

Chapter 1

Introduction

THIS BOOK recounts the journeys to college of young people living in America. By itself, this story would not be remarkable—except that it is a story of the children of Latino immigrants, a group whose educational success is nearly invisible in popular accounts and not often studied in academic ones. How do children who are typically not expected to achieve very much end up doing so well? This book helps us answer this important question and sheds light on how we can increase the odds of immigrant educational success. Before we can understand these children’s journeys to college, however, we first need to consider the journeys their parents have made to and in America.

This prologue might seem familiar, harkening back, as it does, to the oft-told tale of immigrants coming to the United States full of hope and a strong work ethic that fueled their dramatic success. Immigrants and their descendants are typically compared in this way to native-born minority groups, notably African Americans and Puerto Ricans, and held up as exemplars of the motivation needed to overcome obstacles to success. That said, variability in ethnic origins (read: ethnic cultures) is typically cited as a reason why certain immigrant groups have done better or risen faster than others. These two counternarratives—the immigrant analogy and the ethnic culture analogy—have both played out in understandings of Latino outcomes in the United States. By virtue of being immigrants, Latinos are seen as having greater drive and a more positive orientation than African Americans (and thus doing better), but because they are Latino immigrants, they are also seen as having much less drive and a less positive orientation than Asians (and thus not faring as well).

Keeping the Immigrant Bargain tells a different, more complex story by bringing into the picture the often invisible aspects of the immigrant journey, framed in both optimism and pessimism. The parents’ immigrant incorporation is bifurcated: they have immigrant optimism about their mobility, regardless of their actual economic gains or losses, and believe

in the American Dream, but they also have immigrant pessimism about their assimilation. The journey is not just about the immigrants themselves and the resources they bring or do not bring, but also about American natives and institutions and the ways in which they welcome or reject the integration of newcomers (Eckstein 2006). This perspective helps us understand how different immigrants who come to the United States for the same reason—to make better lives for themselves and for their children—can have dramatically different experiences after arrival. Their experience is as much about the role of institutions in immigrant incorporation as it is about their own desire and capacity to be incorporated.

The story of second-generation success told in this book has two parts. The first gives an account of the interactions between families and institutions that shape the opportunities that families provide to their children for schooling, as well as the constraints on what they can provide. The other equally important part of the story takes place in the children's own interactions with powerful institutional and other nonfamily supports as they seek the guidance they need to succeed in school; information about this guidance and support is often unknown to their parents. This second part of the story challenges our understandings of why immigrants have surpassed some African Americans, who have been here longer, and why certain immigrant groups succeed much more quickly than others.

By focusing on how the institutions of mainstream society, such as the economy and education, simultaneously open up and constrain mobility opportunities for immigrants and their children, and on how immigrant families respond, this book moves us away from approaches centered on immigrants' national origins or on panethnicity. While these two approaches are undeniably important, explanations of mobility and assimilation based on them have tended to marginalize the social processes and social contexts that influence differences in outcomes (Stepick and Dutton-Stepick 2010). Explanations like the immigrant and ethnic analogies often privilege group-based optimism and motivation without adequately examining where these attitudes come from, how they are maintained or dampened, and the extent to which they matter in outcomes. For these reasons, the immigrant and ethnic analogies are provocative, but ultimately incomplete, explanations.

I argue that the key to success, especially for the mostly working-class children we interviewed, was not just that they had hope, motivation, or a work ethic. What it took for them to succeed was strong family care *combined* with powerful institutional and other nonfamily supports. In making this argument, I draw on a three-and-a-half-year survey and interview study of 113 members of Dominican and Colombian families. They included 37 immigrant parents and 76 members of the "1.5 genera-

tion”—immigrants who had arrived here by the age of twelve—and the second generation (born in the United States); these young people had transitioned to more than twenty colleges in the northeastern United States, of different types and prestige levels.¹ Let us hear from some of them.

Andrea had just graduated from Cornell University when we met in her Washington Heights neighborhood in upper Manhattan.² It was the summer of 2002, and she noted that the once mostly Dominican community had changed some. The drug trade that had been a big issue in the 1980s was largely contained, and more whites were moving into the community, as we saw in the Starbucks where we had coffee. The local Dominicans whom Andrea knew, however, were still factory workers, teachers, and cab drivers. Her own mother was a school bus matron who had raised three children on her own, with no financial support from their father. “Education was the only inheritance she could give us because she didn’t have any money,” Andrea told me, with a laugh. She went to Cornell on full scholarship; even so, the family had to work hard to pay for the extras, like books and the \$80 round-trip bus tickets between Ithaca and New York City. Nevertheless, the importance of education in Andrea’s family was never in doubt. “I think, for my family,” said Andrea, “in general, success is getting through college. Because, I mean, it kind of opens the door for you to the American Dream. For my mom, who didn’t finish college here, it’s having her kids go to college.”

