

THE TURKISH DIASPORA IN THE UNITED STATES: IMMIGRATION AND IDENTITY FORMATION

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ABSTRACT

People of Turkish origin from different national, ethnic, religious, and geographical backgrounds have been living in the United States since the 1820 s, and are still integrating today. These Turkish migrations may be classified in three distinctive immigration waves: 1820-1921, 1950-70, and post-1970 s. The motives behind each phase are rather complex and were led by economic, training, and educational considerations. Yet, very little is known about the history of these migrations as the Turkish-American community in the United States had largely remained unknown and undocumented. Until recently, very few studies had been undertaken about the historical integration patterns and cultural backgrounds of Turkish immigrants in the United States. In this light, the present paper examines Turkish-American identity formation across generations. As the past always shapes the present, the paper begins with an overview about the history of Turkish immigration to the United States by analysing the main differences that existed between the three migration waves with regard to their acceptance and assertion of their American and Turkish identities. The paper then asks whether Turkish people of different historical, ethnic, geographical, and religious groups could give way to a shared cultural experience that would help construct the Turkish-American identities.

Keywords: Turkish-Americans- Diaspora- immigration-identity formation.