The publisher gratefully acknowledges the generous contribution to this book provided by the General Endowment Fund of the Associates of the University of California Press.

Legacies
The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
Berkeley  Los Angeles  London

RUSSELL SAGE FOUNDATION
New York
archives, and its Web site offers a fully documented data file from the study's first survey. We thank OPR's director, Marta Tienda, for her enthusiastic assistance and consistent support. Preparing the many versions of the following chapters and coordinating the thousand details of taking the manuscript to publication was the responsibility of Barbara McCabe. Barbara is our closest collaborator, whose grace, patience, and technical skills were key elements in the effort of conceiving, drafting, and revising each chapter. We can only hope that the final version of the book is up to the quality of her work.

Our wives, María Patricia and Irene, have been an integral part of the study, both as direct collaborators and as sources of indispensable support along a lengthy and often difficult road. They have our deepest affection for their loyalty and patience.

The final and most crucial recognition goes to the over 5,000 children and their immigrant families who are the subjects of this story. We learned what we know of the second generation from endless hours of talking to them and listening to their histories, worries, and dreams. The book will be justified if it succeeds in capturing, at least in part, the rich complexity of these families' lives and the gamut of experiences that they shared with us over the years.

Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut
Princeton and East Lansing
March 2000

Chapter 1

TWELVE STORIES

The following stories are real. The names are fictitious, but the places where they took place and the nationality of the participants are true. They provide a glimpse of the life of immigrant families in the United States today as it takes place in two of its main gateway cities. Both cities where the stories occurred—Miami and San Diego—have been thoroughly transformed by contemporary immigration but in ways more complex than meet the eye. That complexity is due, at least in part, to the very diverse flows of foreigners coming to each place and the distinct ways in which they have adapted to their new environment. These stories serve to illustrate that extraordinary diversity, and they will be used in later chapters to help frame and interpret general statistical results.

In part for this reason, we attempt no a priori organization of the narratives other than by the place where they took place. If the reader does not get past this first chapter, we at least want to leave with him or her a durable impression of who the newcomers to U.S. shores are, how varied are their attempts to make sense of their new reality, and what are the principal challenges facing their American-raised children.
Miami Stories

María de los Ángeles and Yvette Santana: August 1993

When María de los Ángeles, Yvette’s Cuban mother, arrived in New York’s Kennedy Airport in the 1970s, she experienced no trouble at all. Cubans were welcome at the time, and the immigration authorities gave her and her family their residency permit—the green card—on the spot. The troubles started after the family moved to Chicago. At first they lived among immigrants, but when María de los Ángeles’s father saved the money to buy a home in the suburbs, their new neighbors and her classmates did not take kindly to their presence. Blond and fair-skinned, María de los Ángeles meshed well in her new surroundings until she opened her mouth and heavily accented English poured forth. “Spic,” the kids called me. They used to yell, ‘Spic, get out of here, go back to where you belong.’ Once, a boy asked how come I was Cuban when I wasn’t black. Another wanted to know whether I had always been white or had turned white after coming to the United States. . . . They were so ignorant.”

María de los Ángeles married a young Cuban printer, Fermín, in Chicago, and Yvette was born there. The family could not “go home” as her neighbors had urged, but it did the next best thing, which was to leave Chicago for Miami. There, Fermín pooled their savings to set up a printing shop, and María de los Ángeles went to work for a local bank. Neither had a college education, but the family was on a clear upward path. By 1993, their combined earnings exceeded $50,000, and the house they had bought was neat, comfortable, and in a good part of town.

All of this had its effects on Yvette. In school, she has never been called names, never been taunted with ethnic slurs. Unlike her mother in Chicago, she speaks English fluently; more important, however, many of her teachers and most of her peers are also Cuban American. In this secure environment, Yvette has had time to drift. She wears smart clothes but wants jewelry and, at 16, a car. She does not see the need for college since jobs are plentiful for a bilingual girl like her in stores and offices close to home. María de los Ángeles says: “We are not really poor, but there are things I can’t give her because they are too expensive. . . . Besides, that’s not the way we were raised.”

The lack of motivation in her assimilated daughter is a cause of sorrow since she recalls all too well her own difficult path to get where she is. “Yvette may be able to get an office job through our Cuban friends, a receptionist or secretary maybe. She is lazy in her studies. She does not have the drive to become a professional.”

Melanie Fernández-Rey: September 1993

Milagros is Melanie’s mother by a previous marriage. She is currently living with Roberto, who has four children of his own. Roberto and Milagros are Nicaraguans who came to the United States in 1986, escaping the Sandinista revolution. They are not married but have been living together for eight years and share their rented two-bedroom apartment with four of their children. Two boys sleep in the living room. Melanie and her half-sister Marcela share one of the bedrooms. Despite the cramped quarters, the apartment is tidy and features new furniture.

Like many Nicaraguans, Milagros and Roberto have experienced rapid downward mobility in the United States. In Nicaragua, Milagros worked as a manager in an insurance company, and Roberto ran his own farm after getting a degree in agronomy. In Miami, Milagros has only advanced as far as a waitress job at Denny’s. She is now a cocktail waitress working for $6.00 an hour plus tips. He has been a busboy and now works delivering pizzas for $4.50 an hour without benefits.

The problem they face is their uncertain legal status. For years they have had a work permit but no guarantee of permanent residence. This made it impossible for the couple to obtain jobs commensurate with their education or to seek assistance in learning English. They simply worked at whatever jobs they could find, hoping for an end to their uncertain status. Milagros finally received approval of her request for permanent residency but is still awaiting her card to arrive and make it official. Roberto’s status is still up in the air.

In the meantime, Melanie has gone from grade to grade, growing fluent in English, gradually forgetting her home Spanish, and dreaming of a brilliant American life. Her modest circumstances seem to spur her ambition. She gets excellent grades and is determined to go to college. This is Milagros’s greatest cause of anguish because neither she nor Roberto has the means to pay for a college education. In the legal limbo where they live, there are no means to obtain outside assistance, and even with the new green card, prospects are dim. As Milagros puts it, “When children don’t want to continue studying, that’s one thing; you don’t worry too much. But to be unable to support your own child when she clearly has the ambition, it breaks your heart.”
Alone in her room, Melanie plucks away at her homework and dreams her dreams. She has recently become a member of her school’s cheerleading team. Her life becomes ever more American, oblivious of the tenuous hold of her family in their new country.

Aristide Maillol: August 1993

Being admitted into the home of Aristide Maillol in the Haitian section of Miami transports the visitor into a new reality. The location is American, but the essence is rural Haiti. Aristide’s mother speaks no English. Her eyes drift to the floor when explaining in Creole that her husband is hospitalized and that she had to leave her job as a maid at a local motel to attend to his needs. Both came as boat people and were granted temporary work permits under the federal Cuban-Haitian Entrant Program. Both have little education, and their earnings are minimal. There is consternation in the woman’s demeanor as she contemplates her situation.

In the tiny sitting area adjoining the front door, a large bookcase displays the symbols of family identity in an arrangement suitable for a shrine. Framed by paper flowers at the top is the painted portrait of Mrs. Maillol and her husband. Below, on three separate shelves, several photographs show Aristide’s brother and three sisters. The boy smiles confidently in the cap and gown of a high school graduate. The girls are displayed individually and in clusters, their eyes beaming, their attire fit for a celebration. Mixed with the photographs are the familiar trinkets that adorn most Haitian homes. Striking, however, is the inclusion of several trophies earned by the Maillol children in academic competitions.

