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Finns in the USA: Patterns of Immigration and Settlement since 1900

Finnish immigration to and settlement in the US can be divided into three phases: 1) the period of mass immigration since the latter half of the nineteenth century until the US immigration laws of 1921 and 1924, 2) the period of the 30s, 40s and 50s when the Finnish ethnic group was shifting from a foreign born ethnic group to that of *born and bred in US* group, and 3) the period of *real barefoot generation* with a small minority of people born in Finland.

During the first period, Finnish immigrants settled down in few states and in few counties. The communities were often socially rather integrated but small in number of inhabitants. This period is important for the whole country as well: until 1910, the population growth of the US can be accounted for by all foreign born immigrants. After that, their descendants played a more important role in population growth. The second period saw a disorganisation of many social structures of the Finnish communities, such as religious, political, cooperative and temperance movements. The

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third period is characterized by a natural assimilation of the descendants of the immigrants born in Finland. Behind these general trends, some more specific trends can be found. Old traditional "Finnish states", such as Michigan and Minnesota, show contradictory trends of development; the Finnish communities seem socially isolated from, or perhaps differentiated, but functionally integrated with the host society of America.

Introduction

Finnish immigration to the USA commenced in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Actually minor groups of Finnish immigrants arrived in the country already much earlier. For example, there were Finns among those who came to New Sweden in Delaware in 1638. However, a mass movement from Finland to the USA started after the awakening of industrialization in Finland. Social changes based on that process pulled people from their rural roots, and many of them did not choose the rapidly growing industrial cities in the southern part of Finland but went further on overseas to North-America. The period of the liveliest immigration streams is around the turn of the century. The US immigration laws of 1921 and 1924 set a ban on the streams

from foreign countries resulting annually only in a few hundred immigrants from Finland.

The US population censuses for every tenth year give a chance to study immigration streams. Depending on the population census in question the statistics give figures for total foreign born and/or total foreign stock by country of origin.

As a consequence, the term Finnish immigrant includes the following immigrant groups: 1) the first immigrant generation, that is those who were born in Finland and moved to the USA, 2) the second immigrant generation, that is those who were born in the USA from the parents who (both or only one) were born in Finland, and 3) the third, fourth and older immigrant generations, that is those whose grandparents or ancestors were born in Finland.

In this paper the following themes will be discussed: 1) the immigration waves of the Finns, 2) the general trends of population changes in the target states of the most Finnish immigrants, 3) the spread (settlement) of the Finns in the above mentioned states since 1900, and finally 4) some links between the settlement patterns and assimilation of the Finns. Ability to speak English, citizenship and marriages within/between ethnic groups will be used as indicators of the stage of assimilation.

Effect of Immigration on Population Growth in the US

Population Trends in the US

First, let us have a look at some figures of population trends in the USA and in the states chosen by most Finnish immigrants. Figure 1 indicates the growth of population in the whole country. The growth has been rapid but even. The figure indicates also that the major growth can not be accounted for by the first and second immigrant

generations but, instead, by descendants of these immigrants. That is clearly shown by the difference between the figure for 1980 and those for the earlier decades: the figure for 1980 is based on the entire ancestry of the immigrants filling the questionnaires of the population census, the former figures indicate only the first and second immigrant generations.

The amount of foreign born immigrants increased rather rapidly up to 1910 but then the speed slowed down turning to a decline in 1930 (Figure 2). The trend can be explained by the immigration laws of 1921 and 1924 setting a ban on the streams of immigrants. The amount of foreign born went down to under ten millions by 1960, then turning to a very strong increase in the 70s, reaching fourteen millions in 1980 – the highest level in the half of century. Figure 3 shows how the growth of the population was accounted for mostly by the immigrant streams from foreign countries until 1910, after that the descendants of those immigrants have been more important.

Finnish Immigration

The amount of immigrants born in Finland grew until 1920 being then about 150 000 (Figure 4). Due to the immigration laws the amount has steadily decreased since then. The proportion of Finnish immigrants has always been very modest, at best (1910–1920) only 0.14 per cent of the total population (Figure 5). Figure 6 gives some additional information on the first and second immigrant generations (1910–1970) and Finnish ancestry (1980). It should perhaps be mentioned that in 1980 in the USA there were about 616 000 persons with Finnish ancestry.

