn of the century assimilated more fully into the dominant culture and achieved on average greater economic success than Puerto Rican immigrant farmers who engaged in similar work in the same region roughly fifty years later. I begin by reviewing American Studies literature on assimilation dynamics to develop a framework for qualitatively evaluating how both groups changed over time. The evaluation is thereafter based on local newspaper articles and secondary ethnographic and historical literature from throughout the twentieth century, as well as interviews with the descendants of immigrants and personal accounts from local Massachusetts historians. In the vein of theoretical perspectives developed by scholars Sanchez, Bodnar, and Spickard, I conclude that the disparate outcomes experienced by the two groups is due in large part to the structural forces of postcolonial racism against Puerto Ricans in the context of global capitalism, specifically mid twentieth century urban deindustrialization. However, there is also a significant component to the disparity that I attribute to individual decision-making informed by shifting cultural values and behaviors.

My project is to evaluate and compare the experiences of two groups of rural farm workers who immigrated to the Connecticut River Valley in the twentieth century. The first group is Polish immigrants who came to the United States during the wave of "new immigration" around the turn of the century. The second group is Puerto Rican men who were drawn to the area in significant numbers during the 50s and 60s by certain contract-labor policies of the federal government.

The main focus of my work is an analysis of how the cultures of these groups changed after settling in the Valley, using methods of immigration and assimilation studies. Evaluating the extent to which a group "assimilates" is a complicated and highly subjective task, requiring normative assessment of a particular group or groups. This is a controversial enterprise today, as generalizing and essentializing ethnic or racial groups has come to be viewed critically in liberal society. As such, in the fifty years since the time period covered here, the scholarship of assimilation has become increasingly sensitive to post-colonial and post-modern discourse surrounding race and ethnicity. Although the incorporation of this awareness into assimilation studies does not preclude the necessity of defining specific groups for the purposes of analysis, it does recognize the imperial and/or colonial origins of many of these definitions. It therefore enables scholars to critique and complicate what has been historically implicit and grossly inaccurate in racial and ethnic categorization. Along these lines, scholars now take great pains to grant agency to immigrants, conceiving of their outcomes as negotiated in part by the immigrants themselves, as opposed to something imposed exclusively by impersonal social forces or predetermined by supposedly inherent ethnic traits.

However, a consequence of postcolonial thought's acknowledgment of the role of racial conceptions is its tendency to present a monocausal interpretation of assimilation shaped entirely

by racial dynamics. In his work on the historiography of US immigration[1] and assimilation studies, Couvares critiques scholars such as Paul Spickard, who argue for an exclusive focus on "race-making" and colonial, capitalist dynamics in understanding modern inequality and our current conceptions of difference.[2] In support of his idea, Spickard points out that immigration studies historically have paid too much attention to European immigration to the US and the East Coast, and have neglected areas like the West Coast and the Southwest where more racial-minority immigrants settled. Although true that white immigration is overrepresented in the scholarship, this does not justify Spickard's proposal to abandon older models of assimilation in favor of models based solely on race. While Spickard's lens may be applicable to the experience of Puerto Rican immigrants, it is insufficient and less relevant regarding this study of Polish immigrants. Therefore, immigration scholarship that predates this shift, in addition to more recent post-colonial and postmodernist thought, will be employed to construct an analytical framework with ample breadth to evaluate both populations. This framework aims to moderate the particular focus of more race-oriented conceptions by maintaining the critical awareness of the role imperial and colonial ideology has played and continues to play in immigration and assimilation studies.

The basic terms, definitions, and categories of analysis are derived from Milton Gordon's foundational work, *Assimilation in American Life*[3], which attempts to explain the dynamics of "ethnic" integration into American society with a sociological framework. As such, it provides a comprehensive structure to analyze assimilation. Gordon divides society into primary and secondary "groups." The primary encompasses personal relationships, such as social circles or

[1] Francis Couvares, "Immigrant Assimilation or Transnational Race-Making?" (unpublished paper, 2023).
[2] Spickard, Paul. *Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race, and Colonialism in American History and Identity.* New York: Routledge, 2009.
[3] Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

smaller community organizations. The secondary encompasses impersonal relationships, like those in administrative or business contexts. An ethnic group is distinguished from other groups in terms of exclusivity, as members of ethnic groups are said to interact exclusively with people of their own ethnicity. In other words, an ethnic group encapsulates all its own subgroups, enabling members of such subgroups to never interact personally or impersonally with anyone outside that group. Under this conception, Gordon also sees the social structure as fragmented into ethnic "sub-societies" that exist in parallel, but do not overlap much. He then further refines these sub-societies with the addition of class-based designations, creating a matrix of coexistent "ethclasses," each with its own distinct cultural practices and economic characteristics.

Gordon's ethclass model of assimilation also includes the "core group," defined as the dominant ethclass in a society to which, he assumes, all other ethclasses assimilate. For instance, in the United States, the white middle class generally has been the core group, and Gordon's work takes for granted that other ethnic groups acculturate in relation to it. To illustrate the ways in which an ethclass might adapt to the core group, Gordon introduces a structure of seven different forms of assimilation: behavioral or cultural, structural, marital, identificational, attitude receptional, behavior receptional, and civic. Behavioral/cultural assimilation describes a change in ethclass cultural patterns to match the core group. Structural assimilation refers to incorporation into core group institutions. Marital assimilation refers to the intermarriage of ethclass members with core group members. Identificational assimilation refers to the "development of a sense of people-hood based exclusively on the host society." Attitudinal and behavioral assimilation refer to, respectively, the absence of prejudice and discrimination against the assimilating ethclass. Finally, Gordon defines civic assimilation as "the absence of value or

power conflict," meaning that once achieved, the minority ethclass would no longer resist particular values or power systems of the core group.

While using Gordon's basic analytical framework, this study also incorporates concepts from other scholars to complicate his essentialist notion of ethnicity. The starting point for Gordon's thought is his view that "the sense of ethnicity proved to be hardy," or in other words, his formations operate under the assumption that ethnicity is rigidly defined.[4] Although recognizing that individuals and even whole groups can change their cultures, Gordon's conception of assimilation as a linear change from one internally consistent culture to another is too simplistic. Especially monolithic in Goron's view is the "host culture," or core group, which he contends is singular, immutable, and everlasting – inevitably absorbing all other cultures into itself.