At 17, Aristide’s brother has already been recruited by Yale University with a scholarship. Young Aristide, who is 15 and plans to be a lawyer, explains his brother’s and his own achievements as follows: “We are immigrants, and immigrants must work hard to overcome hardship. You can’t let anything stop you. I know there is discrimination, racism, but you can’t let that bother you. Everyone has problems... but God has brought us here, and God will lead us farther.” Sitting to his side, in her humble dress, the mother nods agreement. While the immediate situation looks bleak, her son gives her a firm promise for the future.

Armando and Luis Hernández: July 1995

For Armando Hernández Bueno, life in America has never been a bed of roses. An illegal immigrant at first, he managed to legalize his situation by marrying a woman from his native Dominican Republic who had acquired U.S. citizenship. Armando toiled at a series of menial jobs in New York before coming down to Miami in hopes of a better life. Things did not improve much, and discrimination became worse. Armando, a light mulatto, had thought himself white in his native country; in America, however, he became black.

The lowest point of his new life came when his son called 911. Luis was 13 at the time and, after five years in the United States, thoroughly acculturated. Early adolescence brought out the common rebelliousness of the age, compounded by Luis’s perceptions of his parents’ ways as old fashioned and authoritarian. The child became progressively distant as his parents complained of his poor school performance, pointed to their own hard life, and exhorted him to do better. One day leaving the supermarket, Armando ordered his son to carry the bags to their old car and wait for him there as he ran another errand. “I’m not your slave,” the child replied. “Carry them yourself.”

Armando responded as his own father would have done in his native Cibao—by whacking Luis twice across the ears and shaking him by the shoulders. “Until you grow up, you will do as you’re told. Who do you think you are?” he told his son. Luis complied with the order, but upon arriving at home, he called the police and denounced his father. Armando was taken to the police station and booked for child abuse. He had to appear before a magistrate and make bail. Only a sympathetic Spanish-speaking judge and the fact that this was his first brush with the law saved him from doing time. Armando did not seek revenge on his teenage son. Wisely, he understood that Luis had simply absorbed the ways of his new environment. As a father, however, he was quite alarmed at the permissiveness and loss of family values that he saw around him.

So Armando bid his time until the following summer when school let out. During vacation, it was customary for the family to travel back to Cibao for recreation and to see the grandparents. So Luis saw nothing unusual in the travel preparations, not suspecting that it would put an end to his American education. Alerted by Armando, his parents prepared to receive their grandchild in a tight embrace of love and discipline, Dominican style. No higher authority could be called there to overthrow parental rule. A tutor was engaged to freshen up Luis’s Spanish and prepare him for enrollment in a private school come September. Neither tutor nor grandparents had to spare the rod if things got out of hand with the child.
It is now two years since that one-way trip to the Dominican Republic. Luis's parents report that after much initial crying and protest, he adapted to the new situation and is doing well. He is finishing his last year of secondary school and is preparing to enter the national university in Santo Domingo. Armando says that he will eventually bring his son back to the United States when he has matured sufficiently. This means at least two years of college in the Dominican Republic. "This is the strangest country in the world: the richest and most powerful but all twisted in knots as far as children are concerned," Armando says. "We had to send him back. It was either that or lose him to the gangs."

Mary Patterson: February 1995

Mary Patterson had a dilemma. Being black, she was treated in most places as part of the American black population. Clerks followed her in stores to prevent her from shoplifting. Whites from whom she asked a service or bought something added that extra measure of curtness to the transaction—all of this despite her family's home in Coral Gables (an affluent section of Miami) and the achievements of her parents, both successful professionals from Trinidad. When white people knew she was West Indian, their demeanor changed. "Ah, you are Jamaican, hard-working people. Good English, too," they would say. Never mind that Trinidad and Jamaica are different countries.

Mary consciously sought to project herself as second-generation Trinidadian—or, at least, West Indian—by carrying a key chain with the name and map of her parents' country and by caring for her attire and body language. In a busy world, few people paid attention to such details, and she continued enduring the same aggravations. Mary noticed, however, that when Patricia, her mother, spoke, the situation changed instantly. Patricia uses firm, well-modulated, heavily British-accented English—the English that she learned as a child in Trinidad. Having grown up in American schools, Mary speaks American English to which she has added local black inflections. She did this deliberately, searching for acceptance among her black school peers in junior high.

But now, approaching high school graduation and seeking a job to help pay for college, the situation is different. That West Indian identity must be conveyed to employers. It must be there, up front, as her best defense against standard white racism. Mary's solution was eminently practical: She has been taking lessons from her mother, seeking to regain an island accent. "My mother is so self-assured. She stands tall everywhere... at work, when shopping in the stores. I need some of that," Mary says. While she considers herself American, the question of language is just too important to be left to itself. "Blacks in this country carry a lot of baggage, like the way they dress and speak. I respect them, but I don't have to carry that load. I'm an immigrant." Despite discrimination, Mary is determined to succeed. She plans to surpass her mother, who is head nurse at a local hospital, by attending medical school.

Efrén Montejo: May 1994

Efrén Montejo is a senior at Belén Prep, an old Jesuit school in Havana transplanted to Miami in the 1960s. Efrén's parents arrived during those years and were quickly granted political asylum. His father studied civil engineering in Cuba and continued his career without pause in the United States. He is now a naturalized U.S. citizen and works as an engineer for a large Cuban construction company in Miami. His mother graduated from college and now works as a nurse in the office of a plastic surgeon. The couple's combined income exceeds $100,000. The family has never lived anywhere in the United States but Miami.

Both parents speak English fluently, but they try to speak Spanish at home so that Efrén and his younger brother Luis do not lose the language. In the public school that Efrén previously attended, he was rapidly forgetting Spanish. When his parents' economic situation allowed them to pay the steep Belén tuition, he was transferred. Instruction in Belén is bilingual, and children are taught Cuban history and geography. Though Efrén's Spanish is now much better, he still prefers English when talking to his friends.

The Montejos see themselves as Cuban Americans, and both parents and children have high aspirations for the future. Efrén plans to become a physician like his grandfather in Cuba. Since his grades are good and Belén has an excellent track record for placing its graduates in good universities, his parents are confident that he will reach his goal. They intend to assist him financially both in college and in medical school. "It will be a big sacrifice for us, but we can do it and will do it for him," his mother says.

Mr. Montejo would have preferred to raise his children in Cuba since he sees the United States as too permissive and too full of dangers for children. Nevertheless, he is grateful to the new country for the opportunities to succeed in his career and is satisfied with the progress made by his children in school. Surrounded by other Cuban Americans in
Belén and with strong support from his family, Efrén is growing up fully bicultural and with solid confidence in his future. He feels secure and reports that he has never felt discriminated against. His counselors have already started to help him select a college. For Efrén, the world is his oyster.

San Diego Stories

Jorge, Olga, Miguel Angel, and Estela Cardozo: January 1994

Jorge and Olga Cardozo and their two teenage children, Miguel Angel and Estela, live in a small house they recently bought in south central San Diego. The neighborhood, populated by Mexican immigrants like themselves and African Americans, is poor and run down, with several vacant lots filled with tumbleweeds; a boarded-up crack house is across the alley from the Cardozo home. Drug dealers hang out on corners down the block from the Mexicans, close to a seedy commercial district. The Cardozos used to give bread to the crack addicts on the street as part of their evangelical outreach to the poor, but now they, too, have boarded up the windows that face the crack house to avoid seeing anything going on there.