Andrea’s mother, who later met with Ana, an interviewer for the project, said that she had gotten as far as the equivalent of eighth grade in Santiago, Dominican Republic. In the United States, she worked full time during the daytime and took evening classes to earn her general equivalency diploma (GED). But after only two months at a local private college, she had not been able to continue her schooling. She wanted more for her children. So she routinely went to her children’s parent-teacher conferences and found out about free classes to prepare Andrea for the entrance examination to the city’s much-sought-after specialized high schools. (Andrea would earn a berth at the selective Brooklyn Technical High School.) Andrea had a terrific learning experience at Brooklyn Technical, thanks mainly to the “very highly qualified teachers,” with whom she had a good relationship. “They were good teachers, and I might sound like I’m bragging, but I was a good student also. So, I think that combination of both made things turn out pretty well.” And even though Andrea’s mother did not always understand what her daughter was saying about school, she made sure she listened. Andrea’s mother recalled, “We always talked about why a school was a good option or not. She always said that she wanted to attend an Ivy League school, and

then I asked why, and she replied saying that those were the best schools in the U.S. So if that was her choice, I would support her all the time.”

Billy was born in the United States but grew up both here and in the Dominican Republic. Until he was seven, he lived with his family in Lawrence, Massachusetts, before moving back to Santo Domingo for several years. By the winter of 2004, when Billy spoke with Silvia for the project, he had been back in Lawrence for seven years, along with his mother and brother. To him, life was definitely better in Santo Domingo. Unlike Andrea’s mother, who had made a few gains with migration, his family’s standard of living had declined dramatically with the move back to the United States. His parents had co-managed a binational check-cashing business in Santo Domingo, which had his father shuttling back and forth between Lawrence and the island. There they had lived in one of the neighborhood’s bigger houses and had a basketball court and a maid, and the residents held monthly outdoor meetings to plan activities for the children. Billy had gone to one of the capital’s best private schools.

It was a shock to move back to the Broadway Street area of Lawrence, which he described as “low-class” and plagued by a dangerous drug trade. Back in Lawrence there was also a shift in how his parents helped him with schoolwork. In Santo Domingo they had given “100 percent help,” but in the United States his mother did not know enough English to understand what he was doing in school. Billy was fortunate because his high school teachers noticed him and steered him toward honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes. He said, “Teachers were always there to tell me, you know, to vouch for me.” Although he had positive things to say about the local public high school, Silvia and I knew that the school had lost its accreditation, owing to academic problems, during his time there. After graduating, he enrolled in the local community college because it was cheaper, and he paid his tuition with earnings from a full-time job as a Verizon Wireless technician. Although Billy’s pattern was to go to school for a while and then drop out, only to start again later, he remained hopeful about transitioning to a four-year college.

The educational success of Billy’s older sister and brother—both graduates of four-year colleges in the United States—brightened an otherwise bittersweet migration journey for his parents. Each of his parents had only a year or less of postsecondary schooling, but that level of education had still been enough for them to have a relatively good life back home. Billy’s mother noted, “You know, we didn’t come here for the necessity, we had an apartment over there, it was small, but we were making all the payments, since my husband had a decent job at that time. The reason why we came here is because I guess we wanted to reach

higher in life, we wanted more." For a while, those hopes were realized as the success of their binational business allowed them a life of greater comfort back home, while still having stakes in the United States; then they ran afoul of the Internal Revenue Service. Billy's mother returned to the United States to manage the aftermath, while her husband returned to the Dominican Republic. She became a licensed home day-care provider, and after her charges went home she cleaned a local cafeteria in the evenings from 6:00 to 9:45 PM. The family had moved to a somewhat better-off part of town, but she was still always fearful of being robbed. Overall, life in the United States had been quite a fall for the parents. And his mother was worried about Billy because, after three years, he still had no degree.

In May 2005, Herman picked me up at the Lowell, Massachusetts, commuter rail station in his cousin's baby blue Toyota Celica, whose faulty transmission caused it to buckle when in reverse. He joked about it as we drove past his old kindergarten, the supermarket where he had been a part-time produce clerk between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five, and Bally's Gym, where he had worked for six months while completing his bachelor's degree. In the McDonald's, the customers were white (excepting us), and the staff behind the counter was Latino and Asian.