A more flexible alternative framework is advanced by Thomas Archdeacon, who uses a model of "resistance and accommodation" to explain assimilation dynamics.[5] He posits that the degree to which a particular ethclass adopts the core group culture is dependent on their resistance to assimilation, which in turn is affected by the core group's willingness to accommodate the newcomer's culture. In this sense, Archdeacon views the process as a push and pull rather than an inexorable flow in one direction. Therefore, he credits the immigrants with some degree of *agency* in the assimilation process, a paradigm that has become a hallmark and priority of immigration scholarship over the past forty years or so. Bodnar, one of Archdeacon's contemporaries, similarly argues that immigrants actively use their own culture as a set of tools to help them navigate and make sense of their new environments, and in doing so take charge of the extent to which they adapt to the host society.

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[4] Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 25.
[5] Thomas J. Archdeacon, *Becoming American: An Ethnic History* (New York: Free Press; London: Collier Macmillan, 1983).

Even while they insist on the value and strength of immigrant cultures in the face of Anglo-American hegemony, these scholars ultimately still see all ethnicities largely as static and durable units, which individuals and populations can move between with varying degrees of awareness. George Sanchez offers a critique of this assumption in *Becoming Mexican American*, claiming that "culture" has been "one of the most hotly debated terms… throughout the twentieth century."[6] In his analysis, Sanchez follows the example of more radical scholarship, in which "culture is not what preexists [capitalism], but is how humans whose lives are structurally defined by institutionally enacted capitalist principles respond to them in their everyday life and experience." In this capacity, Sanchez sees culture as "contested, temporal, and emergent."[7] His conception allows for "the possibility of multiple identities and contradictory positions" within an individual, and he sets up this idea in opposition to the views of scholars like Gordon or even Bodnar, whose view he refers to as the "bipolar model of changing cultures." Critically, Sanchez believes that the bipolar model "treat[s] contradictions as temporary features that [are] certain to disappear with the passage of time and generations."[8] In his own view, Sanchez sees these contradictions instead as crucially important entities that have the ability to represent a wholly new culture, related to but ultimately divorced from both its culture of origin and the culture of the core group.

My own qualification of Sanchez's argument rests on the idea that cultural contradiction, in this context, is inevitably a relative term, as it only has meaning within the bipolar conception of assimilation. Contradictions can only exist between cultures that are seen as immutable and in opposition, and therefore by accepting and incorporating the existence of cultural contradictions,

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[6] George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 8.
[7] Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 8-9.
[8] Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 8.

Sanchez conforms to the bipolar model he critiques. To demonstrate this inconsistency, imagine a descendant of a Polish immigrant that is atheist or agnostic, but still eats kielbasa and dances to Polka music on the holidays. This "Polish-American" would be seen by Sanchez as the embodiment of a contradiction, and as evidence for the emergence of a brand new and durable culture, as this person simultaneously displays elements of American culture and elements of Polish culture. To Sanchez this cannot be dismissed as a passing cultural phase, but as a new reality that came about as a reaction to a particular social world. However, this view is based on the assumption that catholicism is fundamental to Polish culture, and that Polka music is fundamentally un-American, as otherwise there could be no contradiction to begin with.

The salient problem in this conception is its implicit fixation on durability and persistence. Although Sanchez, like Bodnar, recognizes the prominent role of global political and social forces in constructing identity, what he ignores is the *continual* effect of broader trends on all cultures and individuals. Along with a degree of personal agency, these impersonal forces are the ultimate cause of cultural development, and their universal, albeit variable, effect on *all cultures* causes perpetual change. Therefore, assimilation cannot be seen as something that terminates, and it cannot be seen as something influenced exclusively by cultural interchange.

The view of acculturation used in this paper's analysis rests primarily on Sanchez's view that there can be no absolute definition of culture or ethnicity. Culture can only be deemed somewhat stable within clearly defined temporal and spatial bounds. Following the example of Bodnar, immigration, and therefore cultural change, is seen as affected significantly by socio-political forces and power structures, specifically the dynamics and logics of global capitalism that inform decision-making at society's micro, meso and macro levels. Incorporated within these global structures are persistent post-colonial political, social, and economic

formations, which include deeply-rooted racism and gender prejudices that cause uneven effects on privileged and under-privileged populations. Although structural discrimination is certainly not the only factor in evaluating immigration and assimilation dynamics, as scholars like Spickard may suggest, it is nevertheless an aspect of analysis in this field that cannot be overlooked.

Immigrants from the area of modern day Poland began arriving in the Pioneer Valley in significant numbers "in the third quarter of the 19th century" accompanying political and economic disruptions in Europe.[9] These immigrants included people from a variety of ethnic groups, such Ukranians and Lithuanians, although at the time Americans tended to refer to all people from Eastern Europe generally as "Polanders." It is John Bodnar's position that the development of global capitalism in the 19th century upset structural conditions in Europe and caused mass migration, especially Eastern Europe in the latter half of the century. He writes that this was due to the transition from traditional subsistence agriculture to market production in particular. Land ownership patterns changed drastically and often became consolidated, due to the popular notion that standardized and mechanized agricultural practices would ultimately be more efficient and lead to higher yields.[10] Part of this transition was related to population increases following industrialization, as well as the emancipation of serfs in the region around this time. Bodnar claims that despite what Eastern European reformers intended, emancipation did not necessarily lead to widespread land ownership, as inheritance conventions dictated that a father's land be divided equally among his sons upon his death, causing family plots to become

[9] "The Incoming of the Poles," *Greenfield Gazette and Courier,* May 26, 1900.
[10] John E. Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 24.

smaller and smaller over time. This made subsistence farming increasingly difficult, especially in light of a booming population.[11]

Bodnar stresses that those who left Eastern Europe for these reasons were not necessarily the poorest of the poor, as it was only people with modest means that could afford to leave their homes. Generally an individual would sell all their property to afford the steamboat ticket to cross the Atlantic, but this was not viable for those without any property in the first place.[12] On the opposite side of the spectrum, it was uncommon for people with moderate wealth to make the journey, as they had less incentive to leave.[13]

Although it was not cheap or easy to get across the ocean, it is likely that the process became easier after the turn of the century as Eastern European governments grew more lenient. In the early 20th century, steerage steamboat tickets could cost between $30-35,[14] which, in terms of an average wage for a Polish farm worker in the Valley, could take years to pay off. In an interview with Walter Kownacki, who was born in Hatfield, Massachusetts in 1929, he relates how his father had worked for a Hatfield farmer who had sponsored the journey across the Atlantic – it took Kownacki Sr. two years of farm labor to pay off the debt.[15]

Most of these personal statements from descendants of Polish immigrants attribute their ancestors' migratory motives to a lack of work in Poland and an acute labor shortage in America, which generally aligns with Bodnar's structural arguments. However, there is also a thread of debate asserting that Poles fled also due to political reasons. At the end of the 19th century Poland was split into three partitions, belonging to Russia, Prussia, and Austro-Hungary, and