Mr. Cardozo and his family entered the country illegally 14 years ago in the trunk of a car. He had failed in his first attempt to cross on foot and was hospitalized afterwards. Their original goal was to make enough money to buy a house in their hometown of Michoacán; smiling, the Cardozos say they accomplished the first part of their goal—they bought the house—but are still here. They became legal permanent residents under the 1986 federal amnesty for illegal immigrants. Jorge works as a busboy in a tourist restaurant, a job he got through a Mexican friend and has held for 10 years. Olga works at a small Chinese-owned laundry, ironing clothes. They are poor but extremely proud of their son, Miguel Angel, expecting him to become a civil engineer. Miguel Angel gets good grades in school, was recently elected to the honor society, and is recognized by his teachers as a serious student.

Living in a combat zone of a neighborhood, the family has withdrawn from it. The parents speak very little English. The mother's friends are a mix of Latin Americans, almost all drawn from her church—Olga became a devout Pentecostal after coming to the United States—but the father has only Mexican friends, as does their son.

Miguel Angel stays home, playing video games and attending to his school work, rather than risk going outside and getting harassed by gangs. He told a painful story of riding the new bike his parents had given him and being surrounded by gang members who tried to steal it from him. They ripped off a gold chain instead, but ever since he keeps his bike locked up inside the house and does not use it.

Miguel Angel is angrier about experiences of anti-Mexican prejudice he has had in school and elsewhere. The family used to live in an apartment building where Jorge was a resident manager yet was frequently abused by the tenants. One day Miguel Angel's mother came home and found him speechless with rage. He said he could not stand seeing his father insulted so and that he would get a gun and shoot the neighbors. This event led Olga to insist that they move.

His father wants Miguel Angel “to be better than [him]” and not work all day and come home exhausted. “No one wants to wash dishes, that’s the truth,” he says, but he is proud that his family has never been on public assistance. Olga worries that her son does not want to go to church and sometimes talks back loudly; she also worries about Miguel Angel's younger sister, Estela, who is more rebellious and dresses gang style. Miguel Angel, for his part, continues to plan on becoming an engineer, but his biggest worry is economic. Sometimes, he says, it seems that his parents work just to pay the bills and never help him get ahead.

Quy Nguyen: December 1987

Quy Nguyen is a 19-year-old Vietnamese student in her first year at a local university. Her family, including her father's parents, left Vietnam in 1975, when Quy was 7 years old. In their recent move from Texas to San Diego, the grandparents and other kin stayed behind. Quy's brothers are enrolled in colleges in Texas, where they pursue computer science and premed courses of study. Eventually the grandparents will resettle in California as part of the father's plan of family reunification. Quy's parents are Catholic, and both are college educated. The father has attended community college in the United States and now works in the computer field. The mother—who had seven children born in Vietnam and two more in the United States—is a seamstress and does alterations for a department store.

Quy talked about her oldest brother's educational history and its significance for the rest of them: “We were not really into academic things until my brother graduated third in his high school class. He ended up
being third without really trying or anything. And so my parents felt that now that he's gone though it, he knows the system. That sort of opened our eyes. There was not that much pressure to do very well until then; once my brother did so well, that started us off... and everybody followed. We kind of knew the system. But the key thing is... how the older ones start off, because if the older children start on the wrong foot, it's very hard to get the younger ones in the right track. I have seen that happen, even to my relatives.” With responsibility for tutoring shifted down the sibling line, the entire family becomes a mini-school system.

Quy's second-oldest brother graduated from his Houston high school as class valedictorian. Her third-oldest brother graduated fourth in his class. And Quy herself was co-valedictorian: “It was a very close race with a Korean girl. We had been friends since the sixth grade, and we studied together, and she was also pressured a lot by her parents.” Quy remained in Houston during her senior year, after her parents moved to San Diego, so that she could stay in the race to become valedictorian—competing not only against her Korean friend but also against the record of her brothers.

Quy believes that the reason for her studiousness is to be found in “the nature of the family” and involves a combination of competition and cooperation: “To us there's always the competition. There's always challenge... each of us urging each other to do better... It creates a really neat atmosphere. And then there's a certain feeling that you get when you're trying to help younger brothers and sisters.” During all her years in junior and senior high school, her parents never met her teachers. They assume that schools have their authority and that when their children are at school, teachers are in charge. Parents support the idea of education but only at home.

Quy is now a freshman at the local branch of the University of California (UC), majoring in biochemistry and aspiring to go to medical school. At UC she was surprised at the number of Vietnamese students, and she hasn't done as well as she had hoped. “There are a lot more Vietnamese than I expected. They make it harder, because there's a lot more competition, really. The majority of Vietnamese are either enrolled in engineering or in science or in something premed, like biology or biochemistry, to get into medical school. And the Vietnamese study all the time, every time you see them, they're always... studying, or talking to the TAs and stuff.”

The single-mindedness with which Vietnamese students pursue technical fields also reflects their English-language handicap. The Vietnam-ese want to compete and to win, but they can't succeed against American students in English-based courses. Quy remembers that because of the language handicap, she and her brothers and sisters were held back a grade by the nuns at the Catholic school they first attended in Houston, and she still feels cheated out of that year.

She recalls that “the one thing that gave me satisfaction was math, because in Vietnam you were taught at a much faster pace. I remember the things that I learned in second grade were not taught to the students here until the fourth or fifth grade.” So “math is the language that the Vietnamese do know, where they feel they're not handicapped.” She calculated her way to the co-valedictorian honor, she explained, by focusing on accelerated math and science classes that yielded extra grade points for her grade point average, unlike classes such as history that did not.

Bennie and Jennifer Montoya: October 1995

The Montoyas live in a predominantly Filipino, middle-class neighborhood in San Diego with their four U.S.-born children and Mrs. Montoya's elderly mother. Their home is well furnished, with a huge television set in the living room. The two oldest children, Bennie and Jennifer, attend different high schools in the San Diego area—but not the one that is closest to their home. Mrs. Montoya says that the neighborhood school is “the worst place to send a child right now,” due to the poor quality of the teaching and administrative staff. So the kids have to travel long distances to get to other schools.

The parents both hail from Manila. Mrs. Montoya is a registered nurse—she trained in the Philippines—and works at a local hospital. Mr. Montoya is employed as a manufacturing technician; unlike his wife, he did not finish college, but he says that education is very important. “The Filipino way is to have a good education for [the] kids. The kids can then help their parents. They show the world that they are good parents.” Still, he seems ambivalent in his career expectations for the children. He wants them to get good grades in school but does not encourage Bennie (a senior) or Jennifer (a junior) to seek to attend a top university or to go to college outside the San Diego area.

Mrs. Montoya says that her daughter Jennifer has the usual problems of wanting to socialize more, and her grades suffer as a result. “There are gangs anywhere you go, there's drugs anywhere you go, you teach your kids to do what's right and hope that they find good friends, that's
all you can really do.” Jennifer minimizes those concerns: At her current high school, she said, the kids break down along social lines (socialites, brains, dropouts) rather than ethnic lines, but her junior high was majority Filipino, and social life was shaped by Filipino “gangs,” organized by where they lived. “At the time everybody was like ‘clique-ing’ together; it was totally like a bunch of kids saying, ‘We’re together now and we’ll be called so-and-so.’”

Mr. Montoya is dissatisfied with Bennie’s academic performance, which has deteriorated lately despite their efforts to send him to a better school—“I would like that A, if possible.” Bennie’s GPA in ninth grade was 3.2, but in his junior year he managed only a C average. According to Mr. Montoya, an inability to communicate is one of the difficulties he has with his son. Another problem is “the materialism of the youth in this country. Sometimes Bennie has an attitude, the way he dresses, the expensive things he wants.”