Herman had grown up in the city's public housing projects, and his parents still had an apartment there. Even more so than Billy, Herman believed that he was entirely on his own with school, but he also said that he had made peace with his immigrant parents' limited role. "My parents, they only went to school 'til seventh grade. They weren't the type of parents who enforced, like, if you don't finish your homework, you're not going to go out. They didn't really voice it." Unable to afford the Catholic school system, his parents sent Herman to the local elementary school. In the second grade, Herman was one of the first students to leave bilingual education and join a completely English-speaking class. His second-grade teacher helped with this "nerve-wracking" transition, and he described her as a "good teacher." She was an Argentine native who later taught at the local arts magnet middle school (which he also attended), and "she was stern," Herman said. "So, she got my respect." At Lowell High School, Herman said, he was an "average student" who never got into trouble and always went to class. It was enough to graduate and to go on to Middlesex Community College, which his guidance counselors advised him to do because he had low SAT scores. Even though Herman said his parents did not take on a strong role, they did clearly express the expectation that he would go on to college. With the advice and encouragement of a close older friend who had graduated from the University of Massachusetts-Lowell and was a medical techni-

cian, Herman completed an associate's degree, even though it took him four years, and then earned a bachelor's degree himself from UMass-Lowell.

Herman's parents, retired factory workers, confirmed their eldest son's account when they later met with Claudia, another interviewer for the project. Although they had completed only two years of secondary school back in Medellín, Colombia, they believed that there were greater opportunities for schooling in the United States; students here, they observed, could receive good attention from teachers and also financial aid. Herman's father noted, "The one who doesn't want to study here is ignorant. It's completely ignorant in every sense."

His parents believed that their four children never needed much guidance with schooling, at least not from them. Said Herman's father: "They didn't complain about anything. They were never lost. We never told him anything." Added his mother: "They did it themselves. After they entered elementary school, we didn't have to do anything. I am sure that someone helped him." Echoed his father: "They found their way by themselves." In truth, only half the children had completely found their way. Herman's older sister had an associate's degree and was working, but his younger brother and sister had both dropped out of state universities and were trying to figure out what to do next.

All the children interviewed for this book had kept the "immigrant bargain," a term coined by Robert C. Smith (2006) to capture the hope of immigrant families that their children would do well in school and succeed, a feat that would make up for the parents' sacrifices with migration. Many of the children we interviewed were in their early to mid-twenties, so they, along with their parents, were looking back on the immigrant and school journeys. Although the parents were doing better than average for foreign-born Dominicans and Colombians—for instance, in home ownership and, in some cases, occupational status—migration had been accompanied by hardship. The children's schooling success—not all had finished college, but those who had not certainly expected to—validated their parents' decision to migrate and undertake their difficult journeys. As we have just seen, some of those journeys were tougher than others. While Andrea's mother and Herman's parents had benefited some, Billy's family had suffered painful economic losses. Similarly, more than 60 percent of the children's parents had made only modest economic gains, had replicated their low status in the United States, or had seen their status and standard of living decline after continuing to work jobs of lower prestige long after the initial years of settlement. Certainly, the parents welcomed higher wages, new freedoms, and political and economic stability, but the net gains of the immigrant journey, both material and symbolic, were decidedly uneven according

to the calculus of the families. Regardless of how the parents had fared in income and job status, all of them had to negotiate certain long-term challenges: the need to become at least proficient in the English language, a goal not easily met; the need to learn and manage unfamiliar American cultural and social norms; and discrimination against immigrants and nonwhites in general.

The children had to win the immigrant bargain because keeping that bargain was by no means easy for them. Their parents had fared better than the average foreign-born Dominican or Colombian, but many of the children still faced daunting obstacles known to derail success. More than two-thirds had grown up in urban neighborhoods that were largely ethnic or panethnic and often working-class or poor. More than one-third had spent some part of their childhood in a female-headed household, and these are typically associated with lower incomes and lower levels of maternal education. Just under one-third (twenty-four respondents) had gone to neighborhood public urban schools, where blacks and Hispanics made up 50 to 80 percent or more of the student body. Students at such minority-majority schools tend to be poor and low income, and these schools usually have fewer institutional resources than average and less than optimal learning conditions (Noguera 2003; Lopez 2004; Orfield and Lee 2006).

