This online-only virtual issue, edited and introduced by Sevsem Cicek-Okay, focuses on immigrants’ incorporation into their host countries amid the rise of global social intolerance toward immigrants. The articles included in the virtual issue converge around post-migration processes; however, each contribution is distinct in terms of the dimension of incorporation it addresses.

Introduction to the Virtual Issue
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Growing numbers of global migrants of all types, including refugees, asylum seekers, and labor migrants, compel scholars to address a wide range of questions associated with migrants themselves, their destinations, and the places and people they leave behind. Considering the rise of global social intolerance toward migrants at both structural (e.g., labor market) and interpersonal (e.g., prejudice) levels, this virtual issue of *Social Problems* focuses on immigrants’ incorporation into their host countries. Broadly, the articles included in the virtual issue converge around post-migration processes; however, each contribution is distinct in terms of the dimension of incorporation it addresses.

Immigrants’ incorporation into a host society has long been assessed via socioeconomic attributes (e.g., educational attainment, income) and acculturation processes (e.g., language proficiency). While useful for identifying general trends (over time, across broad groups), such measures are less helpful for capturing the extensive variations, both within and across groups, that characterize incorporation. For instance, although some scholars stress the importance of immigrants’ racial or ethnic status (Portes and Rumbaut 2014; Portes and Zhou 1993), the process of incorporation is often treated as if individual identities (e.g., religion, gender, sexual orientation, ability) are not intersectional. This amounts to a blind spot in the field of immigrant incorporation studies, especially considering the extensive work on intersectionality in inequality scholarship. Immigration scholars have only recently begun to address this topic. The papers in this virtual issue tackle the problem of variable immigrant incorporation in different ways and with different focal groups, but they all demonstrate how the social, spatial and political opportunities immigrants are afforded, and the experiences they have, are linked in various ways to their intersecting social statuses, including legal status, age, race, gender and health.

The papers in this virtual issue of *Social Problems* attend to the intersections of individual characteristics and structural systems with regard to immigrant incorporation. Particularly they attempt to fill the gap in the immigration literature surrounding the impact of race and racism on integration processes. As Portes and Zhou (1993: 83) argue, although race “may appear at first glance [to be] an individual characteristic, in reality it is a trait belonging to the host society.” For this reason, immigrant incorporation studies must take into consideration the unique characteristics of each society. This
endeavor, then, requires continuous analytical re-adjustment to reflect and understand how processes of incorporation differ across place and time.

Onasch (2017) attends to this under-studied area by explicitly connecting race and immigration, using a theoretical framework that combines racialization theory and symbolic boundaries. She problematizes an essentialist French civic integration program that ultimately exacerbates differences between immigrants and the host population, thus stalling the integration process. Other studies demonstrate how ethnoracial discrimination and gender status mediate immigrants’ ability to incorporate. Agadjanian, Menjivar and Zotova (2017), for example, draw attention to these complex relations by looking at the link between ethnoracial status and incorporation in the context of Russia. Comparing experiences of migrant women from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, they find that phenotypical similarities preponderate cultural similarities in incorporation. Adding gender to the axes of racial/ethnic and immigrant status in United States, Williams, Alvarez and Hauck (2002) address the links between gender and acculturation processes of Latinx youth, and find segmented adjustment along structural gender lines. Focusing on a West Africa community in the United States, Brown (2017) demonstrates the importance of racial status and immigrants’ bodies in shaping incorporation paths. She argues that the racial “mismatch” between African immigrants and their predominantly white American host society negatively impacts their ability to incorporate.

Scholars also often overlook the dynamic relations between immigrants and host societies post-migration. Immigrants are not passive recipients of host societies’ cultural and legal attributes. Instead, they play an active role in their own incorporation process, embracing some aspects of their host society and resisting others. In various ways and in varying degrees, immigrants also play important political and civic roles, as illustrated by Wong, Garcia and Valdivia (2018) and Patler (2018), respectively. These studies move beyond past conventional understandings of political incorporation that rely on naturalization and voting patterns to examine such integration via immigration-related organizational membership, civic engagement and youth organization activities.

So far, I have emphasized the process of incorporation as well as some of the group-level and external factors that impact how, and to what effect, incorporation happens. However, the studies included in this issue also demonstrate that different identities generate different experiences and outcomes. Immigrants’ cultural, spatial, economic and political incorporation are impacted by such identities and statuses in various ways. For instance, the papers by Kimbro, Gorman and Schachter (2012) and Anderson (2017) both address the extent to which immigrants’ health is influenced by the incorporation process. The former study demonstrates how changes in the self-rated health of Asian immigrants is an outcome of acculturation, while the latter study explores how immigrants’ health patterns are linked to spatial incorporation and finds that racial or ethnic segregation generates disparities in health-related resources across certain immigrant groups.
In this virtual issue, immigrant incorporation is approached from social, spatial and political perspectives and the papers all address the many challenges immigrants face in their host countries. The articles cumulatively demonstrate the importance of studying immigrant incorporation as a social process where embodied ethnoracial differences matter. Although we can make some prediction about immigrant incorporation with the help of general assimilation theories, we must generalize with caution. The studies included in this virtual issue demonstrate that neither immigrants nor their host societies are homogeneous. Immigrants are distinct in their experiences, and their lives as immigrants are always historically and geopolitically situated. Hence, to fully comprehend how, and with what consequences, immigrants are incorporated into their host societies, researchers must attend to these sociological contexts—as all the articles in this issue of Social Problems do. Ignoring the complex interrelations between different forces (individual, intersectional, and structural level) impedes our understanding of immigrants’ incorporation.

References