Bennie and Jennifer have lost much of their ability to speak the parents’ (and grandmother’s) native tongue, Tagalog. Ironically, Bennie is now taking Spanish at school even though a Tagalog class was also offered. But Bennie is not motivated and recently received a D in that class. When asked why Bennie cannot speak Tagalog well, his father replies: “They’re embarrassed to speak it because they think we’re making fun of them.” Bennie shrugged and said simply, matter-of-factly, “I do all the customs.”

Sophy Keng: November 1987–June 1988

Sophy Keng, an 18-year-old Cambodian girl, had just turned 6 when Phnom Penh fell in 1975 and her life was turned upside down. The apartment complex where she now lives is rundown, but numerous Cambodian children are happily running about. Although the complex is shabby, the inside of Sophy’s apartment is neat. Despite the obvious poverty of the place, a corner of the living room boasts a stereo system, a color TV set, and pictures of Sophy’s roommate and her children.

Sophy’s father was of mixed Vietnamese, Chinese, and Khmer ancestry, and her mother was of Thai and Khmer background. In 1974 her father, a soldier, disappeared and was not heard from again. Her mother had been a clerk in Cambodia with about a seventh-grade education. After the Khmer Rouge came, her mother and two siblings were sent along with Sophy to a small village in Cambodia where they stayed until 1979. However, during this time Sophy was separated from her family and forced to work on a farm from 5 A.M. to 6 P.M. every day. She was fed only gruel, which consisted of a little rice and water: “Everybody got skinny.” One day she was lonely for her mother and left the farm without permission to go see her. When she returned, she was beaten with a branch so severely that she still bears the scars on her back. She witnessed killings and feared for her own life. She recalls the horror of being called out of bed one night and taken to a field with sharp stakes sticking out of holes in the ground. There she saw babies thrown up in the air and impaled to death as they fell onto those stakes.

In 1979, her family fled to Thailand, where they lived in several refugee camps until the early 1980s, when they were resettled in San Diego and sponsored by an American family. When Sophy lived with her mother in San Diego, as she did until recently, her mother received supplemental security income (SSI) cash assistance from the welfare department. But her mother was distraught and had difficulty taking care of her family. Sophy and her younger brother had received cash assistance through the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. Her older sister stayed in school for a year but dropped out. Her brother was supposed to be in the eighth grade, but at the time we met with Sophy, he was missing after having run away from home.

While in high school, Sophy was married unofficially in the Cambodian fashion, got pregnant, and bore a son. Her “husband” has since disappeared. After her baby was born, Sophy moved in with her girlfriend. She doesn’t want to move back to her mother’s apartment. “At home it’s lonely; nobody visits me there.” Her mother sends her $100 per month, and her friend helps her out when she can. She is thinking of applying for AFDC herself, but she doesn’t know how that is done. She does recall seeing the social worker when she was pregnant but hasn’t seen one since then.

She likes school and would like to finish high school. But it’s very difficult now with the baby. Her mother is not a reliable resource, so she is often unable to find a baby-sitter during school days, causing Sophy to stay home and thus resulting in school absences. She claims she got good grades before the baby (A’s and B’s), but this semester it’s been all F’s. When asked about her career goals, she selected “clerk” because her mother was one and so was her grandfather. But other than this, she has no idea about future occupations.

About her adoptive country, she says: “How could I be American? I black skin, black eyes, black hair.” She expresses this very emphatically and insisted on defining American in racial terms. When asked about
how she has been treated by Americans, she eluded the question but later repeated that “my English not good enough and my skin color black.” She speaks Khmer most of the time, though her girlfriend does speak English, and she is seen by the black assistant manager of the apartment complex as the tenant who can speak English best. Sophy is distraught and confused about both her past and her future. Life is something that has happened to Sophy, and she experiences it as largely outside her control.

Yolanda and Carlos Muñoz: March 1994

Carlos Muñoz was born in San Diego, the only child of Rafael and Yolanda Muñoz. Both of Carlos’ parents were born in Mexico, but they met and were married in the United States. They divorced several years ago, and Carlos alternates living with his mother and father. His father is an attorney and lives with his new wife in a middle-class suburban home. His mother has long worked as a teacher’s aide in the local school district; she lives in a tidy house in a working-class, mostly Mexican area near downtown San Diego. She periodically takes Carlos on trips to Mexico.

Mrs. Muñoz graduated from a high school in the same district where she is now employed, and she is knowledgeable about the educational system here. She is happy with Carlos’ high school—which is not overcrowded and understaffed as his junior high school had been—but is worried about his school performance, saying that he lacks ganas (desire) and is not spending enough time or effort on his studies. “He tries to do everything fast. . . . He’s getting an F in biology and C’s in most other classes.” Of her career hopes for Carlos, she says that “it would be perfect for him to be a lawyer, but he needs to work harder. I don’t think that he can do it.” His father has now taken a more active role in Carlos’ education, hoping to get him on the right track again.

At school, Carlos is involved with the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) organization. He calls himself Chicano and identifies with La Raza. His father, according to Mrs. Muñoz, also identifies as Chicano. But she thinks of herself as Mexican, saying that “even though I’m a U.S. citizen, I am Mexican because I was born there.” She does not consider herself political, like her son and ex-husband. She would rather that Carlos identified as Mexican, too, to show he is proud of his Mexican heritage. This has caused some discord between Carlos and his mother, though she understands why he feels as

he does. “Now that he started with MEChA,” she comments, “he feels that he has to fight for stuff.”

Carlos has been upset by the anti-immigrant climate in California, especially against illegals. He has witnessed Border Patrol sweeps through their neighborhood. And not long ago he was questioned on the bus on route to his father’s house, because he had been seated next to a Mexican woman detained by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) during one of its routine checks of buses heading north from San Diego. Carlos also has more Mexican friends (recién llegados, or recent immigrants) at his high school now than he did when he was in junior high. Although Mrs. Muñoz has a much less sympathetic appraisal of recent immigrants than her son, she welcomes the change in his peer group. It is good, she says, because now Carlos (who cannot read or write in Spanish) is learning more of the language than ever before.


Boua Cha was an 18-year-old Hmong student completing her senior year at a San Diego High School. She arrived in the U.S. in 1980 at the age of 10 and now speaks English effortlessly and without an accent. She is the second child of her father’s first family, which consisted of eight children at the time they fled Laos in 1975. A ninth died at childbirth, along with Boua’s mother, in a refugee camp in Thailand when Boua was 8 years old. The father remarried and has six additional children with his second wife.

Because their family was so large, they split it in half and lived in separate two-bedroom apartments a block away from each other. Her father works for low wages as a laborer, her grandparents are on general assistance, and the bulk of the household income comes from AFDC. Boua lost her AFDC eligibility when she turned 18, forcing her to work part time to help make up for the loss of household income. But as the oldest female, Boua also had the responsibility of running her household, including shopping, cooking, cleaning, and other duties that her mother would have managed—in addition to being a full-time high school student. This required her to get up at 5 A.M. each weekday to prepare breakfast for the family, as her classes started at 7:30 A.M.; after school she cooked and served the evening meal, and she attended to her homework only after all household chores were done.

Of her siblings, one sister had a 4.0 GPA in school; her older brother had a 3.5 GPA, and she herself had a 3.3 average in senior high. She
became a member of a local Mormon church (which she joined on her own) and cultivated close ties with some of her teachers. Despite her heavy family burdens, Boua seemed poised to succeed. Indeed, she graduated with honors, was admitted to the local state university, received some financial aid, and was supported by teachers and members of her church. Yet soon after her graduation she met a Hmong man from Fresno and three weeks later married him and eloped north. He hadn’t finished high school and worked as a laborer.

