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Public Lecture Offerings

Is Demography Destiny? Diversity and its Discontents

The United States is the most demographically complex nation in the world, but does diversity undermine social cohesion? In its 2003 decision permitting narrowly tailored consideration of race in college admissions (*Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306, 328-29), the U.S. Supreme Court opined that diversity is a compelling state interest. But what does that mean, exactly? This lecture will describe the changing ethno-racial composition of the U.S. population and discuss social, economic and political implications of these changes by focusing on higher education, where access has become contested terrain. I interrogate whether and how diversity undermines cohesion on college campuses. I also provide evidence about diversity and social cohesion by drawing on evidence about intermarriage, voting behavior and attitude surveys signaling acceptance of others.

Economic Implications of Demographic Change

The economic implications of demographic change depend on steadfast investments in research and development; replenishment of the human capital stock diminished by retiring Baby Boomers; and raising college attainment rates. This way the United States can leverage its diverse, fast-growing population to harness a demographic dividend—the productivity boost enabled by declining fertility—while also fueling economic growth, restocking the Social Security system, and bolstering global competitiveness. In this lecture I explain how the United States harnessed a demographic dividend to become the most educated nation, why that status is in jeopardy, and the risks associated with underinvestment in higher education as the nation ages. Comparative data from South Korea, China and India illustrate the risks and opportunities for aging societies more generally.

Restoring the “P” in U.S. Public Education: From Equity to Adequacy

The United States became the first nation to offer universal high school education, and subsequently broadened access to higher education by establishing a system of publicly funded universities. That public education is not a fundamental right, but rather is situated in 50 state constitutions, has direct implications for persisting gaps in student attainments across states and localities. The COVID pandemic laid bare disparities in opportunities to learn. In this lecture I outline the historical foundations of public funding for education, and trace how litigation shifted from resource disparities across schools and districts to the adequacy of opportunities to learn. In public higher education, affordability is key to preventing access from becoming a private good. I close by discussing what it would take, short of a constitutional amendment, for public education to approximate a fundamental right for young people as Social Security and Medicare does for seniors.

Higher Education as Integration Policy

Integration is a ubiquitous concept in the immigration literature, but segregation—its opposite—dominates academic discourse about domestic public education. In this lecture I argue that restoring the nation’s unconditional commitment to quality public education is essential not only to revive economic mobility and restore broadly shared prosperity, but also to broaden the national project of integration beyond race and national origins. Using my personal biography as prologue, I provide a 50-year retrospective that illustrates how the national project of integration eroded as the population became more diverse and social mobility stagnated against a backdrop of rising economic inequality. In closing, I underscore the urgency of restoring investments in higher education as enrollment cohorts shrink, skill shortages loom, and population aging shifts public resources from youth to seniors.

Classroom Discussion Topics

- **U.S. Immigration Policy:** challenges for the new administration
- **Latinos and the Courts:** Beyond *Brown v. Board of Education*
- **Adolescent Romance in the Digital Age:** Insights from a Diary Study