Settlement of Finns since 1900

The proportion of Finnish immigrants among all immigrants has been very

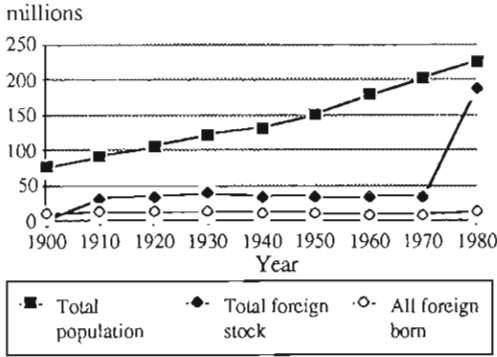


Figure 1. Population growth and immigration in US, 1900-1980

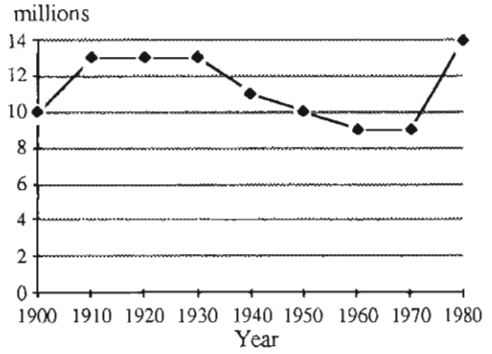


Figure 2. Foreign born immigrants in US, 1900-1980

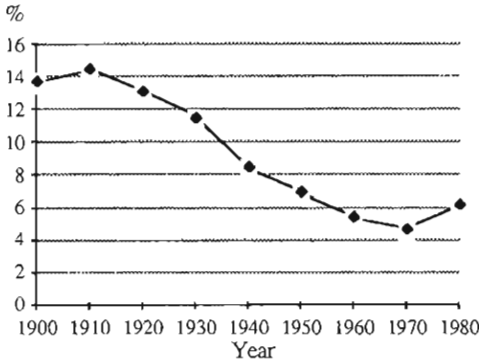


Figure 3. Foreign born immigrants in US, per cent of total population 1900-1980

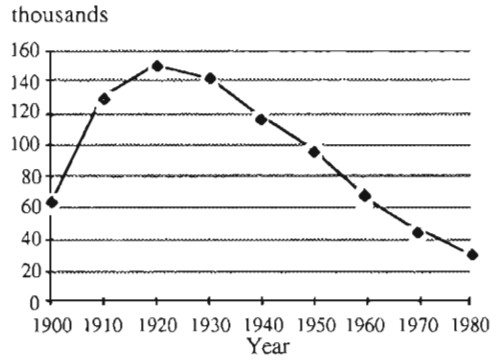


Figure 4. Immigrants born in Finland, 1900-1980

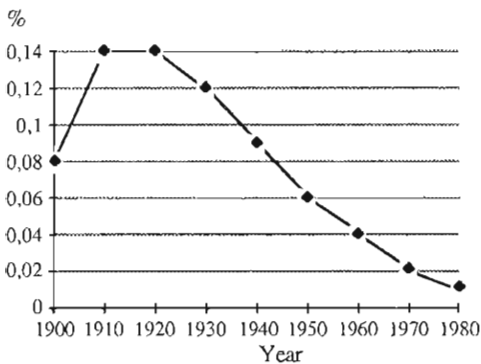


Figure 5. Immigrants born in Finland, per cent of total population in US, 1900-1980

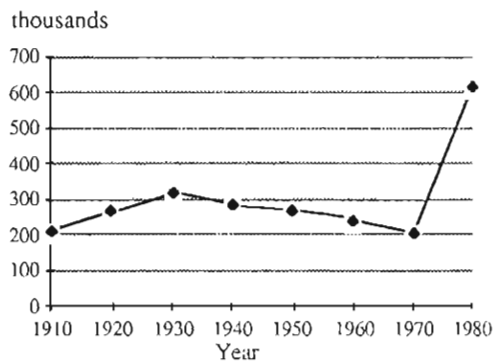


Figure 6. Finnish stock in US, 1910-1970, in 1980 Finnish ancestry

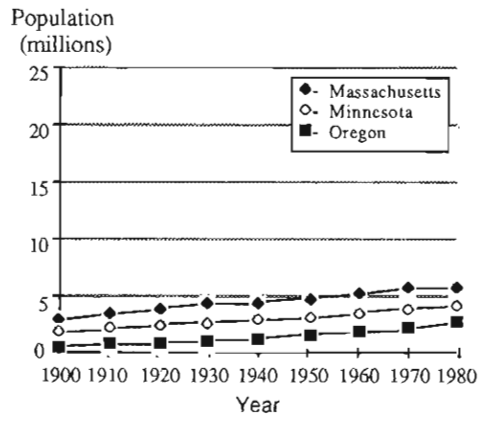
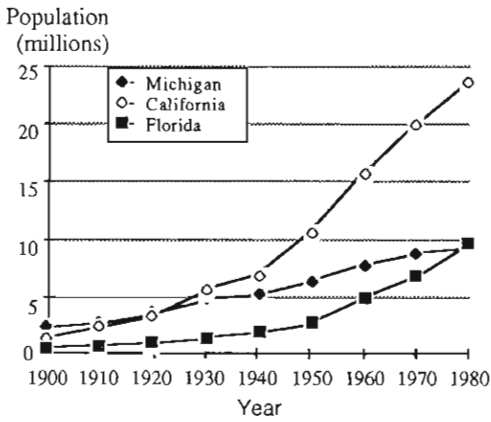