Church sponsors who had placed great hopes in her college education even thought of filing a suit to prevent the marriage but were persuaded by clan leaders that Boua was old enough to make her own choices. Besides, these elders pointed out that supporting a female through college is a poor economic investment because daughters have no obligation to support members of their blood family and instead become contributors to her husband’s family. In traditional Hmong society, girls are seen as “lost” upon marriage and are devalued accordingly. According to one young Hmong activist, cases like Boua’s are all too common and amount to a “tragic waste of talent.”

Two years later we caught up with Boua at her modest home in Fresno. She said she felt happier and freer but was ashamed that she had let down those who had helped her in San Diego; she had one baby and was expecting another. She still vaguely hoped to enroll in community college classes and to become a writer some day, but not under her present circumstances, without the financial wherewithal or the support of her family and community.

Chapter 2

THE NEW AMERICANS
An Overview

Immigration Yesterday and Today

Like the early 1900s, the final decades of the twentieth century witnessed a growing wave of immigration that is once again remaking the fabric of American society. Because of its recentness, attention has focused on the adult newcomers—their places of origin, qualifications, and legal status. As is now well known, the bulk of the new immigration comes from Latin America and Asia; it includes a sizable number of professionals and entrepreneurs along with many poorly educated manual workers and comprises both legal residents and a large, underground migrant population.¹

Less attention has been paid so far to another key aspect of the new immigration, namely, its transformation over time into a variety of new ethnic groups as the first generation gets settled and the second generation comes of age. The experiences of adult immigrants are important for the future of these ethnicities, but even more decisive is the fate of their children. Immigrants always have a point of reference in the countries they left behind, and if they are unsuccessful, they can go back. Many actually return home on their own after accumulating sufficient resources. In contrast, the U.S.-born second generation grows up American, and the vast majority of them are here to stay. Their common point of reference is life in this country, and their relative educational and eco-
them dominate the process of adaptation and its prospects of success. Placed in an impoverished community and surrounded by a hostile world, even the most motivated individuals flounder, despite brave declarations to the contrary. This is what the consistently negative effects associated with disadvantaged nationalities tell us.

On the whole, the new second generation seems to be achieving and adapting well, as indicated by its superior academic performance relative to native-parentage students. Common stories of success support immigrant parents’ goals and give reason to anticipate that most, if not all, members of this emerging population will successfully join the American mainstream in the future. Set against this outcome is the passage of time, which diminishes the early immigrant drive, especially among children experiencing dissonant acculturation, and bad schools and weak families that make others abandon their educational goals as unattainable dreams. This combination of factors means that while the second generation as a whole is moving ahead and thus providing grounds for general optimism, some children are doing much better than others. Adapting and achieving in a new society cannot be attributed to any single factor; it is the way that individual and contextual forces are joined in a particular time and place that affects individual outcomes in a manner that is complex but not chaotic. This joining of forces underlies the place that different immigrant communities take in the process of segmented assimilation and, hence, their eventual standing in the American hierarchies of wealth, status, and power.

Chapter 10

CONCLUSION

Mainstream Ideologies and the Long-Term Prospects of Immigrant Communities

Ronald Unz, the Jewish-American millionaire who spearheaded California’s successful Proposition 227, the so-called English for the Children initiative, explained his support for the measure as follows: “As a strong believer in American assimilationism, I had a long interest in bilingual education. Inspired in part by the example of my own mother, who was born in Los Angeles into a Yiddish-speaking immigrant home but had quickly and easily learned English as a young child, I had never understood why children were being kept for years in native-language classes, or why such programs had continued to exist and even expand after decades of obvious failure.”

As we saw in Chapter 6, the supposedly bilingual programs against which Unz railed are not bilingual education at all but a potpourri of efforts to gradually mainstream foreign students into English-only classes. There is actually a dearth of certified bilingual teachers in a state where well over one million students speak a language other than English at home, and for many of these languages, there are no bilingual teachers at all. Furthermore, because of bureaucratic inertia and perhaps the interest of some school administrations in continuing to receive funds, these programs ended up keeping many students in second-rate remedial classes, especially at the secondary level. Not surprisingly, English for the Children garnered the support of many immigrant parents,
tired of such inferior instruction. Some of the parents had actually picketed the schools to force them to teach their children exclusively in English.

A thoughtful conservative, Unz sought to distance his initiative from the anti-immigrant activists capitalizing on the fears of white, middle-class voters in California. He read well the mood of these descendants of earlier European immigrants in the wake of the 1992 Los Angeles riots: “Terrified of social decay and violence, and trapped by collapsed property values, many whites felt they could neither run nor hide. Under these circumstances, attention inevitably began to focus on the tidal force of foreign immigration... Public sentiment was [however] quite confused on the matter... To most people, “illegal immigrant” was simply a synonym for ‘poor immigrant’ or ‘bad immigrant’ or perhaps even ‘Mexican immigrant.’”

This was the frame of mind that led white Californian voters to support overwhelmingly Proposition 187, the so-called Save our State proposal. That measure conveyed a direct message to immigrants that they were less than welcome in the Golden State. Accordingly, as seen in Chapter 7, it triggered a strong reactive formation among the foreign born and their children that produced levels of political mobilization and ethnic reassertiveness seldom seen before. Unz apparently wished to avoid the mean-spiritedness of 187 since his English for the Children proposal did not aim at excluding immigrants but at incorporating them as rapidly as possible into the American mainstream. This goal is to be accomplished by abandoning foreign-language instruction and immersing immigrant children into English-only classes.

Two Mainstream Ideologies

The politics surrounding Propositions 187 and 227 in California are useful to give us a glimpse into the way the mainstream native population understands migration and its consequences. Throughout the preceding chapters, we have delved into the worlds of immigrant parents and their children, seeking to understand how they cope with the challenges of their new environment and how they struggle to carve a niche in it. In this final chapter, we turn the tables, exploring the dominant views among the native citizenry and how they affect the chances for success of immigrant adaptation efforts.

The experiences of California are strategic because they provide a blueprint for the reaction of the electorate elsewhere in the country as the number of immigrants inevitably grows. The political environment leading to the vote in these two referenda was marked by three key features: first, the central importance attributed to immigration by native voters as they became increasingly aware of its power to transform the state demographically and culturally; second, the growing fears expressed by or on behalf of white voters and crystallized in such expressions as the “end of white America” and California becoming a “minority white” state; and third, the fact that neither of the main ideological positions that competed for support among this electorate offers a viable blueprint for successful immigrant adaptation. In other words, the political stances that appear understandable and appealing among middle-class suburbanites would not lead to successful solution of the immigration “problem” but to its exacerbation. Instead of a viable process of integration of the foreign born, policies derived from these ideologies would lead exactly to the opposite outcome.

The first ideology, represented by the drafters of Proposition 187, can be labeled “intransigent nativism.” It seeks to stop all or most immigration, send unauthorized immigrants back as quickly as possible, and put immigrants who remain in the United States on notice that they occupy an inferior position, ineligible for the privileges of citizens. The second ideology, represented by Unz and supporters of Proposition 227, can be labeled “forceful assimilationism.” It seeks to mainstream immigrants and their children as far and as swiftly as possible, in the model of Yiddish-speaking mothers who left everything behind in their quest for English fluency and social acceptance. According to its proponents, this policy will reunify anew the state and the nation, avoiding the fractious influence of multiple languages and cultures.

