African-American struggle to overturn racial discrimination.

Collectively, these books provide new material on an important period in the African-American and Mexican American struggles for racial justice. They draw attention to the many similarities as well as the important differences between the experiences of two racialised groups who have long resided alongside each other in the South-West. However, these works also reveal that scholars focusing upon a single ethnic group, such as African Americans or Mexican Americans, are prone to misinterpreting important parts of that group’s experience if it is viewed in isolation from that of other similar groups.

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Pieter Bevelander and Don J. DeVoretz (eds), The Economies of Citizenship

The economic outcomes of immigration settlement and the question of the value of citizenship to new arrivals are both substantive issues in their own right but there are not many publications that put the two together and ask about the economic benefits of citizenship for immigrants—or for the host society. This book is one.

The theme which unites the contributions to this book centres firstly on the economic determinants of obtaining citizenship for immigrants and secondly on the benefits (or otherwise) of having gained that citizenship. The countries that are used as examples to explore this question are Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the USA; a summary chapter by the editors is also included. But the best summary of the issues is left to a sociologist, Irene Bloemraad, in an introduction. She asks: ‘What are the economic determinants in an immigrant’s choice to acquire citizenship? What are the economic consequences of choosing citizenship for the foreign-born worker? What are the economic consequences of immigrants’ citizenship for the country of reception?’ (p. 13). As might be expected, the answers given in this volume vary according to the quality of the data available for any given country, the conceptual and methodological proclivities of the respective authors, the mix of immigrants arriving in a particular destination, especially with regard to the human capital they bring, and the nature of the receiving country, in terms of both welfare provision and the labour market.

Given the economic orientation of the central question, and the fact that six of the seven authors (leaving aside Bloemraad) are economists, it is perhaps inevitable that there is extensive discussion of the available economic data and what they might tell us. There appear to be some common conclusions. One, regarding the human capital mix of the immigrants who arrive, suggests that variations in language skills and education translate into better or worse convergence rates with the host (locally born) population. But the assimilation (meant here in a narrow economic sense) or integration rate is then reinforced by the bonding or bridging capital that can be deployed post-arrival. However, immigrants, especially those who are racialised, also encounter particular labour market barriers, although these are given relatively little attention here. There is discussion of the cohort effect, both in terms of an entry effect for migrants and in relation to whether immigrants encounter the same labour market experiences and scarring as locally born cohorts.

This leaves, firstly, the question of whether there are particular economic drivers in obtaining citizenship and secondly whether citizenship provides the immigrant with better outcomes. DeVoretz and Pivnenko suggest that, in Canada, selectivity bias according to gender and source country has an impact on the former issue, but that this bias is accompanied by variations in the ‘expected wage gain, level of education, marital status, age and the presence of children’ (p. 50), all of which can affect the decision to naturalise. These are micro-level considerations but there are also macro-level impacts, notably in terms of lifetime net fiscal contributions to a federal government. Similar findings apply to northern European countries, so that demographic and educational variables are important determinants and naturalisation becomes the dependent variable. Those who obtain citizenship have better labour market outcomes, especially over the medium and long term. However, there were some surprising conclusions:
Bevelander and Veenman note that Dutch integration programmes do not have a significant effect on naturalisation; there is an instantaneous wage effect for immigrants if they naturalise in Norway; and that, in Sweden, citizenship ‘often shows a negative relationship to employment probability’ (p. 125), contrasting with the experience of other countries.

Does citizenship provide economic benefits for immigrants? Again, Bloemraad addresses some important questions about the assumptions concerning economic benefit and what is being maximised, and whether the focus on immigrants as atomised, rational actors is productive. She asks what we can learn by taking an economic approach to citizenship, concluding that a great deal is to be learned but that the answer is often truncated by data and methodological constraints. A further issue is whether the global economic crisis has altered the costs and benefits of immigrant citizenship, especially given the role that immigrant labour plays in destination economies, combined with deindustrialisation, off-shoring, the growth of casual and insecure employment and soft labour demand. These developments have been under-scored by growing anxieties about employment and/or immigration—and anti-immigrant politics—in most of the countries discussed here. It would be interesting to return to the same question in a year or two to analyse what has changed. This book contributes to an interesting and little considered issue but it begs as many questions as it answers.

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