Figure 7. Population growth in selected states, 1900-1980

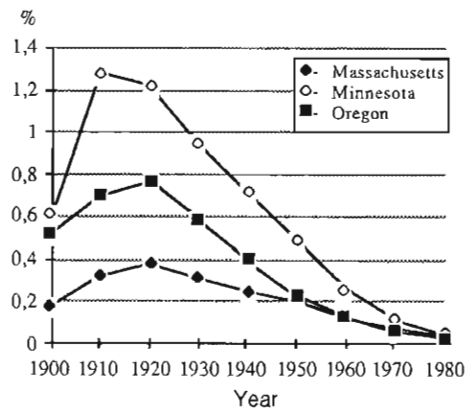
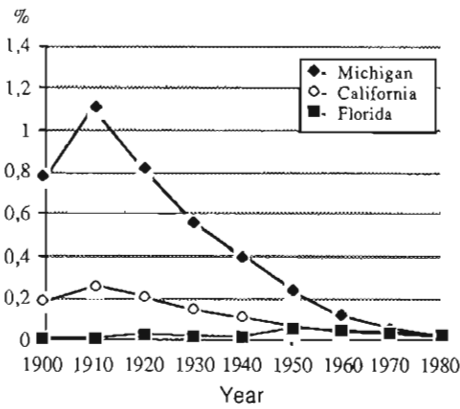


Figure 8. Immigrants born in Finland in selected states, per cent of total population 1900-1980

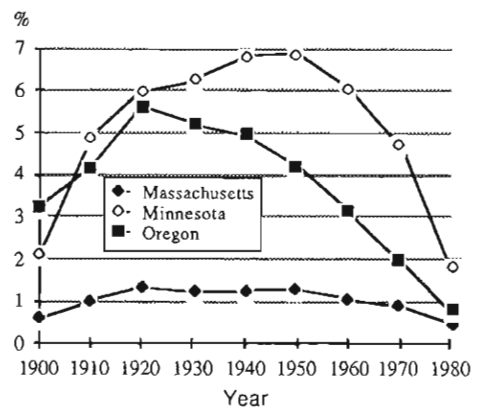
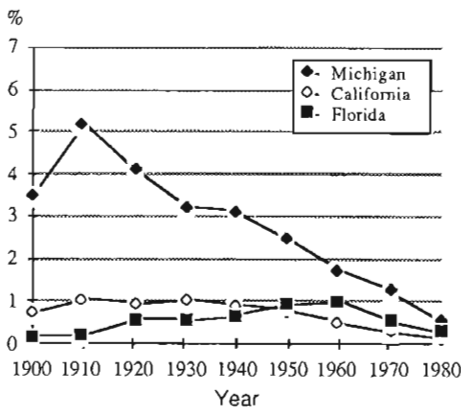


Figure 9. Immigrants born in Finland in selected states, per cent of all foreign born immigrants 1900-1980

modest in the whole country. However Finns, as well as many other ethnic groups, are not spread evenly in all states and counties. In some areas the proportions of Finns and their influence on social life has been remarkable. That is why it is important to concentrate on settlement patterns in certain states and counties.

Spread of Finns in the Country

Table 1 shows the distribution of Finnish immigrants in 1920 and 1980. Michigan and Minnesota, in this order, were the major "Finnish states" in 1920. Massachusetts and New York come next. Ohio, California, Washington, Wisconsin, Oregon, Montana, Wyoming and South Dakota are also relatively densely inhabited by Finns. In course of decades the traditional "Finnish states" have basically kept their status (see immigrants with Finnish ancestry 1980, Table 1 and Map 1). However, as to the numbers of those born in Finland, some changes can be found. The major "Finnish states" are California, New York and Florida. (see also Map 2).

Population Development and Finnish Immigration in Selected States

In the following, six states will be chosen for a more detailed discussion: Florida and Massachusetts from the East, Michigan and Minnesota from the Midwest and California and Oregon from the West Coast. The first state of each pair is a state of a rapid population growth, in the latter states the growth has been more modest (see Figure 7).

These differences in population growth affect the proportions of Finns (see Figures 8–9). Absolute numbers of people born in Finland are highest in Michigan (rapid growth of population) but percentage of Finns is high in Minnesota (slow growth). The same applies to California (rapid growth) and Oregon (slow growth).