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[11] Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, 30.
[12] "Interview with Josephine Skalski," interview by Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, Deerfield, Massachusetts, United States of America.
[13] Bodnar, *The Transplanted*.
[14] Stephen Szabados, Polish Immigration to America: When, Where, Why and How (Stephen Szabados, 2016), ch2.
[15] "Interview with Walter Kownacki," interview by Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, Peter Thomas, and Michael Kline, Deerfield, Massachusetts, 2022, United States of America.

some sources indicate that in this political environment Poles faced compulsory military service and even persecution at times.[16] While this likely isn't a primary reason for mass migration, deliberate government intervention certainly played a role in alternatively restricting or enabling migration flows. There was purportedly a period where the Austro-Hungarian government passed laws preventing migration due to reports of Poles facing terrible working conditions, although that is not to say governments were concerned primarily with humanitarian issues.[17] Bodnar mentions that there were some instances of labor shortages in Eastern Europe, which posed an economic problem and caused governments to discourage out-migration.[18] Ironically, these labor shortages were due to the same commercialization efforts that were pushing people away to begin with.

However, immigration restraints were not necessarily heeded or even well-enforced by European governments. For instance, citizens were often required to obtain travel visas before leaving the country, which entailed the settling of all debts and the completion of military service, and Prussia specifically was known to station troops at the border to stop those without proper documentation.[19] But ship manifests and the proliferation of artifacts from shipping companies advertising their services to Poles demonstrates that it was nevertheless common for migrants to leave their homelands, if covertly.[20] As such, Bodnar claims that eventually governments abandoned their attempts to curtail immigration due to the overwhelming tide of people leaving the continent, and instead began to capitalize on what was clearly an unstoppable mass movement.[21] They engaged in lucrative cooperations with transportation companies, many

[16] Joseph R. Katra Jr., "A SURVEY OF THE POLISH POPULATION OF NORTHAMPTON, MA (1889-1953)" (Amherst College, 1953), 8.
[17] F. Missler Bremen Wallet, cloth wallet, The Polish Center of Discovery and Learning, Chicopee, Massachusetts, United States of America, 1899.
[18] Bodnar, *The Transplanted,* 29.
[19] Szabados, *Polish Immigration to America*, ch2.
[20] *F. Missler Bremen Wallet.*
[21] Bodnar, *The Transplanted,* 48.

of them German and American,[22] companies which came to be essential middle-men in establishing connections between the New World and the Old.[23]

In the late 19th century the Massachusetts Pioneer Valley was facing dire economic conditions. What had for centuries been a prosperous agricultural center was in recession. The Poles that were to eventually move into the region claimed almost universally that the Valley "had some of the best soil in the world," and while such statements are difficult to validate, undoubtedly the land was very fertile and had been utilized by Yankee farmers for centuries to grow grains and fruit and to raise pork and beef. Starting around the 1830s farmers began growing broomcorn in the region, and subsequently local broom manufacturing sprung up in developing industrial centers like South Deerfield.[24] It became a very profitable industry and the region grew central to the whole nation's broom industry.[25] However, Hardin claims that in time, overspeculation led to a decline and eventually production of broomcorn began to shift westward.

But the failure of the broomcorn industry did not alone lead to the economic destitution of the region. Soon after the corn bust, tobacco growing boomed and became another successful and dominant cash-crop, although this production eventually formed a speculation bubble as well that burst in much the same way as the broomcorn had.[26] In his 1975 thesis on Poles in Hadley, Massachusetts, Hardin uses Hampshire County population statistics from the census to demonstrate that in the 25 years from 1870 to 1895 the area's population saw a general decline.

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[22] *F. Missler Bremen Wallet.*
[23] Katra, *Survey of the Polish Population*, 9.
[24] Peter Hardin, "Poles and Puritans in Hadley, Massachusetts: An Historical Study of Hadley's Polish Population" (Hampshire College, 1975), ch1.
[25] Walentyna Pomasko, "Deerfield - It's Early Beauty Has Never Left [Sic]," *Tercentenary Greenfield Reporter,* June 29, 1973.
[26] However, tobacco production in the Valley would eventually become profitable again and continues in some areas to this day.

He attributes this to the "call of the city," the idea that in the face of growing industrialization and urbanization, the children of Yankee farmers had decreasing desire to carry on the agricultural tradition and instead sought more modern occupations in population centers.[27] Ironically, this could be seen as a result of the 19th century agricultural financial success with cash-crops in the Valley, as it likely contributed to Yankee farmers' ability to educate their children at a higher level which in turn encouraged a departure from traditional livelihoods.

Regardless, by the time Polish immigrants began arriving in the region, Yankee farmers were aging and they had no children around to work their land or take over their farms once they died. This created a widely recognized social problem, which the Greenfield Gazette and Courier referred to as "the abandoned farm question,"[28] where empty land proliferated across the countryside. The solution was to import labor, which was accomplished using a handful of different methods. Initially, this importation was orchestrated by independent labor agents, characters now largely seen as nefarious, who made their living by essentially mortgaging Eastern European laborers to farmers who needed extra hands. A handful of these agents are known by name, the most infamous being Charles T. Parsons. He was said to have concocted the idea to travel to New York and intercept immigrants right from off the boat, telling them "as pleasing stories as was necessary to make the Poles see the Connecticut River Valley as the promised land."[29] Parsons would advance the men money to pay for their travel to the Valley, as well as sell them to the highest bidding farmer once they reached the Valley. While they were waiting to be purchased, these Poles, who spoke no English, were said to have been kept in barns. There are even stories claiming Parsons kept Poles "tightly bound,"[30] and in one instance

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[27] Hardin, *Poles and Puritans*, ch1.
[28] Greenfield Gazette and Courier, "The Incoming of the Poles."
[29] Boston Globe, "Poles Prosper Where Yankees Failed," June 29, 1902.
[30] Stefan Włoszczewski, *History of Polish American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), 23.

he was reported to have chained a number of Poles to the back of a wagon.[31] Eventually, Parsons was arrested in 1888 for his inhumane practices, although allegedly he single-handedly brought thousands of Poles to work in the Valley.[32]

