

Initial Settlers and Gender Norms: Evidence From the United States

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Abstract : The distinctive traits of early settlers at initial stages of institutional development may be crucial for cultural formation. In 1973, the cultural geographer Wilbur Zelinsky postulated this in his doctrine of "first effective settlement". There is however little empirical evidence supporting the role of early settlers in shaping culture over the long run. This paper tests this hypothesis by relating early settlers' culture to within state variation in gender norms in the United States. Settlers' culture is captured using past female labor force participation, women's suffrage, and financial rights at their place of origin. The paper documents the distinctive characteristics of settlers' populations and provide suggestive evidence in support of the transmission of gender norms across space and time. Results from this analysis show that women's labor supply is higher, in both the short and long run, in U.S. counties that historically hosted a larger settler population originating from places with favorable gender attitudes. Findings from this study shed new light on the importance of the characteristics of immigrants and their place of origin for cultural formation in hosting societies.

Keywords : female labor force participation, settlers, gender norms, cultural formation.

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