Massachusetts and Florida differ from this general trend. This happens probably because of the late and extremely rapid growth of population in Florida; the population of Florida grew from about three million in 1950 to ten million in 1980. Finns came to Florida mainly after 1960.

The proportions of Finnish immigrants have some interesting features. There are more Finns in the states with a slow population growth in terms of percentages (Figures 8–9) but in most cases not in absolute numbers. For example, in 1950 there were about 15 000 people born in Finland in Michigan and 14 500 in Minnesota but the respective percentages of all foreign born immigrants were 2.5 and 6.9 (see Figure 9).

Summarizing it can be said that in the rapidly growing states the Finnish ethnic group has tended to become a smaller minority group than in the slowly growing states. That is however true only in relative terms; in absolute numbers the size of the Finnish group varies state by state. For example in 1980, the highest number of immigrants born in Finland can be found in California, New York (not included in Figures 7–9), Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan and Minnesota, in this order. The respective order according to the persons with Finnish ancestry is: Michigan, Minnesota, California, Washington (not incl.), Wisconsin (not incl.) and Massachusetts.

Finnish Settlement and Assimilation in Selected Counties

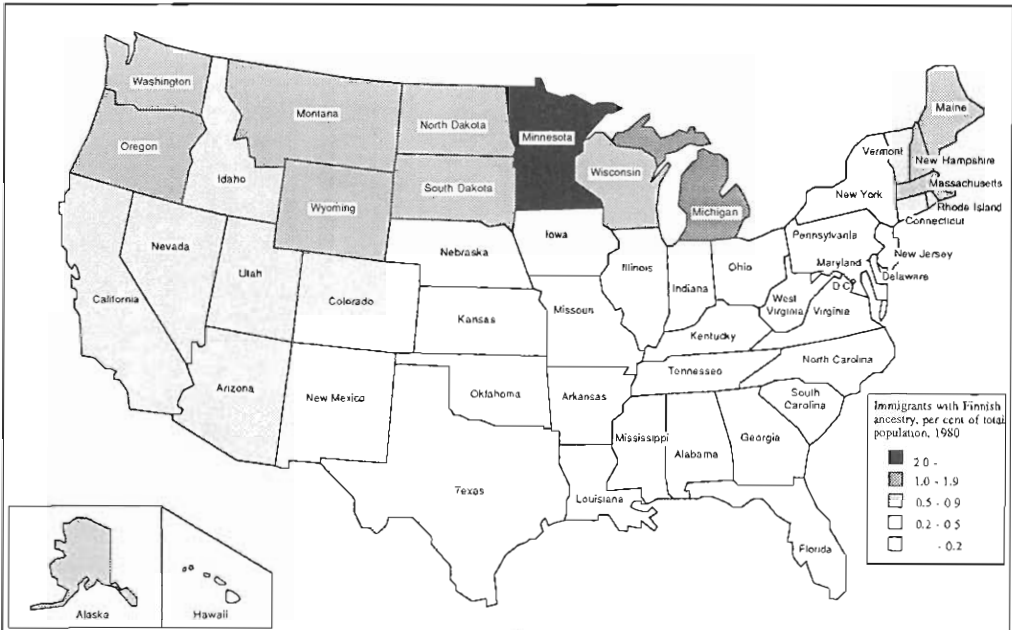
In the following, some notes will be made on the distribution of Finns in selected counties of the six states described above.

The years 1920, 1940 and 1980 will be chosen for a deeper study. The choice of these years can easily be justified. The year 1920 symbolizes a new phase both in

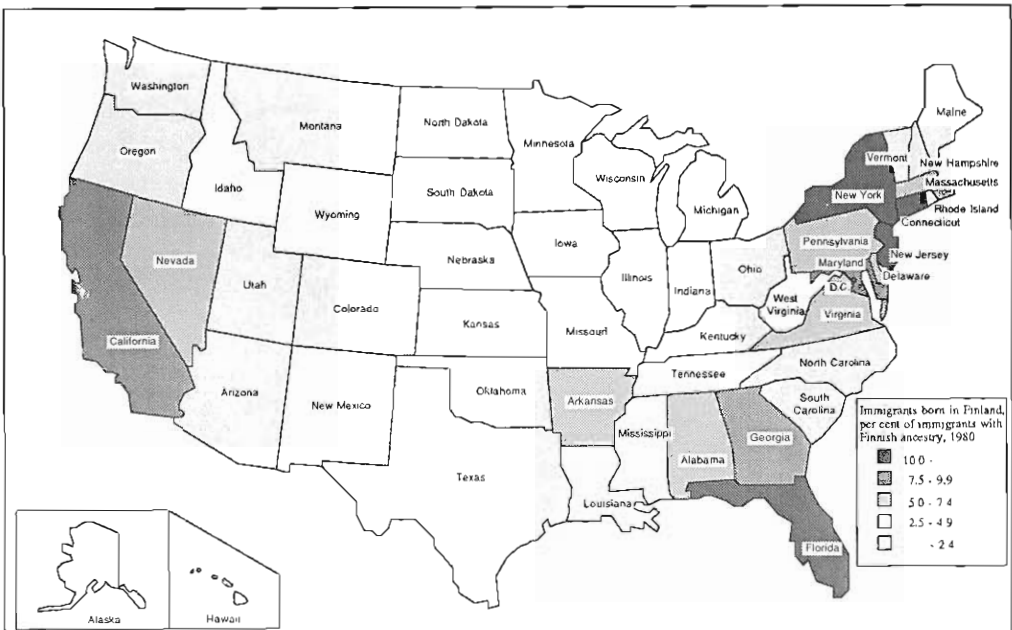
Table 1. Finnish immigrants in US, 1920 and 1980