In this book, I show how such challenges were especially pronounced among the Dominican families. The Colombian and Dominican families were both mostly working-class. Yet because the Dominicans lived in different residential locations—locations determined, as others have found, by their darker skin color—they faced a much tougher journey to success (Newman 1999; Waters, Mollenkopf, and Kasinitz 1999). A bit more than half of the Colombian children—but only a few of the Dominicans—had grown up in predominantly white, middle-class areas, with the safe streets and good schools that we have come to expect from such areas. In contrast, the Dominicans' neighborhood experiences were consistent with the rising residential segregation of Latinos in high-poverty areas, a trend similar to the intense geographic isolation of poor African Americans in urban neighborhoods characterized by concentrated social problems (Wilson 1980, 1987; Massey and Denton 1993; Massey 2007; Dobbie and Fryer 2009). Dominicans were more likely to grow up in poorer and socially disorganized neighborhoods with dilapidated housing, violent crime, and segregated and low-performing schools (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993; Duncan and Brooks-Gunn 1997; Kasinitz et al. 2008). One-quarter of the Dominican children reported that violence had occurred in the K-12 schools they attended and that they had witnessed or been the victim of nonfamily violence. Winning the immigrant bargain was tougher for the Dominican children because not only did they have to make it out of these neighborhoods and schooling con-

texts, but their success was especially contingent on the backing of institutional actors and other powerful nonfamily members.

My prior research with working-class Chinese, who also transitioned to college, reveals what academically successful working-class Dominicans, Colombians, and Chinese all have in common. To begin with, the notion that Latinos and Chinese have anything in common is already noteworthy, since Chinese immigrants, along with other Asian American immigrants, have been held up as the quintessential educational success stories. Supposedly, Asian cultures drive educational success in ways that Latinos cultures do not. My comparison reveals more nuanced mechanisms of success. Second-generation Chinese children benefit from their parents' embeddedness in immigrant communities and their access to flows of transnational capital and social ties to middle-class kin and friends. These resources and social ties are crucial to their working-class parents' access to information about good public schools—information that the Dominicans and Colombians do not have.

This book identifies the powerful ways in which the parents' immigrant status, social class, and ethnicity (especially as related to skin color) influenced the children's life experiences. Growing up in an immigrant family was a shared experience for all our interviewees, but it was lived differently across social class. Simply put, children whose parents replicated their high status with migration or came from dramatically upwardly mobile, middle-class families lived in better-off areas, had more family resources for schooling, and went to better precollegiate schools. The story, however, is not just about social class: some downwardly mobile, working-class parents were able to get useful information from non-ethnic individuals (for example, non-Dominican or non-Colombian) and use it to help their children get into better schools or after-school programs. There was also a clear ethnic gap within the working class—the Dominicans had a more arduous journey to success. In some respects, the class-based experiences of the Colombians and Dominicans evoked similarities to the experiences of their native black and white counterparts, as detailed in the existing research. Yet being the child of parents who were struggling to learn English and figure out where they belonged in America brought distinct constraints.

This argument is based on an analysis of how the respondents interpreted and experienced several core aspects of American life, namely who can become American and what this process involves; what children and their families can expect of the children's schools, and vice versa; and finally, how education is experienced as a channel of upward mobility. Each of these aspects is a key lever of the book. In the first half, I show that the incorporation of the immigrant parents influenced how they were able to assist their children economically, culturally, and practically with schooling. In the second half, I show that the children under-

stood and experienced schooling, assimilation, and mobility in ways specific to being members of the 1.5 and second generations.³ I show that the children became academic success stories in light of their parents' incorporation into the United States and that the family was only part of the reason for their success. Also contributing to their success were adults outside the family who mentored the children in how to succeed in school, especially adults in institutional settings.

Why This Story Is Important

This immigrant story is compelling for several reasons. In the United States today, about one in five children age eighteen or younger are the U.S.- or foreign-born children of immigrants, and by 2015 they are likely to make up 30 percent of the nation's prekindergarten to grade 12 student population (Fix and Passell 2003). Based on numbers alone, the schooling success of the children of immigrants has become a crucial national goal. This goal echoes the historical importance of earlier waves of European immigrants and their descendants to America's industrialization and its development into an economic powerhouse. The rising importance of a college education, however, is new. A college education has value not only for an individual's lifetime earnings and status but, when aggregated, to the nation's economic well-being. In a rapidly globalizing world, a highly skilled and educated workforce has become integral to how well a nation fares in the world economy (Grissmer 2005).

Nor are the stakes entirely economic. Just as in the past, the ways in which immigrants and their children are embedded into the nation's cultural and social fabric speak to the question of what it means to be an American (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova 2008; Kasinitz et al. 2008). Today the terrain is arguably even more complex. With the resumption of large-scale migratory flows since the 1960s, the complexities of American demographics have intensified: the United States is now home to individuals "from, literally, every civilization and of every nationality, and speaking almost every language" (Prewitt 2001, 3). It remains to be seen whether and how such demographic diversity will re-define conceptions of American national identity.