Once Polish farm workers became established in the Valley, they would often send for other family members and sponsor the journeys with their own earnings, a practice which ultimately made the local labor agent business irrelevant by the turn of the century.[33] However, it was not easy for the Poles to attain the financial stability to make this possible – it would often take years of virtual indentured servitude for them to pay off the predatory loans provided for them by labor agents, and meanwhile they lived in oppressive conditions. Yankee newspaper articles from the time, although they were certainly biased against the Poles who were widely considered to be racially inferior, characterized their living conditions as dirty and overcrowded.[34] Observers put special emphasis on a common Polish practice where newly arrived immigrants would live as lodgers in the homes of more well-established Poles, who rented out rooms to supplement their income. An excerpt from the Dillingham Commission purports that "in these houses, two, or perhaps three, families of average size are frequently sheltered. The sanitary arrangements are seldom considered… Single men are crowded into small attic rooms, where as many as 6 men were found sleeping in a room with 1 window and 3 small beds."[35] Often Yankee sources attribute these living conditions to Polish moral destitution, or alternatively as evidence of a less developed culture. Balch writes that Polish wage-laborers were considered dirty and drunken, although this sometimes manifested among Yankees as a sort of detached sympathy. This attitude is present in Brunner's work, who claims that some Yankees

[31] Katra, *Survey of the Polish Population*, 13.
[32] Boston Globe, "Poles Prosper."
[33] Emily Greene Balch, *Our Slavic Fellow Citizens* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910), ch12.
[34] Balch, *Our Slavic Fellow Citizens*, 342.
[35] William Paul Dillingham, "Immigrants in Industries, Part 24: Recent Immigrants in Agriculture," *American Centuries Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Website,* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911).

considered the Polish workers to be treated little better than slaves, in that they were ill-fed, ill-housed, and overworked – he even lamented the corporal punishment farmers inflicted.[36]

Despite challenging initial conditions, Polish immigrants were able to effectively assimilate into the culture of the core group in the Pioneer Valley after two generations had elapsed. In the context of Gordon's framework of the seven modes of assimilation, the Poles achieved a significant degree of conformity in a majority of these categories. The only mode in which Poles did not effectively assimilate after two generations was in terms of intermarriage with other ethnic groups, but this too followed after another few decades.[37]

Brunner's work on Sunderland illustrates the social climate that had developed between Poles and non-Poles in the Valley by around 1930. Brunner suggests that Polish enclaves in Valley cities such as Greenfield and Northampton had all but disappeared by this point (although other sources qualify this point), and that resentment among Yankees for Polish people had become a minority opinion.[38] Generally speaking, Brunner believes that the Poles' steadily improving economic conditions considerably improved their relationship with Yankees, which is strongly supported by other sources. Polish enclaves and their broad social webs had largely been centered around fraternal organizations and church groups, wherein members relied on each other for economic help during the early years of their time in America. However, these groups tended to disintegrate and lose members, at least in urban centers, as Poles gradually got to be more financially independent. As a result, the ties holding the Polish-American social world together began to break down and enable their integration into Anglo society.

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[36] Edmund De Schweinitz Brunner, "Sunderland," in *Immigrant Farmers and Their Children* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 214.
[37] Brunner, "Sunderland."
[38] Brunner, "Sunderland," 232.

Turners Falls, for instance, had two Polish social organizations in the 1920s that were committed to the economic support of the community there,[39] and likewise "The Sunderland Society of Sons of Poland and Lithuania" was created to provide welfare and employment to the slavs of Sunderland.[40] The Society of St. George, a Polish Catholic organization in the Valley, was in 1898 known in Northampton to pay between $4 and $6 a week to struggling families in the case of emergencies like sickness, death, or unemployment. The St. George Society simultaneously served as a source of social unity, as it was a gathering place for the dispersed Polish community in Northampton which eventually formed its own parish church. As its congregation grew over the first decades of the century, various devotional fraternities formed out of it. This further emphasizes the importance of the parish as a Polish social space.[41] Some Polish organizations emerged with the express purpose of helping their members naturalize and obtain their citizenship papers,[42] such as the Polish Naturalization Club of Northampton, founded in 1906, or a similar one that emerged in Chicopee a few years before.[43]

Eventually, in the context of the patriotic fervor and anti-immigrant sentiment that swept the nation around the First World War, these naturalization efforts assumed a more feverish pitch. Patriotic rhetoric began to appear as propaganda in many aspects of Polish life, including in the YMCA, industrial classes, citizens committees, patriotic festivals, and especially in public school curriculum.[44] An article from the Springfield Republican in 1914 suggests that this state-sponsored assimilation campaign was supported by Yankees, as one journalist wrote that "it now remains for us to invade them with knowledge, education, democracy, and American

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[39] "Will Visit Native Land," *Greenfield Recorder,* January 17, 1920.
[40] "Poles Organize," *Greenfield Gazette and Courier,* January 4, 1904.
[41] Katra, *Survey of the Polish Population*, 36.
[42] Katra, *Survey of the Polish Population*, 49.
[43] Edward Kirk Titus, "The Pole In The Land Of The Puritan," *New England Magazine,* January 1903.
[44] Edward R. Kantowicz and John J. Bukowczyk, "And My Children Did Not Know Me: A History of the Polish-Americans," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 2 (1988): 64.

ideals."[45] The movement certainly met with some success, especially among the younger generation, who around this time were found to be disagreeing with their parents' "stubborn polishness" and unwillingness to Americanize.[46] An article in the Greenfield Recorder from 1920 claims that after the war, most Poles in Turners Falls who had been planning to return to their homeland decided against it, and that the only two who had left "plan[ned] to come back to the land of liberty," suggesting a growing patriotism during the war years. The article also mentions that the "Polish children [who] in large numbers attend the schools… not only become better educated themselves, but diffuse their learning among their parents, giving them new ideas about this land and its people."[47] Such language implies that public school efforts to indoctrinate Polish children into American lifeways were yielding fruit.

There is ample evidence to suggest that by this point, many Poles actively wanted to Americanize. Many adult immigrants were very excited about the prospect of becoming American citizens, industriously attending night classes to learn English so they could pass their citizenship exams. Edie Bourbeau described in an interview how her father had proudly undergone this process, and she illustrates the point by recalling an instance where he became frantic and was reduced to tears after having briefly lost track of his papers.[48] Walter Bakula shared similar sentiments in his account, claiming that acquiring citizenship gave Poles a feeling of belonging as well as something that could prove their right to live and work in America.[49] Some were even ashamed of their Polish identity in the face of American hegemony. Carol Gritz remarked in her interview that her aunts Ninnie and Mildred changed their names to Monica and

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[45] "Coming of Poles to America," *Springfield Republican,* February 15, 1914.
[46] Kantowicz and Bukowczyk, "And My Children Did Not Know Me," 72.
[47] "Will Visit Native Land," Greenfield Recorder, January 17, 1920.
[48] "Interview with Edie Bourbeau," interview by Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association and Sara Campbell, Montague, Massachusetts, United States of America, April 7, 1994.
[49] "Interview with Walter Bakula," interview by Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association and Sara Campbell, Montague, Massachusetts, United States of America.

