

Intergenerational Progress in Educational Attainment When Institutional Change Really Matters: A Case Study of Franco-Americans vs. French-Speaking Quebeckers¹

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Abstract

Using U.S. and Canadian census data I exploit the massive out migration of approximately 1 million French-Canadians who moved mainly to New England between 1865 and 1930 to look at how the educational attainment and enrollment patterns of their descendants compare with those of same aged French-speaking Quebeckers. Data from the 1971 (1970) Canadian (U.S.) censuses reveal that New England born residents who had French as their mother tongue enjoyed a considerable advantage in terms of educational attainment. I attribute this large discrepancy to their exposure to the U.S. public school system which had no equivalent in Quebec until the late sixties. This result is even more remarkable given the alleged negative selection out of Quebec and the fact that Franco-Americans were fairly successful in replicating the same educational institutions as the ones existing in Quebec. Turning to the 2001 (2000) Canadian (U.S.) censuses, I find strong signs that the gap has subsided for the younger aged individuals. In fact, contrary to 30 years earlier, young Quebeckers in 2001 had roughly the same number of years of schooling and were at least as likely to have some post-secondary education. However, they still trail when it comes to having at least a B.A. degree. This partial reversal reflects the impact of the "reverse treatment" by which Quebec made profound changes to its educational institutions, particularly in the post-secondary system, in the mid-to-late 60's. Given the speed at which this partial catch-up occurred, it would appear that the magnitude of the intergenerational externalities that can be associated with education is at best fairly modest.

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