Given that Latinos make up the most populous stream of post-1965 immigrants, and the nation's largest minority group, it is especially important to understand their integration.⁴ According to the U.S. Census 2000, 52 percent of the foreign-born population in the United States was from Latin America, and Latinos made up 14.5 percent of the nation's population. The term "Latino" is constructed as a panethnic category that encompasses individuals of diverse nativity statuses, national origins, ethnic and social class backgrounds, and racial classifications. Despite

this diversity, “Latinos” have often been viewed as one group and as not suited to mobility and assimilation thanks to their group origins. In contrast to the successful incorporation of earlier waves of European immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Latinos are thus thought by some to have a grim prognosis for schooling and assimilation: it is argued that they settle in ethnic enclaves, communicate in Spanish, and generally are unwilling to assimilate. They do not do well in school supposedly because they do not value schooling. While much of the adverse attention has focused on Mexican Americans, the nation’s largest immigrant group (Huntington 2004), Latinos of diverse national origins have been universally enveloped in this narrative of threat and negative exceptionalism (Fukuyama 1994; Espenshade and Belanger 1997; Rumbaut 1997; Cornelius 2002).

The bidirectionality of social processes helps explain Mexican American outcomes. In other words, the larger society has great power to make a group’s incorporation difficult or easy—for instance, through the opportunities its economy offers to immigrants and the relative openness of the social structure to newcomers (Portes and Rumbaut 1990, 2001; Eckstein 2006; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova 2008; Telles and Ortiz 2008; Massey and Sanchez R. 2010; Jiménez 2011). Drawing on a unique data set spanning four generations of Mexican Americans, Edward Telles and Vilma Ortiz (2008) recently showed that, while Mexican Americans have made progress, they continue to trail native white Americans in educational and economic status.⁵ The findings of this and other studies, according to the authors, suggest that longtime Mexican Americans are a racialized minority group, particularly in schooling. From a young age, Mexican Americans disproportionately attend poorly financed public schools with less experienced teachers who have low expectations of them. Even when they attend integrated schools, they continue to be tracked into less demanding courses.

Since the so-called new Latinos, including Colombians, Dominicans, Guatemalans, and Salvadorans, have arrived in large numbers only in the post-civil rights era, their experiences are likely to be somewhat different from those of Mexican Americans, who as a group have been here longer (Pachon and DeSipio 1998). This book focuses on Dominicans and Colombians, who make up the fifth- and seventh-largest Latino subgroups, respectively (Fry and Hakimzadeh 2006). There are 1.3 million Hispanics of Dominican origin and 882,000 of Colombian origin in the United States (Pew Hispanic Center 2010a, 2010b). A comparison of Dominicans and Colombians allows us to explore possible differences along the lines of region of origin (the Caribbean versus South America), skin color, parental educational background and financial resources, and family composition, which we know to be important to immigrant incor-

poration and second-generation outcomes. Furthermore, while there are important differences between the two populations, there is also diversity within each along these indicators (Guarnizo, Sanchez, and Roach 1999; Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2002).

Keeping the Immigrant Bargain has two goals. The first is to explain the schooling success among 1.5- and second-generation Dominicans and Colombians in light of the immigrant journey, especially the interactions between newcomer families and institutions. The second is to draw on the findings to suggest lines of further research and to contribute to public policy recommendations. This is the first contemporaneous study to address such issues from the perspectives of the adult children and their mothers and fathers. Immigration and education are quintessentially family affairs, and yet we seldom hear from both parents and children; rather, the voices of one generation are typically emphasized. This book provides a much-needed comparison of how children and parents alike understand the immigrant journey around education, mobility, and assimilation and what they believe to be possible for themselves and for each other (Waters 2008).⁶

From Whence We Came

Because so much of how we think about immigration, mobility, and assimilation is shaped by the American past, we need to consider that history, especially as it informs public policy and scholarly debates. The emphasis on the ability of immigrant groups to be incorporated rather than the role of institutions in their incorporation dates back to the initial great flows of immigration. From the midnineteenth century until 1924—a period of large-scale immigration in response to the nation’s rapid industrialization—it was widely questioned whether immigrants and their children could be absorbed into American life (Hartmann 1948).⁷ It seemed unlikely that the immigrants, natives of southern, central, and eastern Europe and of peasant background, would successfully make the transition: many lacked facility with English and were illiterate in their own language, and virtually all subscribed to then-foreign religions, namely Catholicism and Judaism (Gold 2009). It was argued that immigrants did not wish to, or were unable to, assimilate (Walker 1896; Fairchild 1911).