Amelia respectively to make them sound more American – they were embarrassed to tell people they were Polish at all.[50]

This suggests that Poles had come to embody Gordon's identificational and structural forms of assimilation, in the sense that they were starting to identify with American nationalism and were being formally admitted into the nation with full rights. Behavioral assimilation is also present, manifesting through the general "adopt[ion of] American modes and fashions with regard to dress and manner of living," and the behavior of Polish schoolchildren: "the casual observer in the schools sees no differences in the aptitude or general behavior of the children, and the teachers are not conscious of any notable differences."[51] As for civic assimilation, which Gordon defines as the elimination of resentment among immigrants regarding the power structure of the core group, there is no evidence to suggest that Poles ever harbored this sort of feeling about Yankees, despite their structural disadvantage upon arrival. Hardin concludes his thesis with the claim that "thankfulness lies close to the heart of their patriotism." He believed that the Poles were grateful for the economic opportunities they had access to in the Valley, which suggests that even initially they did not harbor resentment for the power that the Anglo-Americans held over them.[52]

Puerto Ricans arrived to the Valley in large numbers for agricultural labor after the Second World War due to a cooperation between the Puerto Rican Department of Labor and the Federal government, who jointly created a program providing seasonal contract labor for Puerto Rican migrants stateside. García-Colón writes that because of the socio-political climate at the

[50] "Interview with Carol Gritz," interview by Gabriel Proia, Amherst, Massachusetts, United States of America, July 26, 2023.
[51] Dillingham, "Immigrants in Industries."
[52] Hardin, *Poles and Puritans*, conclusion.

time, importing Puerto Rican labor was almost universally popular among Americans. Similar to the social pattern among Yankee farmers at the end of the 19th century, around the mid-twentieth century urbanization and improving economic means meant waning interest in agricultural work among the second and third generation of Eastern European immigrants.[53] One newspaper source claims that a contributing factor to this was growing union power following the war, which ensured that factory jobs in the Valley, especially skilled ones, came to offer much higher wages for locals. This provided an attractive alternative to farm work, thereby increasing demand for agricultural labor.[54] Puerto Rico, meanwhile, had very few jobs to offer. Unemployment on the island was high and the population was beset by crippling poverty due to centuries of economic exploitation and, according to García-Colón, a failure on the part of the Puerto Rican government to develop their own manufacturing sector.[55]

The solution for all parties was to encourage migrant labor, which would alleviate some of the island's poverty by exporting the unemployed, while theoretically infusing more money into its economy when workers returned with their earnings. It would also allow for the continued profitability of the tobacco industry in the Connecticut River Valley, and satisfy political tensions arising from importing truly foreign immigrant labor, such as from Mexico or Jamaica, which was a common practice prior to the popularization of Puerto Rican labor. A Valley farmer is quoted in the Springfield Republican: "the U.S. Department of Labor told us, 'What are you doing, hiring Jamaicans? There are thousands of people in Puerto Rico who need work desperately. They are American Citizens. Hire Puerto Ricans.' So, we hired Puerto Ricans."[56] Writing about the phenomenon from the perspective of the island's government,

[53] Ismael García-Colón, *Colonial Migrants at the Heart of Empire: Puerto Rican Workers on U.S. Farms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020), 52.
[54] Steven D'Arazien, "The Plight of the Migrant Worker: Part 2: Long Hours And Backbreaking Work; Invisible Workers In Invisible Camps," *Holyoke Transcript-Telegram,* November 10, 1969.
[55] García-Colón, *Colonial Migrants at the Heart of Empire*, 12.
[56] Springfield Union. "Job Hunting." May 6, 1959.

Carvalho wrote the following in his work on the Puerto Rican Community in Western Massachusetts.

> The Puerto Rican Department of Labor established its Migration Division in 1947 in order to arrange contracts between unemployed Puerto Ricans and mainland farmers. According to accounts, Migration Division recruiters would travel all over the rural island roads in cars with bullhorns and distributing leaflets. They also placed frequent advertisements in island newspapers announcing good jobs on the mainland. By 1955, the Migration Division had also established offices in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. The initiative helped make the 1950s the period of greatest Puerto Rican migration in the twentieth century, with over 470,000 individuals leaving Puerto Rico to come to the mainland during that decade.[57]

The system described here bears a striking similarity to the practices of the labor agents who had recruited Polish laborers from New York and Eastern Europe fifty years earlier, and in many ways the politics and economics were similar as well.

There was significant economic exploitation of Puerto Rican farm workers in the Northeast, and although the contract labor system that began in the late 1940s introduced labor regulations that improved the situation, the problem was never solved. When hiring workers immediately after the war, Northeast farmers would intentionally sell more tickets to their farms than there were jobs available, as they hoped to keep wages low by maintaining a large labor pool that competed for limited work.[58] As a result, many migrants could not make enough money to earn a living. The Puerto Rican government quickly caught wind of the situation and this led to the creation of a regulated program, where workers would sign contracts that stipulated minimum standards for working conditions, wages, and hours. However, this system was still rife with exploitation, in part because the Puerto Rican Department of Labor did not have the resources to enforce their regulations, but also because of the supposedly virulent discrimination

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[57] Joseph Carvalho, "The Puerto Rican Community of Western Massachusetts, 1898-1960," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 43, no. 2 (2015): 16-17. Accessed January 23, 2024. https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1P3-3810400531/the-puerto-rican-community-of-western-massachusetts.
[58] Carvalho, "The Puerto Rican Community," 55.

Puerto Ricans faced in the States, despite their theoretically equal legal status.[59] Irwin Fleishman, who wrote a thesis on migrant laborers in the 1960s, claimed that "a lot of workers don't like contract work. There's a lot of red tape." He identified that contracts written in English posed a large problem, as most of the Puerto Rican workers could not read them and therefore were unaware of their rights. For instance, the contracts required employers to cover the cost of one-way travel from the island to the mainland, but workers who were unaware of this often ended up arranging for transit on their own.[60]

As a result of the frustrations surrounding the contract system, many Puerto Ricans seeking work chose to eschew written agreements altogether and establish unofficial relationships with farmers in the Valley, although statistically this was more likely to lead to their mistreatment. Statistics from the Holyoke Transcript-Telegram report that in 1969 there were 1,200 Puerto Rican farm workers in the Connecticut River Valley in Massachusetts, and 7,000 in the full geographic range of the Valley, although the article claims that this number is almost certainly a vast underestimate based on how unregulated the program had become by that time.[61] Carvalho claims that "tens of thousands of other Puerto Rican workers came through illegal private contracts or with no contract at all."[62] Such workers were chronically paid under the minimum wage of the time,[63] were sold second-hand goods for far more than they would have been new, and were housed in abysmal conditions.[64]

The Valley's Puerto Rican agricultural laborers were generally housed by their employers in camps on or near the farm premises, or else in a centralized Connecticut camp in Windsor

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[59] Steven D'Arazien, "The Plight of the Migrant Worker: Part 4: Many Reasons Account For Migration; Once Here-Low Wages, Discrimination," *Holyoke Transcript-Telegram,* November 10, 1969.
[60] D'Arazien, "The Plight of the Migrant Worker: Part 2".
[61] D'Arazien, "The Plight of the Migrant Worker: Part 2".
[62] Carvalho, "The Puerto Rican Community," 51.
[63] García-Colón, *Colonial Migrants at the Heart of Empire*, 54.
[64] D'Arazien, "The Plight of the Migrant Worker: Part 4".