	Immigrants			% ¹ born of ancestry
	1920, born in Finland	1980, born in Finland	1980, with Finnish ancestry	
Michigan	30100	2292	111702	2,1
Minnesota	29100	1959	98783	2,0
California	7050	4539	60459	7,5
Washington	11900	1474	39496	3,7
Massachusetts	14570	2314	33583	6,9
Wisconsin	6760	552	31782	1,7
New York	12500	3541	23475	15,1
Oregon	6000	853	22653	3,8
Illinois	3080	928	21258	4,4
Ohio	6410	814	20633	3,9
Florida	310	3409	18412	18,5
Texas	190	391	8409	4,7
Pennsylvania	2820	446	8301	5,4
Connecticut	1230	1078	8221	13,1
New Jersey	2110	974	8118	12,0
Montana	3500	195	7490	2,6
Arizona	410	233	7259	3,2
Colorado	880	185	6132	3,0
New Hampshire	1560	261	5998	4,3
Maine	1390	260	5592	4,7
Maryland	540	440	5274	8,3
Virginia	165	302	4873	6,2
Idaho	990	82	3990	2,1
North Dakota	1100	38	3930	1,0
Indiana	240	91	3893	2,3
South Dakota	1090	29	3716	0,8
Utah	780	149	3526	4,2
Missouri	100	66	2949	2,2
Alaska	0	98	2798	3,5
Iowa	110	59	2659	2,2
Wyoming	870	47	2476	1,9
Georgia	40	219	2460	8,9
Nevada	185	129	2228	5,8
North Carolina	15	72	2161	3,3
Louisiana	150	48	2089	2,3
Rhode Island	320	68	1977	3,4
Vermont	476	70	1664	4,2
Tennessee	50	35	1641	2,1
Nebraska	70	31	1555	2,0
New Mexico	50	34	1527	2,2
Kansas	60	21	1459	1,4
Oklahoma	100	42	1401	3,0
Kentucky	50	30	1199	2,5
South Carolina	50	31	1170	2,7
Alabama	70	66	1145	5,8
Hawaii	0	54	987	5,5
Arkansas	20	50	884	5,7
West Virginia	625	13	730	1,8
Mississippi	60	0	571	0,0
Delaware	50	30	562	5,3
District of Columbia	105	30	322	9,3

¹ Immigrants born in Finland, per cent of immigrants with Finnish ancestry, 1980



Map 1. Immigrants with Finnish ancestry, per cent of total population, 1980



Map 2. Immigrants born in Finland, per cent of immigrants with Finnish ancestry, 1980

the official immigration policy of US and general attitudes of the citizens. The First World War had awakened suspicion and fear towards the strange and the unknown outside the country. Together with critical attitudes towards immigration that was intensifying since the latter part of the nineteenth century, pressures to control both immigration streams and the immigrants already in the country strengthened. People wanted to decrease the volume of the streams and make immigrants members of the American society. The phenomenon has been given the name *americanization* and American society of that time *a melting pot*. These pressures and critical attitudes reached their greatest strength in the 20s. The decade saw also a drastic decline in the amount of newcomers from Finland (cf. the immigration law). As a consequence, at the end of the decade the amount of immigrants born in Finland had reached its peak (see Population Census 1930).

The 1920s and 1930s can be characterised as a period of the shift of emphasis from the first Finnish immigrant generation to other generations. In the 1980 population census there are figures indicating not only foreign born people but also ancestry. The general ancestry question based on self-identification, provided no prelisted categories, and allowed for one or more ancestry responses. The question was: "What is this person's ancestry?" The question included the nationality group, lineage or the country of the person or the person's parents or ancestors. The category *multiple ancestry* indicates marriages between two ethnic groups, *single ancestry* in turn marriages only within the own ethnic group.