The evidence, however, suggests that there were strong institutional barriers to assimilation. In 1911 the U.S. Immigration Commission published a multivolume study that revealed the relative scarcity of English-language classes for adult immigrants (U.S. Congress 1911).⁸ Immigrants faced other challenges, including workdays of twelve or more hours—typically in the mine, factory, or sweatshop—and their tendency to live in urban ethnic communities where English was not necessary to every-

day life. It was not surprising, then, that few knew how to write or effectively speak English or had any knowledge of American history and American political institutions.

The role of education in the lives of the children of immigrants shows how an institution can strongly facilitate incorporation. The common school, the precursor to and then the popular name for the American public school, became the site for the Americanization of the children of immigrants from 1900 to 1920 (Graham 2005). The goal of teaching American cultural practices to immigrant children took place in schools that marked a social boundary between children and their immigrant parents, who were quite often seen as suspect (Reisner 1930; Cremin 1951; Weisz 1976; California Tomorrow 1990; Bryk, Lee, and Holland 1993). In the popular American imagination, this project was dramatically successful—the children of immigrants eventually achieved upward mobility and assimilated into the mainstream white, Anglo-Saxon American fold. It was the realization of the American Dream as experienced by the children of European immigrants. Scholars of that era played a part in creating that narrative. As Herbert Gans (2007, 152) tells us, the rise of immigration research in the United States came at a time of “nearly universal upward mobility” among European immigrants, who had arrived with so little that they “could only move up” and who were at the same time assimilating.

This story did have an empirical basis, but the reasons for these trajectories, and the shapes they took, proved much more complex than previously theorized (Lieberson 1980; Alba 1990; Waters 1990; Ignatiev 1995; Brodtkin 1998). It typically took three or four generations for these ethnic groups to join the American mainstream, measured in years of schooling and occupations (Foner 2006). So it was the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the European immigrants who made the leap into the middle class and professional jobs, an intergenerational journey in which both the original migrants and their children encountered significant exclusionary barriers (Alba and Nee 2003). The now-classic paradigm of assimilation and upward mobility—for example, joining the native white middle class—is a historical artifact born of numerous social transformations that gradually opened institutional doors to the descendants of immigrants. These included a decades-long incubatory period between the cessation of large-scale immigration and its resumption in 1970, and even more pivotal was the unparalleled post-World War II economic prosperity enjoyed by the United States. In keeping with the adage that “a rising tide lifts all boats,” Richard Alba (2009) argues that the descendants of once-vilified European immigrants benefited from the willingness of native whites to include them in the expanding opportunity structure. Skin color was certainly noteworthy, since blacks were largely shut out of this process of boundary blurring. We should

also note that the American cultural mainstream did not remain static; rather, it was transformed by immigration as cultural practices formerly deemed foreign and exotic were gradually incorporated (Alba and Nee 2003). Despite the documented role of institutions, the popular narrative of the historical immigrant story virtually ignores the institutional dimension and maintains that the Europeans and their descendants did what they had to do to move up and become American.

The question of immigrant success and its mechanisms has reemerged in the wake of the post-1965 newcomer flows into a dramatically different American context. Certainly, the newcomers have institutional advantages that were unavailable to their European predecessors. Within the framework of national social subsidy programs, a result of New Deal reforms and the War on Poverty, and legally sanctioned equality of opportunity, a fruit of the civil rights movement, immigrants and their children have access to myriad social insurance policies such as unemployment benefits, housing regulations, and fair labor practices. Although the presence of foreign cultures in the United States is back in the forefront as a contentious issue, today's newcomers, who mainly come from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia, benefit from the greater tolerance of ethnic, racial, and religious diversity that resulted from the civil rights movement (Jaret 1999; Levitt 2001). Of course, we should not paint too rosy a picture. A clear signal of anti-immigrant times was the passage of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). Under this welfare reform legislation, immigrants who had legally entered the United States after August 22, 1996, were barred from receiving federal assistance based on income guidelines, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and food stamps, for five years after entry (Massey and Sanchez R. 2010). The events of September 11, 2001, and the global economic crisis that started in 2008 intensified an already distinctly chilly climate toward newcomers (Schumacher-Matos 2011).