Locks owned by the Shade Growers Association, where from they would be trucked to a farm in the region to work for the day. There were 60 migrant labor camps in Massachusetts alone, the biggest housing 360 workers. A 1969 newspaper article claims that conditions at these places were barely policed, especially at the more remote camps, which were rarely if ever visited by authorities. Some official reports referred to in the article claimed that while most of these camps did in fact fall within guidelines, these minimum standards were nevertheless "spartan in terms of creature comforts."[65] One source describes such "good" conditions as follows:

> [The] barn was plain but clean and comfortable as a Boy Scout Camp or an army barracks. Four metal frame cots sat on the concrete floor, three were in an adjoining room. The furniture looked second-hand. Four men were sitting around, some drinking cheap wine, watching television. It was cold, foggy, and drizzly outside, but a wood-burning Franklin stove kept the room warm.[66]

However, not all camps maintained even this modest standard. One unlicensed camp in Hatfield run by a Polish man named Zgrodnik had 100 migrant laborers, four of whom were Puerto Rican and lived apart from the rest.

> Officials found the four had been living in a hut. A piece of sheet metal had been installed above their heads to divert rainwater when it came down from a leaky roof. Bare light bulbs hung from the ceiling. Paper was stuffed in the broken windows to keep the cold out. The bathroom was an unpainted outhouse and a woodburning stove the source of their heat. The official complaint, however, was the contaminated well which was the workers' sole water supply.[67]

Important to note is that the farm work offered to Puerto Ricans was strictly seasonal. By November the tobacco and potato seasons were over, but nevertheless many migrant laborers stayed in the Valley and found work in industrial centers like Holyoke and Westfield.[68] Housing was very cheap in the urban slums, especially after cities like Holyoke underwent

[65] Steven D'Arazien, "The Plight of the Migrant Worker: Part 3: Their Condition Is Called A Disgrace And Health Code Enforcement Inadequate," *Holyoke Transcript-Telegram,* November 10, 1969.
[66] Steven D'Arazien, "The Migrant: What Is Being Done Part 1: Reporter Visits Two 'Good' Camps; At One, Men Say Conditions Good; At The Other, A Farmer Is Wary," *Holyoke Transcript-Telegram,* December, 1969.
[67] Steven D'Arazien, "The Migrant: What Is Being Done Part 2: Fire Destroys Quarters At Albert's; Polluted Well Closes Zgrodnik Farm," *Holyoke Transcript-Telegram,* December, 1969.
[68] D'Arazien, "The Plight of the Migrant Worker: Part 2".

deindustrialization, and this allowed large Puerto Rican families to move in year-round.[69] Those who could not find factory work stayed to collect welfare and unemployment in the off-season. Their income in either case was not substantial by any means, but it was nevertheless significantly higher than what they could hope to earn in Puerto Rico.

The Massachusetts Legislative Research Department reported that in 1967 the average migrant laborer family earned $868 per year, making them the most impoverished group in the country.[70] The minimum wage for farm labor during the growing season at the time was just $1.50 per hour when it was granted, but this almost invariably beat wages on the island, which were reported to be $0.85 per hour. Welfare was available in Puerto Rico, but the benefits in Pioneer Valley cities like Holyoke were far better, which encouraged many to stay in the region indefinitely. Some fathers who had settled there with their families even separated from their wives and children to give them a legitimate reason to claim public assistance, as this was more profitable than whatever income the father could bring in on his own.[71]

In this way, the Puerto Rican community in the Valley slowly set down roots and ceased to be a "temporary" labor force by the 1960s, when sizable Puerto Rican communities emerged in cities such as Westfield, Springfield, and Holyoke. One source estimates that between 5% and 7% of the farm workers that came to the area ended up staying permanently, branching out into "manufacturing jobs, employment in the service industry, and in small businesses."[72] Understandably, Puerto Ricans preferred anything to the temporary farm work where they had faced such abuse, and they abandoned their agricultural work as soon as they could.[73] By the 80s,

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[69] Springfield Republican and Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance, *Nuestra Historia: The History of Latinos in Western Massachusetts,* 2013, 35.
[70] D'Arazien, "The Plight of the Migrant Worker: Part 3".
[71] Barry Werth, "Holyoke's Puerto Ricans: Money Stakes High for Holyoke, Low for Hispanics," *Holyoke Transcript-Telegram,* September 1983.
[72] Carvalho, "The Puerto Rican Community," conclusion.
[73] Carvalho, "The Puerto Rican Community," 20.

these communities had made some social and political inroads into their urban environments, including desegregating schools, the development of a small middle class, and some participation in city politics.[74] In Westfield and Holyoke, social justice organizations emerged to help advocate for Puerto Ricans and protect their social and political rights, which met modest success. The Puerto Rican Social Club in Westfield put voting rights on their "lengthy social justice agenda,"[75] and in Holyoke education took primacy, as it was recognized as the best way to achieve greater integration into city society.[76]

These economic and social outcomes for Puerto Rican immigrants represent a stark contrast with the Polish immigrants from fifty years earlier, which had significant implications for their assimilation to the host culture within the first few generations of living in the Valley. A significant indicator for Puerto Rican economic difficulties was their collective lack of property ownership, even after several decades of being reasonably well-established in the area. Their circumstances were especially shocking when compared to Polish real estate holdings achieved in a similar time frame after their arrival. A Holyoke Transcript-Telegram article from 1983 claims that at the time only 2% of hispanic people owned their own property in the city. Puerto Rican families, statistically among the largest in the state, tended to live in rented, overcrowded tenement-style apartments in Holyoke. In comparison, 41% of white people and 21% of black people in the city owned their own homes. This housing disparity is clearly linked to income inequality. In 1979 Puerto Rican families had an average annual income of $8,158, while