Summarizing – and simplifying – we can say that in 1920 the majority of Finnish stock was born in Finland, in 1940 more than a half (almost 60 per cent) were born

in US, and in 1980 more than 95 per cent of people with Finnish roots were born in US. In other words, 1920 represents a period of the immigrants born in Finland, 1940 that of a shift of the emphasis from them to other generations and 1980 in turn a period of Finnish ancestry.

Five counties in each state having the greatest amounts of Finns in 1920 will be selected for the following study. The phenomena to be discussed will be 1) concentration of population and Finnish immigrants in the states mentioned above and in selected counties of these states, and 2) stage of assimilation in those areas.

Concentration will be measured as a proportional distribution of population and Finnish immigrants in the selected counties, i.e. location quotient (LQ).

$$LQ = \frac{x_F/x}{X_F/X}, \text{ where}$$

x_F = Finnish immigrants in county
 x = total population in county
 X_F = Finnish immigrants in state
 X = total population in state

The proportion of Finns with single ancestry of all Finns will be used as an index of the stage of assimilation process; the greater the percentage the lower stage of assimilation.

Michigan and Minnesota (Table 2). Michigan is the oldest and strongest "Finnish state". Location quotients are very high already in 1920. With only one exception (Wayne) they range between 10 and 21. Wayne County has a large population, the other selected counties are relatively small. The location quotients of 1940 and 1980 indicate an increasing concentration of Finns. This concentration in small counties seems to be related to a strong in-

Table 2. Total population and Finns in selected counties, 1920, 1940 and 1980

	Year							
	1920		1940		1980		Single %	Population
	Born in Finland	LQ ¹	Born in Finland	LQ	Finnish ancestry	LQ		
MICHIGAN								
County								
Houghton	7961	13,5	4483	23,4	13733	30,1	78,8	37872
Marquette	4620	12,3	2958	15,6	15473	17,3	61,1	74101
Gogebic	4042	14,7	2443	19,1	5393	22,7	61,7	19586
Wayne	2000	0,2	2275	0,3	14499	0,5	41,1	2337891
Ontonagon	1952	19,1	1452	31,7	3821	32,1	74,5	9861
MINNESOTA								
County								
St Louis	17342	6,9	11990	8	32744	6,1	53,1	222229
Carlton	2140	9	1615	9,2	6469	8,9	63,8	29936
Itasca	1607	5,5	1333	5,6	3746	3,6	55,2	43069
Hennepin	1169	0,2	1013	0,2	17408	0,8	38,8	941411
Otter Tail	1145	1,8	646	1,7	2106	1,7	61,5	51937
CALIFORNIA								
County								
San Francisco	1810	1,7	1620	2,3	1526	0,9	48,2	678974
Alameda	1153	1,6	1254	2,2	4306	1,5	42,3	1105379
Mendocino	1061	21,5	700	22,4	1529	9	57,9	66738
Humboldt	827	10,8	670	13	939	3,4	60,2	108514
Los Angeles	658	0,3	1562	0,5	12892	0,7	43,2	7477503
OREGON								
County								
Clatsop	2743	15,4	1659	16,9	3097	11,1	56,8	32489
Multnomah	1485	0,7	1209	0,9	5257	1,1	40,2	562640
Coos	537	3,1	314	2,4	799	1,5	42,3	64047
Columbia	530	4,9	429	5,1	1248	4,1	50,6	35646
Marion	103	0,3	97	0,3	1008	0,6	39,7	204692
MASSACHUSETTS								
County								
Worcester	7734	4,5	5339	4,3	12080	3,2	50	646352
Norfolk	2118	2,6	1518	1,9	3262	0,9	39,1	606587
Middlesex	1729	0,6	1449	0,6	6058	0,8	43	1367034
Essex	1300	0,7	808	0,7	3386	0,9	42,5	633632
Suffolk	577	0,2	409	0,2	983	0,3	48,3	650142
FLORIDA								
County								
Dade		Data not available	141	2,2	1372	0,4	42,3	1625781
Palm Beach			90	4,6	4847	4,4	81,7	576863
Duval			39	0,8	634	0,6	41,5	571003
Lake			28	4,2	172	0,9	63,4	104870
Hillsborough			25	0,6	850	0,7	41,1	646960

¹ If LQ = 1, then the distribution of Finns is equal to that of total population;

if LQ < 1, then the proportion of Finns in a county (of all Finns in the state) is smaller than that of total population in the same county (of total population in the state) (e.g. LQ=0,2 means that the proportion of Finns is only 20 per cent of the expected proportion);

if LQ > 1, then the proportion of Finns in a county (of all Finns in the state) is greater than that of total population in the same county (of total population in the state) (e.g. LQ=4 means that the proportion Finns is four times greater than expected)

tegration of Finnish communities; the percentages of Finns with single ancestry is very high. For example, in county of Keewenaw which is not included in Table 2 (population in 1980 only 1963 inhabitants and $LQ = 39.3$) 47 per cent of people have Finnish ancestry and more than 90 per cent of them have single ancestry. Baraga, Ontonagon, Gogebic and Houghton Counties are other good examples. The high rate of concentration resulted also in a high percentage of people with single Finnish ancestry in the whole state (51.1 %).

