

**Title—Strangers No More: Immigration and the Challenges of Integration in North America and Western Europe**

**Authors—Richard Alba and Nancy Foner**

**Year—2015**

Categories: Migration, Integration, Politics, Islam, Culture

Place: North America & Western Europe

Time: 1960-Present

Argument Synopsis:

Alba and Foner's book is a broad comparative review of the multifaceted processes of immigrant integration in North America and Western Europe. They compare six countries, in terms of integration of immigrants: The United States, Canada, Britain, France, Germany, and the Netherlands. They utilize a comparative perspective to reveal parallels as well as differences across these countries. Their central question is how to integrate immigrants and their children so that they become full members of the societies where they now live. For Alba and Foner, integration refers to the processes that increase the opportunities of immigrants and their descendants to obtain the valued 'stuff' of a society, as well as social acceptance through participation in major institutions, such as the educational and political system and the labor and housing markets. They claim that the presence of immigrants alters the communities in which they live, and in some ways, the larger society as well. The emphasis for their study is on low-status migrants.

The book is organized into ten chapters. After the introduction, Alba and Foner explore the role of post-1945 immigration laws and policies of the six countries in giving rise to the mix of new social groups on their social landscapes. They categorize twentieth century migrants into various categories—labor migrants, high human-capital migrants, postcolonial migrants, refugee and asylum seekers, and subsequent family reunification. Foner and Alba then turn to the economic situations of the immigrants, exploring the implications of growing labor market inequality. They examine the actual extent, and consequences, of residential segregation, looking at the role of public policy in shaping these patterns. One of the chapters highlights race, with a stress on the special position of the United States. Alba and Foner argue that color-coded race is a more severe barrier in the United States, especially for immigrants of African ancestry owing to the legacy of slavery and ghettoization. They then describe how immigrant religion has become a more significant social divide, a greater challenge to integration, and a more common source of conflict with mainstream institutions and practices in Western Europe when compared to the United States. Alba and Foner attempt to consider possible changes in the future that could make Islam less of a barrier, including European Islam shifting in a more liberal direction and second-generation people becoming less closely tied to Islamic cultural practices. Alba and Foner find that postcolonial migrants are a very diverse group in Britain and includes a large share of migrants with high levels of human capital. They reveal that the British government has sought to clamp down on marriage migration in light of the high number of second-generation transnational marriages among Muslim South Asians. Alba and Foner's book analyzed the experiences of immigrants and their children across six Western countries in the modern period, with an emphasis on institutional factors shaping their successes, as well as continued difficulties.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Assimilation does not necessarily produce cultural homogeneity
- If racial divisions are a defining characteristic of the United States, religious cleavages seem their nearest equivalent in Western Europe
- One reason why religious division impede integration in Western European societies is because of the church-state relationships left behind by the histories of established religions