Supporters of intransigent nativism look mainly to the present. They give expression to the growing discomfort of a settled, middle-class citizenry that sees itself increasingly surrounded and even outnumbered by foreigners. Advocates of this position seldom stop to reflect on the origins of contemporary immigration. They do not know or care to know that these origins are closely intertwined with the activities of U.S. corporate capitalism or the colonialist ventures of the U.S. government. The deliberate recruitment of workers by American interests in the interior of the Mexican republic since the nineteenth century, the creation and repeated extension of the Bracero labor contract program during the twentieth century, and the creation of numerous legal loopholes by Congress to give employers uninterrupted access to this flow of foreign workers after the end of the Bracero Program do not figure high in the
nativists' story. And neither does the colonialist occupation of the Philippines by U.S. forces at the beginning of the twentieth century or U.S. interventions in southeast Asian internal conflicts that set the stage for massive refugee outflows.\textsuperscript{8}

Intransigent nativism pays attention only to the present consequences of these processes as they give rise to fear and discomfort among the white suburban population. Accordingly, it lashes out not against the sources of these outflows—U.S. agribusiness, corporate interests, and the framers of U.S. foreign policy—but against the immigrants themselves, seeking to eliminate their presence. The restoration of social peace, from the perspective of the framers of the Save Our State proposition, requires rendering the foreign element once again invisible.

The second ideological position is less irrational. Forceful assimilationism does look at the past but less to find the origins of contemporary immigrant flows than to search for ways in which prior waves were separated from their cultures and integrated into the American mainstream. The nation's success in absorbing so many foreigners in the past is attributed to its relentless hostility to the perpetuation of cultural enclaves and the immersion of foreign children into an English-only environment that made Americans out of them in the course of a single generation.\textsuperscript{7} Assimilationists want the future to mirror this past as a proven way to restore cultural unity and peace. Just as Yiddish-speaking mothers had to leave their culture and language behind, so should Mexican immigrants and Vietnamese refugees today.

Both positions have consequences for immigrant families and their children. To the extent that it is translated into policy, intransigent nativism yields heightened discrimination and new barriers to successful adaptation. It also triggers a defensive reaction in which self-identities and political mobilizations are structured in opposition to a native mainstream perceived as hostile. As demonstrated by numerous historical examples, nativism is likely to produce both self-fulfilling and self-defeating prophecies.\textsuperscript{8} Self-fulfilling prophecies arise because discrimination and external barriers encourage labor market failure, poverty, weaker communities, and the rise of an oppositional stance among foreign groups who could have adapted successfully in a less hostile environment. Self-defeating prophecies come about because the effort to "put immigrants in their place" and return society to its culturally integrated past results in exactly the opposite situation—greater ethnic polarization, greater conflict, and the emergence of impoverished and embittered groups at the bottom of society.

The preceding chapters have presented consistent evidence of how a mode of incorporation marked by a hostile governmental and societal reception yields negative outcomes both for immigrant adults and children. Adults are unable or less able to put their human capital to use; it becomes more difficult to forge solidary communities that can support parental control and promote high expectations for the future. Children's perceptions of the surrounding society become more threatening, their academic aspirations and achievements suffer, and they become more preoccupied with issues of ethnic identity and reassertiveness than with the achievement of high goals through individual effort.

Although less traumatic, forceful assimilationism also has negative consequences, both individual and collective. Policies derived from this ideology delegitimize the culture and language of parents, thus promoting dissonant acculturation. By instilling in children the sense that their parents' language is inferior and should be abandoned in favor of English, schools help drive a wedge across generations, weakening parental efforts to preserve a common cultural memory. As seen in Chapter 6, immersion programs can prove highly traumatic and lead to maladaptive outcomes. A common result is limited bilingualism, in which immigrant children move away from their parents' language and culture without having acquired full command of English. Self-esteem, educational expectations, and academic achievement suffer accordingly.

By remaining fixed on the past, assimilationists neglect the major changes that have taken place in the world and in the U.S. economy during the last twenty-five years. A century ago, immigrants came from remote lands to fill the labor needs of a rapidly industrializing country. Few other ties linked sending nations with the United States. At present, sending countries are increasingly part of a single global web with the United States at its center.\textsuperscript{9} In this new world order where multiple economic, political, and cultural ties bind nations more closely to one another, it is not clear that the rapid extinction of foreign languages is in the interest of individual citizens or of society as a whole. In an increasingly interdependent global system, the presence of pools of citizens able to communicate fluently in English plus another language and to bridge the cultural gap among nations represents an important collective resource.

Despite being grounded on thoughtful reflection on immigration history, Unz's Proposition 227 is designed to accomplish exactly the opposite. Despite its moderation, its vision is ultimately reactionary. It wants
an America as it was in the 1920s, a relatively isolated society, not as it must be in the new millennium, after it successfully emerged as the core of the global system. In the process, old-line assimilationism undermines the very forces of parental authority and ambition that can overcome the barriers to successful adaptation and forge productive and self-respecting citizens out of the new second generation.

A Third Way: Selective Acculturation and Bilingualism

The findings from our longitudinal study consistently point to the benefits of selective acculturation. This path is closely intertwined with preservation of fluent bilingualism and linked, in turn, with higher self-esteem, higher educational and occupational expectations, and higher academic achievement. From a theoretical standpoint, these relationships are reasonable. Children who learn the language and culture of their new country without losing those of the old have a much better understanding of their place in the world. They need not clash with their parents as often or feel embarrassed by them because they are able to bridge the gap across generations and value their elders’ traditions and goals. Selective acculturation forges an intergenerational alliance for successful adaptation that is absent among youths who have severed bonds with their past in the pursuit of acceptance by their native peers.10

By the same token, members of the second generation who are American without having abandoned their roots are in a position to make a significant contribution to society by dint of their ability to communicate in other languages and comprehend other cultures. In global cities, such as New York, Los Angeles, and Miami, bilingualism is commonly a prerequisite for employment. The same is true for global corporations. Still, as seen in Chapter 6, selective acculturation, as indexed by fluent bilingualism, is exceptional; the normative path continues to be monolingualism and monoculturalism.

Despite its advantages, selective acculturation has no political constituency. For nativists and assimilationists alike, anything that reeks of preservation of foreign ways is suspicious and should be made to disappear. For assimilationists, this is accomplished by the surrender of immigrants’ language and cultures; for nativists, by the removal of the immigrants themselves. The reactive formation process triggered by nativist policies does not represent selective acculturation but marks the start of a far more problematic outcome. As seen in Chapter 7, children of immigrants can abandon hyphenated identities that incorporate their past and present (i.e., Mexican-American) in favor of a purely nationalist stance (i.e., Mexican) in response to attacks against their origins and culture. Subsequent ethnic mobilizations under foreign flags are part of the self-fulfilling prophecy prompted by nativist policies. In turn, the spectacle of thousands marching under these banners adds to the fears of middle-class suburbanites in a vicious spiral.11

Selective acculturation requires a socially and politically supportive environment where learning of English and American culture takes place in a paced fashion, without losing valuable cultural resources in turn. In addition to other shortcomings of American public education documented by the recent literature, public schools tend to discourage rather than support selective acculturation.12 In the absence of such support, achievement of this outcome is at present in the hands of immigrant families and co-ethnic communities. A good example, revisited in previous chapters, is the pre-1980 Cuban exile community in southern Florida. This group was able to construct a solidary and institutionally diversified ethnic community that includes a well-developed system of bilingual private schools. Children attending such schools are most likely to remain fluent bilinguals, and this outcome is accompanied by high levels of self-esteem, high ambition, and a solid academic record.

The type of education imparted by these schools is worth attention as a viable model for the institutional promotion of selective acculturation. However, as seen in Chapter 9, not all Cuban children attend bilingual private schools. In fact, only a minority do, and these are mostly children of older exiles. Those whose parents came during or after the Mariel boatlift are more likely to enroll in the public school system. Conditions for selective acculturation are weakened accordingly. Ironically, it is children attending public schools who are most likely to remain trapped within the Cuban ethnic enclave as they drop out of school in search of early employment.

