

11.947 Race, Immigration and Planning

Session 7 Lecture Notes:

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Citizenship and Political Rights

- I. Should immigrant voting become a major political issue?
 - a. Immigrant voting should be part of a broad and aggressive political strategy.
 - i. If immigrants don't see a party that is fighting for their political rights, they might swing to other parties that can promise them alternate benefits.
 1. The Democratic Party came out for African American rights under Roosevelt, and that was when African Americans became strongly Democratic even though they
 2. A labor union poll found that immigrant workers are becoming more conservative: they are being swayed by the Republican Party.
 - ii. The immigrant vote, if it were allied with the African American vote could generate real political power that does not currently exist for African Americans on their own.
 1. Despite having gained voting rights, African Americans have only been able to control local power through mayoral and Congressional seats:
 - a. 2 Centers of Power in U.S.: The Federal Government and the State Government.
 - i. Cities only have power of home-rule granted by the State. Cities and towns can only exercise power through the state.
 - ii. The Republicans have in the last several elections transferred as much power as possible to the states.
 - b. There has only been one black governor and 3 black senators since Reconstruction.
 - iii. The immigrant vote would increase the power of cities and help them escape their current fiscal crisis.
 1. Cities are systematically disenfranchised:
 - a. A strong suburban voting base controls state power;
 - b. Many cities have large immigrant (non-voting) populations that lessen their political power in the state.
 2. Challenges to local/state support of immigrant voting rights:

- a. State lawmakers must weigh the number of potential votes gained through immigrant voting, which is uncertain, against the number of white upstate suburban votes that might be lost.
 - b. Strongest opposition: local minority legislators who are worried about being ousted by immigrant candidates.
 - c. Most likely proponent: Progressive democratic candidates for city-wide, state-wide offices.
- b. Immigrant Voting should not be emphasized in politics:
 - i. The second-generation will eventually gain the right to vote anyway.
 - 1. Counter-argument is that the second-generation will not necessarily become voters; they only become eligible to vote and that if their parents were given the right to vote that they might be more likely to become voters and to have loyalty to whoever gave their parents the vote.
 - ii. It is important that people be politically active in other ways besides voting (community organizations, community activism, etc.).

II. The Power of Voting

- a. Two models exist to explain how people vote:
 - i. Give people their rights and then stand back and let them vote their issues.
 - ii. Engage in communities and educate them to mobilize and reframe problems and potentially move people over.
- b. Voting has a power symbolically that exceeds its actual value. Two structural variables influence this:
 - i. Organizational structure
 - 1. It is easier for organizations to mobilize on issues than individual voters
 - a. E.g. In school boards, teachers unions and schools are more powerful than parents.
 - ii. Nature of the voting laws:
 - 1. Voting laws were redesigned to specifically disenfranchise immigrants and weaken the political parties.
- c. Potential targets for voting activism:
 - i. Labor Unions
 - 1. Immigrant Workers Centers (not part of Unions) are going out of business.
 - ii. Professional associations
 - 1. There are associations that nobody organizes:
 - a. School Board
 - b. Public Housing Managers
 - iii. Community Development Corporations (CDCs) are currently politically immobilized.

- III. Challenges to immigrants' suffrage:
 - a. There is virtually no interest amongst incumbent politicians to bring in an unknown factor to their elections. What is the strategy?
 - b. Funding is not available to build and sustain immigrant coalitions.
 - c. What does this mean for how planners address immigrant political participation?
- IV. Immigrant Disenfranchisement and Society
 - a. The Migration State:
 - i. This is a state in which the government is primarily concerned about how people are able to cross borders
 - b. It is really dangerous to have large groups of people who are disenfranchised.
 - c. Three arguments about the development of immigrants:
 - i. Social Networks: The church was a key to pacifying southern Blacks and the Irish. What are the social networks, institutions to pacify immigrants?
 - ii. Economic: Home-ownership and mortgages pacified immigrants moving out to the suburbs.
 - iii. Agency: Immigrants were naturally conservative, just wanted a piece of the pie (did not follow leadership when it radicalized).
 - d. What is pacifying immigrants today? Will their disenfranchisement lead to societal instability?
 - e. It would take a huge political mobilization in order to just get immigrants a small piece of the pie.