[74] Barry Werth, "Holyoke's Puerto Ricans: Streets Are Proving Ground for Young, Disillusioned," *Holyoke Transcript-Telegram,* September 1983.
[75] Springfield Republican and Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance, *Nuestra Historia*, 30.
[76] Barry Werth, "Holyoke's Puerto Ricans: Severing Ties Can Be Cost of 'Success,'" *Holyoke Transcript-Telegram,* September 1983.

comparable white families made $21,158 a year. “Puerto Ricans were… five times more likely than whites to live below the poverty line, and three times more likely to be unemployed.”[77]

Sources from the turn of the century regarding Polish immigrants stress time and time again how successful these people were at acquiring property and profiting off of it, which provided them with significant social capital in the eyes of Yankees. It even became a part of the standard narrative of Polish newcomers for them to buy their own farmland with earnings they thriftily saved after years of near-indentured servitude. As early as 1900, the Greenfield Gazette and Courier was reporting that “there have been many, who after a few years of work as hired men on farms, have seen good chances to buy out little places of their own. The records of the local registry of deeds will show that a considerable number of these people are securing little farms.”[78] Katra typified this progression for Polish immigrants in three phases outlined in his survey of the Polish population of Northampton. The first phase was “the laborer,” where the Pole was a farmhand in the employ of a Yankee farmer, generally trying to pay off debts incurred from his travel to the Valley. Next came the “tenant phase,” where the Pole achieved some amount of autonomy. At this point he would slowly rent more and more land to cultivate at his own discretion until he saved enough to buy his own modest farm plot, likely old abandoned Yankee land of a dozen or so acres. If they were not able to save up the required money, Katra claimed that it was relatively easy for Poles to procure small loans or mortgages from Yankee banks, as they had developed a reputation for thrift, honesty, and persistence in the region that established them as safe investments.[79]

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[77] Barry Werth, “Holyoke’s Puerto Ricans: Opportunity Beckons Puerto Ricans to a New Land, New Life,” *Holyoke Transcript-Telegram,* September 1983.
[78] Greenfield Gazette and Courier, “The Incoming of the Poles,” May 26, 1900.
[79] Katra, *Survey of the Polish Population*, 22-25.

Poles were not particular about the land they purchased. In fact, if there was no desirable land available, along the Connecticut River or in the lowlands where the soil was deemed superior, then Poles were known to purchase cheap plots in the hinterland, either far from the water or in the hilly regions on the periphery of the Valley. Initially Yankees laughed at Poles for this practice, but as Hardin writes, once the brush was cleared, all of this land proved perfectly capable of cultivation, and some was even highly fertile and profitable. In this way the Poles were responsible for vastly increasing the amount of land utilized in the region and improving the local economy significantly.[80] It was contributions such as these which earned the Poles the respect and even gratitude of the Yankee population over time – as Blejwas writes, "the immigrants' economic impact was readily admitted, even praised, as were the traits which contributed to that success."[81]

While Puerto Ricans made modest gains in integration into the host culture in Pioneer Valley cities, it would not be accurate to say that they had "assimilated" within two generations as had the Poles. A series of articles from the Holyoke Transcript-Telegram written in 1983 featuring the city's Puerto Ricans offers an illustrative portrait of the population a few decades after they had first become established in the area. These pieces portray the community as being very distinct from any other population in the city, in both their self-conception and in the way they were perceived outwardly. At a cultural level, most Puerto Ricans in Holyoke maintained their traditional behavior and beliefs. "Puerto Ricans are a proud people who rejoice in their language, music and art, their very personal relationships, their abiding spirituality, and their particular way of viewing themselves and the world that stresses individual respect and dignity."

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[80] Hardin, *Poles and Puritans*, 22.
[81] Stanislaus A Blejwas, "Puritans and Poles: The New England Literary Image of the Polish Peasant Immigrant," *Polish American Studies* 42, no. 2 (1985): 62.

It was often noted in these articles that assimilation was often consciously rejected, as it would mean severing important community ties and accepting some amount of loneliness and loss.[82]

Many Puerto Ricans were identified as having a strong desire to return back to the island, even years after settling in the area. Many suffered from what the paper refers to as "revolving door syndrome," which refers to frequent and relatively easy travel back and forth between the island and Holyoke. The Transcript-Telegram claims that due to discrimination, loneliness, and feelings of alienation, many Puerto Ricans would have returned to the island indefinitely if they had the economic means, but were paralyzed because the United States represented opportunity, albeit at the cost of homesickness and one's "integrity." One individual was quoted as bitterly remarking that he wanted to return home because he was sick of being treated like a foreigner in Holyoke.[83] In rare cases, Puerto Ricans did achieve enough success to return to the island permanently, such as the case of Jesus Tanon, who lived in Holyoke for thirteen years before moving back to his hometown, partially in order to take care of his mother. He claimed that he had never intended to stay in Holyoke permanently, and that after he had "made his mark" there by working as a community leader advocating for school desegregation, the forty-six year-old man had found himself drawn back to his home.[84]

The transitory nature of the Holyoke Puerto Rican community is perhaps one reason why its assimilation to the host culture was prolonged in relation to their Polish counterparts, who were far less likely to travel back and forth across the Atlantic. Barry Werth of The Transcript-Telegram believed that such constant movement of people hampered the growth and development of their community in the city, and while this is likely true, it certainly was not the

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[82] Barry Werth, "Severing Ties".
[83] Barry Werth, "Harsh Realities".
[84] Barry Werth, "Holyoke's Puerto Ricans: They Left Mark on Holyoke, but Are Pulled to Puerto Rico," *Holyoke Transcript-Telegram,* September 1983.

only cause of their social isolation. There was significant discrimination against Puerto Rican Holyoke residents, much of it manifesting in negative stereotypes perpetuated by their economic vulnerability and dependence. One article contends that "Puerto Ricans often are called a drag on economic development. Some whites claim businesses that might locate here are deterred by fears of racial tension and street crime." Other complaints focused directly on the tax burden Puerto Rican residents posed by their reliance on the welfare system, although the author of the article is quick to point out that the state government provided block grants to cover unemployment, meaning that welfare money never came out of the pockets of Holyoke residents.[85] Furthermore, the welfare money distributed to Puerto Ricans was almost invariably spent at local businesses within the city limits, therefore directly contributing to the local economy and likely benefiting all its residents.[86] Therefore, because these economic arguments against the Puerto Rican community are unfounded, it is clear that discrimination ran deeper than resentment over unemployment.