Asian parents have not been able to create bilingual school systems, and the smaller size of their communities has made collective support for second-generation bilingualism more difficult. While fewer Chinese, Korean, or Vietnamese children turn out fluent bilinguals, there are signs of selective acculturation in the support that tight ethnic communities provide to parental authority, the transmission of a strong achievement drive across generations, and the remarkable academic
performance of these youths. As Nghi Van Nguyen stated in Chapter 4, the Vietnamese family is "like a corporation," and their mutual assistance, coupled with the decisive support from the community, leads to sustained academic effort even when bilingual skills are dissipated.

Assimilationism sustains a vision of an integrated society composed of well-behaved citizens who share key values and normative commitments. There is nothing wrong with that vision, but the proposed way of achieving it is mistaken. One does not get there by pressuring immigrants and their children into a uniform mold but by making use of the values and resources that they themselves have brought. These are the resources that provide second-generation youths with the necessary sense of self-worth and normative guidance to succeed in the face of multiple external challenges. The irony of the situation is that many immigrant families are doing for American society what it will not do for itself: raising law-abiding, achievement-oriented, and bilingual citizens in the teeth of the obstacles stemming from intransigent nativism and forceful assimilation.

The Mexican Case

The first girl born in California in 2000 was born to Mexican parents. She was named Anayeli de Jesús. Her parents, Elena and Javier, came from Mexico in the 1990s looking for a better life and hope the same for their daughter: "To be a good student and to go to the university."


"If one talks out the Mexicans, there will be no evidence for segmented assimilation." This is a statement often heard among immigration specialists. It is buttressed by the size of the Mexican-origin population, by far the largest among contemporary immigrant groups, and by its low human capital. Some observers believe that signs of dissonant acculturation, low ambition, and the emergence of oppositional attitudes concentrate mainly among second-generation Mexicans. As seen in the preceding chapters, this is erroneous since other groups that have experienced negative modes of incorporation are also at risk. In different contexts, we have examined evidence to that effect among other sizable immigrant minorities, including Nicaraguans, Haitians, and post-Mariel Cubans.

Nevertheless, the Mexican immigrant population is defined by several attributes that make it unique and deserving of special attention. In this final chapter, it is worth reviewing what these are and how they affect the second generation, particularly in the context of the ideologi-
capital. Net of human capital factors, Mexican parents in our sample earn $1,910 less per year than other adult immigrants (Chapter 4).

This economic disadvantage is compounded because whatever human capital Mexican immigrants possess has a lower return than that among more successful groups. Thus, years of U.S. residence do not increase incomes for Mexican parents in our sample, and knowledge of English yields a lower payoff than for immigrants from other countries (Chapter 4).

Mexican parents are significantly more likely to report low bonds of solidarity and low levels of support from their co-ethnics, reflecting the weak communities that have emerged under their precarious conditions of arrival and settlement. Aspirations for their children are also significantly lower than for other groups (Chapter 3).

Mexican-American children are the only Latin group in the sample to lack a positive nationality effect on fluent bilingualism, and they have the lowest average self-esteem. Controlling for other factors, Mexican origin makes no positive contribution to either adaptation outcome (Chapters 6 and 8).

Mexican-American children are the most likely to have shifted self-identities away from any American label and toward an unhyphenated national (i.e., Mexican) identity. They are also the group most prone to racialize their national origin. Both trends reflect a strong process of reactive formation to perceived external hostility (Chapter 7).

Reflected in their parents' low aspirations, Mexican-American children have significantly lower educational expectations than the CILS average and the lowest among Latin-origin groups. This disadvantage persists after controlling for other factors. Net of them, second-generation Mexican students are still 10 percent less likely to believe that an advanced college degree is within their reach than other students (Chapter 8).

Corresponding to these low aspirations and cumulative disadvantages, Mexican-origin students are less likely to perform well in school. Their lower-than-average grades and test scores cannot be explained by individual, family, or school predictors. In junior high school, Mexican students fell behind a net 12 points in standardized math scores and 15 points in reading scores, after controlling for these predictors; they also had a significant net disadvantage in grades. This inferior performance continues in late high school, where Mexican-American students suffer a significant handicap after controlling for a wide array of individual and family factors.

These cumulative results clearly point to a difficult process of adaptation and to the likelihood of downward assimilation in many cases. The high optimism of parents and the superior school performance and lower dropout rates of second-generation Mexicans relative to their native-parentage peers only qualify this conclusion. This optimism and relatively better academic record reflect a residual immigrant drive that weakens with the passage of time under the continuous influence of an adverse social environment. It is worth emphasizing that the second-generation Mexican advantage is only observable in comparison with their native counterparts, that is, third-generation and higher Hispanics who perform even worse than the more recent arrivals. This comparison offers no grounds for expecting that academic performance will improve and dropout rates will decline over time.

Hence, while the likelihood of downward assimilation is not exclusive to Mexican-American adolescents, the condition of this group does deserve special attention. Given the size of the Mexican immigrant population and its all-but-certain continuing growth in future years, the cumulative disadvantages under which its second generation struggles should be of prime practical concern. As López and Stanton-Salazar put it:

The Mexican-American case stands apart. They and their parents lack many of the resources that have allowed other recent groups of newcomers to thrive. A rather large proportion of children of Mexican immigrants do poorly in school and their occupational prospects are bleak. If Mexican-origin youths were just another in the vast array of new second generation groups, there would only be modest room for concern regarding their below average achievement and future prospects. But, in California and the Southwest, Mexicanos and their children are not "just another" immigrant-based ethnic group. They are instead by far the largest "minority" and are rapidly becoming the single largest ethnic group. The danger of downward assimilation for Mexican-American youths is only compounded by the policies that have captured the imagination of mainstream voters. For reasons already examined, nativism and forceful assimilationism yield programs that undermine successful adaptation by increasing dissonant acculturation or provoking an adversarial reaction. In light of the present evidence, there is no second-
groups should elicit a more positive governmental and societal response in theory, this is not always the case. As we saw in previous chapters, a relatively well-educated group such as Nicaraguans in Miami experienced a hostile context of reception, their claims for asylum and assistance being routinely denied. In contrast, southeast Asians, although having much poorer human capital endowments, were well received and granted refugee status with generous resettlement aid. The decisive variable in all these cases had to do with the geopolitical interests of the U.S. government and its particular relationship with countries of origin. A second important factor in the case of the groups just mentioned is that neither Nicaraguans nor southeast Asians had strong preexisting ethnic communities to host them and, hence, their modes of incorporation were largely determined by governmental policy.

Time and Acculturation

There are, however, several significant results and some anomalies that are not captured in our original models. The most important is the passage of time. Time in the United States increases opportunities for immigrant economic progress although, for reasons just seen, these opportunities vary with individual endowments and contexts of reception. Some foreign groups move effortlessly into the American middle class, while others are stuck, seemingly forever, in a subordinate social and economic status. Above all, the passage of time brings about greater acculturation and, with it, the weakening of the original immigrant drive. At some point, immigrants become like natives in terms of their work effort, motivation, and social networks. The question then is at what level of the socioeconomic hierarchy are families and entire ethnic communities found when this seemingly inexorable shift takes place.

