

As California Goes...

What is changing is our social fabric!

Book Review by Leon F. Bouvier

Professor Clark has clearly done his “homework.” *California Cauldron* is a well-written and deeply researched monograph. In addition, the numerous excellent charts are a welcome addition to a population-oriented book. Hopefully, this will set a trend in this field.

California Cauldron differs from other books that have been written about California’s population issue in that it looks at various areas, counties and even smaller geographical units. It concentrates, however, on the Los Angeles and San Francisco areas but looks at other parts of the state as appropriate. The main emphasis of this book is, in the words of the author, “To what extent will the new immigrant groups follow the old patterns of ‘integration’?” (p.14) Clark offers a relatively novel approach to the assimilation/pluralism question.

If ethnic groups are empowered under a dominance mode, in which one group is assured majority status in some political unit, division and divisiveness may well result. Under a different mode, however, one in which several groups join to influence outcomes, the separateness of ethnic groups will work to empower the totality. Thus, the way in which pluralism is accommodated is as important as the confrontation between assimilation and pluralism. (p.13)

As California becomes a “no majority” state (as the entire nation may well become by mid-21st century), a new form of adaptation may follow — one in which there is no dominant ethnic group. This is an important theory

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The California Cauldron: Immigration and the Fortunes of Local Communities
by William A. V. Clark
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and deserves serious consideration.

It should be pointed out, however, that Clark is well aware of the difficulties that the state and the nation face as a result of massive immigration. Writing about LEP (Limited English Proficiency) students, he comments:

Without changes in national immigration policies or redistribution of resources to educate the influx of new students, the outcomes will affect California and the United States for the rest of the next century. (p.15)

Later he points out that in the Los Angeles school district, Hispanics comprise 66 percent of the students, 14 percent are Black, 12 percent are non-Hispanic white, and 8 percent are Asian. And he then concludes:

Although money alone may not be the entire solution, there is no question that California must move from the bottom tier of state school

funding to the top, if the generations of new immigrant students are to be incorporated into the post-industrial society. (p.137)

The author devotes a considerable portion of the manuscript to education, poverty, the economy, home ownership, language, etc. The findings are rather dismal. For example, “twenty-six percent of California adults age 20-24 in 1990 lacked a high school diploma, the highest proportion in the nation” (p.50) One could go on and on citing these examples. They are not encouraging and Clark does not hide the facts. Furthermore, much space is devoted to comparing the various immigrant groups with one another. For example, the San Francisco Bay area with its greater concentration of Asians fares better on most social measures than does the Los Angeles area with its large number of Latinos. These comparisons lead the author to a rather gloomy conclusion and one that has been suggested in other works on California:

As a group, immigrants to California are losing ground in relative terms. Although some are holding their own in constant dollars, the relative and absolute decline for successive waves of Mexican and Central American migrants raises the very real issue of a bifurcated immigrant society and eventually of a bifurcated California society. (p.91)

Without stating it specifically, the end result could well be a division between an upper class composed of non-Hispanic Whites and Asians on the one side, and a lower class of African-Americans and Hispanics on the other.

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While overall this is an excellent publication, one omission stands out throughout most of the monograph. The reader begins to wonder if there are any African-Americans in California! Little is written about this important group. Furthermore, on page 117, when Clark refers to Blacks in a chart (Figure 5.13), one searches the chart in vain. No Blacks there! It would have been interesting to see how Blacks compare to the various immigrant groups discussed throughout the book.

For this reviewer, Chapter 6, “Assimilation versus Separation” was particularly interesting, as was Chapter 8 on “The Strained Social Fabric.” Clark explains in some detail the various modes of cultural adaptation including the “melting pot.” (Thus the term “cauldron” to ask whether the “pot” has come to a boil!) He cites the classic studies like those of Milton Gordon and Nathan Glazer. However, in discussing the previous adaptation of non-Anglo Europeans, he failed to cite the very important work of the late Robert Christopher. His *Crashing the Gates: The De-Wasping of America’s Power Elite* would have been an excellent source for this discussion.

The author attempts to measure assimilation through the standards of English language acquisition, seeking citizenship, and intermarriage. He does a good job with an almost impossible task. Then he asks the question:

Do these figures mean that Asians are more likely to be assimilated? The evidence ... is strongly positive. Does this suggest that a Mexican nation within a nation is emerging? Not necessarily, although findings emphasize Hispanic immigrants’ links to Mexico and the role of cheap travel and low-cost telephone service in preserving a cross-cultural link is slowing any tendency to assimilate to a new, blended society. (p.152)

Clark is careful not to offend anyone with his conclusions. Indeed, until the final few chapters, my feeling was that here is yet another academic refusing to take a position on a controversial topic. Here in this particular chapter, he concludes:

ý the division between the new working-class poor and the wealthy native-born whites is a further outcome of the recent high levels of immigration. Immigration levels and preferences will have major effects on the future of division and separation. (p.165)

In this reviewer’s opinion, this book deals only superficially with the future of California’s population. What is discussed is excellent, however. For example, on page 193:

It is clear and incontrovertible that projected growth will create very large youthful and elderly populations at the same time ý one-third of the population will be under 20 ý in 2025; at the same time more than 13 percent will be over 65. This anomalous, bifurcated population will require schools and old-age retirement homes simultaneously. Moreover, the young population will be mostly Asian and Latino, while the aging population will be mostly non-Hispanic white.

It should be added that the author devotes all of two brief paragraphs to “Immigration and the Environment.” The sheer impact of immigration on population size (compared to natural increase) warrants a serious discussion of the impact such growth has on the nation’s

(as well as the state's) environment.

It is in Chapter 8 that Clark discards his academic role and gives the readers an idea of where he stands. It is an excellent position, although he pays scant attention to the actual *level* of immigration. He argues effectively for a more skill-based immigration rather than one based on family reunification. His conclusion is worth repeating here:

...it is not the costs of immigration that is the central issue; it is the change in our social fabric. Our nation must accommodate the changing multiethnic complexity so that the State of California and the United States retain their identity as one society with many ethnic backgrounds and identities, rather than be divided into separate ethnic and racial societies sharing a common territory but holding only weak loyalties to the nation as a whole.

This is somewhat similar to the concept of "pluralistic assimilation" that this reviewer has discussed elsewhere.

Clark's final statement is also worth citing: "We cannot expect the cauldron to stop bubbling, but by rationalizing immigration policy to emphasize skills for admittance and education for human capital formation for

those already here, we would go a long way in reducing the tensions and decreasing the separations that currently exist." (p.201) Is he including African-Americans here?

In sum, *The California Cauldron* is a truly excellent survey of what is happening in our largest state. It is worthwhile reading for anyone (academic or non-academic) interested in this complex issue. It is well written and beautifully illustrated. Of course, any reviewer must find some faults! I have already mentioned the limited attention given to African-Americans. I also wish he had dealt a little more with the future population of both California and the United States. Other criticisms have already been stated. Together these do not detract from a worthwhile effort. As my good friend and colleague, Peter Morrison, wrote in his kudos,

Clark's timely look at California's recent experience with foreign influx clarifies the future and challenges many communities face in this new demographic era y this book offers a wealth of new insight into the local complexities of immigration y and its enduring future promise for the 21st century United States.

All I can add is, "Peter, I agree." •