According to Archdeacon's resistance/accomodation framework for assimilation, the host group's willingness to accept a group of immigrants plays a role in the extent to which they adapt to their new circumstances. This much can be inferred from the different ways that Puerto Ricans and Poles were received in the first few generations after their arrival, in relation to how the populations were observed to change in that time. Although both groups faced discrimination and harsh conditions upon their arrival in the Valley, the Poles came to be appreciated fairly quickly by the Yankees, while even after more than twenty years of permanent presence, Puerto Ricans continued to be maligned by other groups. This is almost certainly correlated to the

[85] Barry Werth, "Holyoke's Puerto Ricans: The Long Road to a New Land, New Life.," *Holyoke Transcript-Telegram,* September 1983.
[86] Barry Werth, "Money Stakes High".

differential rates of assimilation between these groups, although the explanations for why Poles were ultimately more welcome than Puerto Ricans is multifaceted.

A large portion of this differential treatment was due to geopolitical circumstances and evolving attitudes towards race in America over the course of the twentieth century. Such attitudes can be traced through changes in immigration policy. For instance, immigration was virtually unrestricted to Europeans up until the 1920s, when the quota system was introduced due to rising anti-immigrant sentiment and a growing popularity of American isolationist ideology. However, cutting off the flow of new immigrants is theorized by Archdeacon to have shifted public attention, and therefore discrimination, onto the immigrants that were already in the country. He claims paradoxically that this increased the rate at which they assimilated, as the American public could focus its efforts on integrating those that were already present instead of on advocating for new restrictions. This theory is supported to some degree by the Americanization campaigns targeting slavic people which emerged in the country at around the time Archdeacon notes.

However, this notion relies on the idea that Polish people were considered assimilable to begin with, which was not a luxury that Puerto Ricans enjoyed. Although Polish people were subject to discrimination due to racial conceptions and ethnic and religious prejudices,[87] it is evident in journalistic material from the day that the true enemy was the culture they brought with them from the Old World, which was seen as something that could be ameliorated in time. It is Roediger's contention that Yankees believed Eastern European immigrants could eventually become settled and assimilated into American society. He quotes Ellwood Cubberly, a known eugenicist: in regard to the new immigrants, it was the duty of the Teutonic race "to break up these groups or settlements, to assimilate and amalgamate these people as part of our American

[87] Anti-catholic, anti-jewish sentiment prevalent

race, and to implant in their children so far as can be done, the Anglo-Saxon conception of righteousness, law and order and popular government."[88] In support of this idea, Roediger also points out that in the 1910 census, the children of immigrants were considered white, albeit in a different category than the children of US citizens. However, the second generation became legally indistinguishable from any other native born American.[89]

Puerto Ricans, however, were racialized entirely differently, and were considered "unassimilable."[90] In Erman's work, he explores how in regard to Puerto Ricans, the United States saw itself as dealing "with a people whom the nation could not assimilate, exterminate, or exclude."[91] This is to say that regardless of their economic or political success, Puerto Ricans would likely never have been seen by white Americans as capable of full incorporation into their society. Undoubtedly, developing social capital would have helped to some degree, but another large obstacle to the Puerto Ricans' assimilation were the economic circumstances in the Valley in the 1950s. It was simply not a conducive environment for immigrant prosperity, as it had been when the Poles arrived. A lack of available land for purchase meant Puerto Ricans did not have the same opportunities for social mobility as the Poles did. In general, agriculture was moving westward by that time, and manufacturing was leaving the country altogether. Even between the 60s and 80s, while the Puerto Rican community was developing and immigration rates were still high, there was a steep decline in industrial work available in Holyoke. For this reason, the Transcript-Telegram identified Puerto Ricans, in relation to other immigrant groups, as "unique in that they have come as the city's economy was shrinking and changing from an industrial to a

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[88] David R Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (Hachette UK, 2006), 19.
[89] Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness,* 20.
[90] García-Colón, *Colonial Migrants at the Heart of Empire*, ch. 1.
[91] Sam Erman, *Almost Citizens: Puerto Rico, the U.S. Constitution, and Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 81.

service and commercial base. That means there are fewer entry level jobs, making it difficult for them to gain a foothold."[92]

There is also the resistance aspect of the resistance/accomodation framework to consider, which is to say that on average, Poles *wanted* to assimilate more than Puerto Ricans. As discussed, there was a fervor among Poles to learn English and become naturalized. They attended night classes so they could pass their citizenship exams,[93] even if it meant trudging through snow in the middle of the winter.[94] There is evidence to suggest that American ideals of individualism had significant influence on Poles in some areas, such as in the urban centers of Northampton and Greenfield, where by 1929 the power of Polish enclaves had diminished.[95] Even in the small town of Sunderland, Brunner claims that there was a notable decline in fraternal organizations and participation in Polish community events like parades and holiday celebrations. For instance, although Sunderland Polish residents had once relied on benefit societies like "The Sunderland Society of Sons of Poland and Lithuania" that had additionally provided social cohesion, Brunner notes that at the time of publication, Poles had begun to subscribe to insurance companies instead.[96] Although this trend is contested by first hand testimony which suggests that in other areas, like the rural town of Turners Falls, Polish community values and organizations maintained their strength at least until the 1970s,[97] most evidence suggests that the broader area was seeing a decline in Polish community identification well before this time.

Even if it were only urban centers that were witnessing such a decline, this demonstrates a stark contrast with the acculturation outcomes of the Puerto Rican community in the Valley.

[92] Werth, "Harsh Realities."
[93] Greenfield Gazette and Courier, "Aliens in New England," December 7, 1912.
[94] Boston Herald, "Back to the Soil with the Poles," April 14, 1912.
[95] Brunner, "Sunderland," 231.
[96] Brunner, "Sunderland," 227-8.
[97] Jeanne Sojka, zoom call with author, May 22, 2024.

The Puerto Rican population surveyed in the city of Holyoke was shown to have a strong commitment to their collectivist and community-centered cultural values, even going so far as to reject economic opportunity in order to maintain what they considered to be their "ethnic integrity."[98]

Taking into account the personal desires of individual immigrants alongside larger structural forces and population trends is essential to understanding why assimilation follows certain patterns. It is not enough to explain these phenomena in terms of a single factor, such as attributing the whole of the Puerto Rican social system in Holyoke to racialized, post-colonial dynamics. This approach does not treat Puerto Ricans as individuals with their own desires and agency, and therefore erases their commitment to interpersonal relationships and cultural practices. In many instances these highly personal beliefs were the primary reason why someone would reject American culture altogether and return to Puerto Rico, for example. A framework centered on race is also inadequate to explain how the Polish experience differed so significantly from that of the Puerto Ricans. To assume that monolithic discrimination was the exclusive cause of economic disadvantage ignores the effects of subtle and complex environmental and social changes. Urbanization and shifting agricultural practices such as the gradual weakening of the tobacco industry in the Valley caused much larger changes in Polish fortune than the temporary discrimination they faced upon their arrival.

[98] Werth, "Severing Ties."

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