The evidence of an immigrant achievement drive is documented by multiple results in our analysis. They include the strong ambition and optimism of immigrant parents (Chapter 3); the high expectations, school commitment, and work effort of children that consistently exceed those of the general student population (Chapter 8); and the superior grades and lower dropout rates of every second-generation group relative to their third-generation-and-higher peers (Chapter 9). The evidence of a dampening effect with increasing acculturation is equally strong: the diminishing school commitment and effort of native-born students, especially among some groups who, like Cuban Americans, managed to reach middle-class status in the first generation (Chapters 4 and 8); the

Theoretical Reprise

We refer the reader back to the theoretical models in Chapter 3 that have framed the analysis of successive adaptation outcomes. Overall, they stand well in light of the evidence. In particular, the analysis has shown the significance of types of acculturation in confronting the challenges to successful adaptation (Figure 3.1) and the cumulative character of the process with outcomes “building on each other” to define alternative assimilation paths (Figure 3.3). As just seen, one of these paths—downward assimilation—constitutes a real possibility for children growing up in poverty and lacking the support of strong and solidary communities. The significance of modes of incorporation comes through repeatedly as they condition the chances for such communities to emerge and the opportunities for socioeconomic achievement in the first generation.

The contexts of reception that greet different immigrant groups are not determined solely by their human capital. While better-educated
consistently negative effect of length of acculturation on educational expectations and grades (Chapters 8 and 9); and the lower academic performance and higher dropout rates of native-parentage minority students relative to their respective second generations (Chapter 9).

Taken together, this evidence points to a race, as it were, between original immigrant ambition and the passage of time. Results of that race will determine the long-term character of the ethnic groups created by today's immigration. The point is illustrated by the inter-generational outcomes portrayed in Figure 10.1: Riding on the strength of their human capital and a favorable mode of incorporation, some groups manage to make it into the middle classes in the first generation; their children are guaranteed the resources for a good education and, in some instances, entrepreneurial opportunities. They can afford to adopt a more relaxed, native-like stance toward schools and the future. By the third generation, ethnic ties and identities weaken as these groups become fully integrated into the American mainstream.

Other immigrants manage to reach middle-class status in the second generation, drawing resources from strong families and ethnic communities. The following are some of the activities that poor but motivated parents have been known to engage in to ensure that this transition takes place:

Working two or three jobs to buy a home in a neighborhood with good schools or pay tuition in a bilingual private school

Sending their children to their home country to be educated under the care of grandparents and other kin

Moving to cities where their co-ethnics concentrate to increase social ties and external influences supportive of parental authority

Keeping grandparents at home and supporting extended families to reinforce parents' control and use of their language.

From the perspective of these immigrant families, selective acculturation can be redefined as a strategy to preserve the original achievement drive and transmit it across generations. Otherwise, offspring of poor immigrants would be no better off than native-minority youths, whose fate parents seek at all costs to avoid.

Other groups fail to move upward in the second generation, the children having educational credentials and occupational opportunities no

better than their parents'. This situation has two consequences: First, it significantly increases the chances for assimilation into the native underclass for reasons already explained in Chapter 3. Second, it defines the long-term character of the respective ethnic community. A thoroughly acculturated third generation lacks the drive and social resources of their immigrant ancestors and, hence, their position in the American hierarchies of wealth and power is conditioned by what happened to their parents and grandparents. There is no empirical evidence at present to expect that groups confined to the working class or that have moved downward into the native underclass would miraculously rise during the third generation to alter their collective status. There is, on the other hand, strong evidence on the intergenerational transmission of both privilege and disadvantage. This is why long-term prospects of
the ethnic groups created by today's immigration will be conditioned by what happens to these immigrants' children.

Reactive Ethnicity and Its Aftermath

A second significant issue not covered by the theoretical models of Chapter 3 is that of the rise and effects of reactive ethnicity. As seen in Chapter 7, reactive ethnicity is the product of confrontation with an adverse native mainstream and the rise of defensive identities and solidarities to counter it. In contrast to the deliberate preservation of immigrant languages and cultures brought about by selective acculturation, reactive ethnicity is a "made-in-America" product. The discourses and self-images that it creates develop as a situational response to present realities. Even when the process involves embracing the parents' original national identities, this is less a sign of continuing loyalty to the home country than a reaction to hostile conditions in the receiving society.

As seen earlier in this chapter, the Mexican case represents the most significant example of this process because of the group's size, continuity over time, and persistent disadvantage. Along the lines predicted in Figure 10.1, reactive ethnicity is common in children and grandchildren of Mexicans. Terms such as the Nation of Aztlán or La Raza did not exist in the immigrants' original lexicon but were coined by their descendants.20 The process is perfectly understandable as a defense to threatened self-images and collective dignity. However, as a vehicle for collective upward mobility, reactive identities are a double-edged sword. In these final lines, we review these implications both to round out the theoretical discussion of earlier chapters and to advance concrete proposals for immigrant minorities at risk.

Reactive formation processes provide a viable basis for collective solidarity and political mobilization in defense of ethnic group interests. This is what happened among Mexican Americans during the 1960s and 1970s when the term Chicano was coined and a number of militant organizations such as the Brown Berets and La Raza Unida Party emerged.21 As we have seen, the process repeated itself in the 1990s in response to California's Proposition 187. Political mobilization has a series of positive collective consequences in terms of empowering an ethnic minority and bringing attention to its plight. The mobilizations of the 1960s and 1970s did increase the representation of Mexican Americans in Congress and state legislatures and brought about a num-

ber of governmental programs favorable to the group.22 Similarly, the Mexican-American mobilizations of the late 1990s spelled the end of the political careers of several of the most ardent California nati-vists.

Consequences of reactive formation at the individual level are less positive, especially among the young. Youthful solidarity based on opposition to the dominant society yields an adversarial stance toward mainstream institutions, including education. This is the situation that, in Matute-Bianchi's words, creates a forced-choice dilemma for the young between doing well in school and staying loyal to one's ethnic group. In the process, many minority students "learn not to learn."23 This dismal outcome can be defined as an instance of the downward effects of social capital; that is, bonds of solidarity that, among other immigrant groups, represent a powerful resource for advancement lead, in this case, to downward-leveling norms. Instead of the peer group supporting the achievement efforts of its own, it pushes them to conform to the status quo under threat of being ostracized.24

The process was discussed in Chapter 3 as one of the major challenges to successful adaptation of today's second generation. The question here is what to do about third-generation-and-higher minorities caught in this situation. The logical answer lies in reversing the sign of the social capital created by the reactive formation process. Ethnic role models with credibility among the young are best situated to convey the message about the self-destructive consequences of downward-leveling norms and the need to support individual achievement.25 A number of minority leaders have become actively involved in this task among their own student populations. To be successful, such efforts must be supported by school programs that accord attention to the history and culture of the respective minority.

In the film Stand and Deliver, actor Edward James Olmos impersonates famed teacher Jaime Escalante, who had remarkable success in teaching advanced math to impoverished minority students in East Los Angeles. This rousing tale need not be isolated but can furnish a blueprint for the reorientation of minority youths' social capital. Such a policy toward students who have been the victims of downward assimilation in the past has elements in common with that advanced previously to ward off this threat among the second generation. Referring to Figure 10.1, the promotion of selective acculturation among children of immigrants is based on group solidarity and support of a common collective memory as sources of self-esteem and ambition. For children of minorities that have been marginalized in the past, the same elements are
needed for countering downward-leveling norms and constructing an empowerment-for-achievement orientation.

Tragically, the ideologies that hold sway among broad segments of the white middle-class electorate yield exactly the opposite results, imperiling the future of today's second generation and perpetuating the condition of the existing minority underclass. Results of this study point to the urgent need to enlighten the dominant majority as to where its real self-interests lie in the long run and thus build a constituency for an alternative set of policies. The future of the metropolitan areas where immigrants concentrate and of American society as a whole may well hang in the balance.

Appendix A

CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS
LONGITUDINAL STUDY
Follow-up Questionnaire