Immigrants without legal status, however, are a big exception, since many of these institutional benefits are not available to them. Although Asians were a special case, American numerical limits to immigration became decidedly more pronounced only from the 1920s onward.⁹ This phenomenon has given rise to the concept of the "illegal alien," or what Mae Ngai (2004, 4) describes as "a social reality but a legal impossibility—a subject without rights and excluded from citizenship." Although undocumented immigrants come from diverse sending nations, limitations placed on immigration from the Western Hemisphere, especially from Mexico, starting in the 1970s have lent this population a particularly Latino cast (Hing 2004; Massey and Sanchez R. 2010). The journeys of immigrants without legal status are decidedly bleaker from entry to

settlement (Mahler 1995; Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002) for both the first and 1.5 generations as they face exploitation and legal barriers while protected by few legal rights (Menjívar 2008). The undocumented status of parents has consequences for the developmental contexts and learning of their American-born children during early childhood. The parents' anxiety about their status combines with their harsh working conditions, low wages, and lower access to child-centered day care to become a contributing factor in their children's lower cognitive skills (Yoshikawa 2011).

For all immigrants, institutional shifts have also dramatically increased the stakes of intergenerational mobility. In the wake of post-1960s economic and educational transformations, the shift from a manufacturing to a service economy in the United States accorded higher returns to postsecondary education (Wilson 1999). The children of poor and working-class families now have only a single generation to join the college educated, as compared to the incremental educational trajectory followed by the descendants of earlier immigrants (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). To clear this hurdle, many immigrant children go to an American public school in a K-12 system that was once a key lever for upward mobility but has since deteriorated in some parts of the nation, particularly in the cities. Still seeking solutions to the long-standing black-white achievement gap, the United States finds itself also confronting an achievement gap relative to other nations whose systems of education are outperforming ours. There is clearly a need to maintain rigorous academic standards appropriate for a globalizing world, but relatively little agreement on what needs to be fixed and how.¹⁰

Nor is getting to college an easy process. College enrollments have risen dramatically, along with the number of postsecondary institutions, but there remain key blockages at critical junctures. The college universe has become more byzantine as the prestige gap has grown between two-year community colleges and four-year schools, between private and public four-year institutions, and among four-year schools (Gelber 2007; Long 2007). Undocumented immigrant adolescents face even greater challenges (Abrego and Gonzales 2010). Although the Supreme Court decision *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) mandates that public elementary and high schools educate children regardless of documentation status, there are no provisions for higher education. Undocumented students are not eligible for federal financial aid, and they qualify for in-state tuition in only some states (Perez 2009; Flores 2010).

Where Are We Headed?

How can we explain the incorporation of the new second-generation individuals in light of their particular group characteristics and these

macro institutional shifts? In 1992 Herbert Gans speculated that the non-white children of post-1965 immigrants would have different outcomes from the classic paradigm of assimilation and upward mobility. He theorized that some, especially the darker phenotypic youth—whose parents arrive with fewer resources and settle near or in native minority communities—might decline the low-paying, low-skilled jobs of their parents. But without the necessary educational advantages, and in the face of racial discrimination, these immigrant children could conceivably join the downwardly mobile.

Using Gans's speculation as a touchstone, segmented assimilation theory offered three possibly prescriptive and causal pathways for the post-1965 second generation, with divergent outlooks on schooling and socioeconomic outcomes (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Two groups are able to achieve upward mobility: those children who assimilate into the white middle class, as per straight-line or classic assimilation, and those children who are able to draw upon cohesive ethnic communities and develop strong ethnic attachments along with positive outlooks on schooling. The latter may assimilate later into the white middle class. A third group of children who encounter discrimination and settle near native-born minority groups in struggling city neighborhoods have decidedly different outcomes. They tend to adopt their native minority peers' negative outlooks on schooling, do not do well in school, and eventually join the ranks of the urban, native minority poor.

This book, with its focus on social processes, both builds on and pushes beyond segmented assimilation theory, especially its emphasis on the positive influence of cohesive coethnic communities and the negative effect of fragmented native minority neighborhoods. It is the pivotal interplay between institutions and immigrant families and the availability of nonfamily assistance that emerge as key sites of analysis. This approach sheds light on how success happens among those children of Latino immigrants who seem positioned to fail, if only because they come from working-class families, grew up in segregated neighborhoods without much solidarity, and attended *de facto* segregated schools. These children benefited especially from civil rights-era institutions and policies for fostering diversity programs. Non-ethnic individuals helped both families and children map out the American educational system and offered ways for the children to succeed within it.

In addition, native minority cultures of upward mobility provided some children with the tools to succeed (Neckerman, Carter, and Lee 1999; Carter 2005; Kasinitz et al. 2008; Smith 2008, forthcoming [a]). In contrast to segmented assimilation theory, which is silent about upwardly mobile, urban native minorities, we found that these minorities serve as key connections for some 1.5- and second-generation Dominicans and Colombians. These respondents believed that they shared com-

mon goals with the native minority strivers and occupied common ground with them in being racialized as nonwhite and often lower income. They turned to the native minority strivers as touchstones of useful knowledge and for their familiarity with negotiating a sense of marginalization and belief that nonwhites had to do more than whites to be successful. Rather than hew to a single identity, as proposed by segmented assimilation theory, the children we interviewed drew seamlessly on multiple identities, both ethnic and non-ethnic (Smith 2008). On a related note, the children deployed multiple frames of reference, including American and transnational ones, as they made sense of their own outcomes in the United States.