Minnesota shows similar trends but on a lower level. The proportion of people with Finnish ancestry of total population is there higher (2.4 %) than in Michigan (1.2 %) but Finns are more evenly spread. That can be seen as lower location quotients. Otherwise the results are basically similar; increasing concentration in small counties results in a stronger integration of Finnish communities and weaker assimilation (when measured by marriages) with the whole society.

California and Oregon (Table 2). California and Oregon differ from and have similarities with Michigan and Minnesota in a few aspects. The main result is the same: small size of a county and a high concentration results in a high percentage of those with single ancestry. The following differences can be seen: 1) In 1920 Finns are concentrated only in few counties which depends probably on the youth of settlement. 2) Finnish settlement is spread out to many new counties after 1920. In California 1980, for example, San Diego (5168 people with Finnish ancestry), Orange (5076), Contra Costa (3457), Riverside (2338), Sacramento (2338) and San Bernardino (1982) are such counties. Los Angeles County has the largest Finnish population (12 892). The other "old" counties, in addition to LA,

are Alameda, Mendocino, Humboldt, Sonoma, San Mateo and so on (see Table 2). In Oregon the counties of Washington (2085 people with Finnish ancestry) and Lane (1746) should be mentioned as new "Finnish areas". Perhaps it should also be mentioned that only in two counties location quotients are high: in Clatsop (11.1) and Columbia (4.1).

Florida and Massachusetts (Table 2). Florida does not have figures by counties on foreign born immigrants in the first decades of the century. Finns arrived in Florida rather late; in 1940 there were less than 500 Finns. However, in 1980 more than 18 000 Finns inhabited the state. Many of them are retired people who moved from other states but quite a few have immigrated also from Finland. Perhaps because of these groups, Finns are rather isolated from other ethnic groups – at least if measured by marriages. In the state about 57 per cent of Finns have reported single ancestry, the highest percentage among Finns in all states. More than one fourth of Finns lived in Palm Beach county, in a very urbanized and congested area. Nevertheless, about 82 per cent of them reported single ancestry.

Massachusetts is a traditional "Finnish state" with a rather slow population growth. Finns are concentrated in few counties and no big changes have happened in this sense since 1920.

Now we need to summarize the main results for the following discussion: 1) The concentration of the Finns in small counties increases social integration of Finnish communities. 2) The result seems also depend on the age of settlement; the older settlement the more integration (cf. Michigan). 3) So far, this social integration has been measured only by marriages within the Finnish ethnic group. In the following, some additional measures will be taken in use (see Table 3).

Table 3. Selected indicators of the stage of assimilation process in 1980 (%)

Variables	FL	MA	State MI	MN	CA	OR	The whole country
Multiple ancestry	43.3	54.5	48.9	53.4	59.2	57.7	56.5
Speaks English very well	57.3	71.5	81.1	75.4	66.1	70.5	72.8
Speaks only English:							
5–17 years	48.5	71.6	91.6	89.8	72.8	82.6	83.8
18 years and over	23.7	31.5	33.9	32.6	35.6	33.6	35.0
Citizen	72.7	76.5	84.2	85.3	66.7	71.5	69.4

Multiple ancestry = per cent of persons in Finnish ethnic group who reported marriages between their own and some other ethnic group(s) (Source: US 1980 Population Census, Ancestry of the Population by State, Supplementary Report, PC80-S1-10)

Speaks English very well = Finns who reported to speak English very well, per cent of persons in homes where Finnish is spoken (Source: US 1980 Population Census, Detailed Population Characteristics, Table 197)

Speaks only English = Persons speaking only English in families in which Finnish is spoken; 5–17 years: per cent of all 5–17 year persons in Finnish speaking families; 18 years and over: per cent of all 18 years and over in Finnish speaking families (Table 198, see above)

Citizen = naturalized persons born in Finland, per cent of all immigrants born in Finland (Table 195)

Table 3 shows clearly that ancestry measures only one aspect of assimilation. In Michigan a low percentage of multiple ancestry means a high stage of social integration within the Finnish ethnic group. However, the great majority of Finns (81 %) speak English very well, there are a lot of American Finns, in homes and families where Finnish is spoken, who speak only English. All these additional measures refer to a high stage of assimilation.

Discussion

Now we have two opposite descriptions of processes of assimilation. Does that mean contradictory evidence in the empirical data presented above? Or does it have a logical explanation? Let us make these two opposite processes more concrete (Figure 10).

In Figure 10 we suggest that the two opposite processes are not contradictory, rather they present two aspects of the process of assimilation. The conclusion presented in Figure 16 implies the idea that a certain kind of boundary maintenance of an ethnic group, i.e. a difference between the own ethnic group and the rest of the host society, does not necessarily mean that the ethnic group is isolated from the host society. A thinking like this applies rather well to the national spirit of the people of Finland, as experienced through the entire, often hazardous history of Finland. It would be more than natural to expect similar patterns of behavior to be seen among the Finns outside the old home country as well.

We can also find ways to explain these results from a more general theoretical

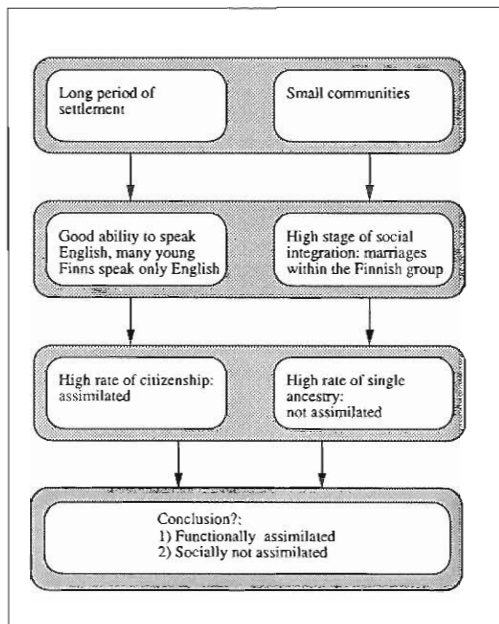


Figure 10. Two opposite processes of assimilation

basis. A framework delineated by Marvin W. Mikesell ("A Framework for the Study of Minority Group Aspirations", University of Chicago, 1986) forms a good starting point for one explanation. Mikesell's work provides a useful conceptual framework for analyzing the ways of reactions of minority groups in different cultural and other situations. He starts by noting that since minority groups are rarely satisfied with their current situation, the problems created by their aspirations may present a severe challenge to national authorities. The complaints voiced by members of frustrated minority groups usually reflect a desire to contribute to or withdraw from a larger national society. In the former case, the diagnostic terms are *recognition, access* or *participation*. In the latter case, the diagnostic terms are *separation, autonomy* and *independence*. The formula $r\ p / S\ A\ I$ can thus be used widely as diagnostic device and illustra-

tions can be offered of both simply and highly complex cases. The most benign expression of minority-group aspiration occurs when a group desires or welcomes recognition of its religious or linguistic identity but does not seek proportional representation in national government or in a national patronage system.

It is more common for a group to feel that it has been denied its proper share of the benefits of national life, and so to press for access and participation as well as mere recognition (e.g. Hispanics in US). In addition, a group may desire fuller participation in a larger national society and yet also seek to maintain or achieve some degree of separation from or autonomy within that society. Some groups express aspirations that are difficult to classify. Desire for recognition by a larger society combined with relative indifference to the prospect of increased participation in that society is most likely to be evident where a national minority is concentrated in a particular area and may in fact be the majority group in that area.

Now, what is the theoretical explanation of the Mikesell's framework in case of the Finnish ethnic group? The following analogies might be seen: 1) The Finnish ethnic subgroups have not sought *separation, autonomy* or *independence* – with, perhaps, an exception of so called ideal communities, such as Sointula in British Columbia, Canada. 2) The evidence based on the empirical data presented above suggests that a relation between the ethnic group of Finns and rest of the society might have something to do with the terms "need for recognition, access and participation". The exact nature of this relationship is a matter for a further study. 3) However, the following needs more attention: "desire for recognition by a larger society combined with relative indifference to the prospect of increased

participation in that society is most likely to be evident where a national minority is concentrated in a particular area and may in fact be the majority group in that area”.

This situation sketched by Mikesell, fits rather well to the Finnish ethnic group in old traditional “Finnish states”, in such as Michigan and Minnesota. The Finnish group maintains a sort of boundary (cf. the high rate of single ancestry) but the group has a great knowledge of English language and a high rate of citizenship; indicators of functional, and some aspects structural (see Gordon, Milton M., *Assimilation in American Life*, 1964), assimilation. That may justify the “conclusion” made in

Figure 10. However, the “conclusion” can, at best, be taken only as hypothesis for a more detailed study. Florida and California differ from this pattern. This is probably mainly due to a shorter period of Finnish settlement and different background of the Finnish immigrants. For example, in Florida, there are relatively many retired people and those who have moved from Finland. California has somewhat similar features.

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