In sum, to increase success, we need to have a better understanding of *how* schooling success happens, especially among groups that conventional wisdom holds to be the least likely to achieve it (Gándara 1995; de los Reyes, Nieto, and Diez 2008). There are plenty of educational volumes on failure or pathology, a number of them about Latinos (Lawrence-Lightfoot 1983; Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997). We need to step up our efforts to identify areas of advancement and favorable prognoses and align them with studies of risk and resilience to develop more targeted policy interventions (Crosnoe 2005, 583). This book is a contribution to that line of inquiry. Immigrant children's journey to college is a function not simply of the immigrant family, the surrounding community, and macro institutional dynamics but also of the crucial interactions *between* the family and institutions, along with nonfamily individuals who are in a position to offer valuable knowledge and support. This book offers lessons derived from these findings that will help us do a better job of integrating immigrant newcomers, improve our schools, and better serve the children at risk of not succeeding in them.

The Study

The children were interviewed from December 2001 to July 2005, and a subsample of their immigrant parents were interviewed from July 2003 to July 2005. I conducted sixty-four of the children's interviews, and the rest were completed by two research assistants, Claudia Pineda, then a doctoral student, and Silvia Covelli. Both Ms. Covelli and Dr. Pineda are natives of Colombia who came as adults to the United States, and both had done extensive research with Dominican immigrant families in the greater Boston area for the Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation Project, a study led by Carola and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco.¹¹ The children first filled out a demographic survey asking about such things as K-12 schooling history, various family characteristics, and linguistic patterns, and then they were interviewed in English about their views on and experiences with neighborhood context, K-12 schooling, college, the family

immigrant journey, family child-rearing practices, children's identities, success, and discrimination. Dr. Pineda and Ms. Covelli, along with Ana Tavares, a second-generation Dominican American, were all fully bilingual in Spanish and English and interviewed thirty-six of the immigrant parents in Spanish; I also interviewed one parent in English. The parents spoke of their migration to and settlement in the United States, their family histories, the meanings they attached to education, and their knowledge of the American schooling system. They also talked about the identities that their children were adopting and how they self-identified. These data complement the second generation's perspectives and reveal the relative differences or similarities in how immigrant parents and their children understood the immigrant journey.

This kind of in-depth qualitative research approach may have a small, nonrandom sample that limits generalizability, but it is well suited to shedding light on the complex underpinnings of the social processes and social contexts that motivated this study. In-depth qualitative research allows us to understand the meaning of events, concepts, situations, and behaviors to the respondents; to analyze the contradictions in their interpretations; and to describe and explain relationships. In the process, we gain a much-needed understanding of how broader social forces shape the social situations of individuals, or lived experience. We are able to illuminate the specific mechanisms of a social phenomenon—in this case, how the children became academic winners (Smalls 2009). Finally, our insights allow us both to refine existing theories and to develop valuable tools to build new theories through further qualitative research along with larger, representative survey studies (McDermott 2006).

About three-quarters of the children we interviewed had grown up in the greater Boston area or New York City, both regions with substantial Colombian and Dominican migration (Marcelli and Granberry 2006).¹² As table 1.1 indicates, more than four-fifths of the children were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six, and 60 percent were born in the United States, more so for the Dominicans. The foreign-born arrived during early and middle childhood, clustered more toward the earlier years. Men made up 42 percent of the overall sample. The majority were enrolled in or had graduated from a four-year college at the time of the interview, and 20 percent had attended or were enrolled in a community college or had completed at most a two-year degree. I employed varied methods to diversify the children's sample along multiple lines and produce samples of individuals who were not known to one another. For a more detailed discussion of the methods employed and sample characteristics, please consult the appendix.

To understand the family backgrounds of the children we interviewed, it is helpful first to have a better sense of how distinct migration

Table 1.1 Characteristics of Children of Immigrant Families

	Colombian	Dominican	Total
Male	16	16	32
Age range			
Under eighteen	1	0	1
Eighteen to twenty-two	24	24	48
Twenty-three to twenty-six	7	10	17
Twenty-seven to thirty	4	3	7
Thirty-one to thirty-three	1	1	2
Over forty-one	0	1	1
Generation			
1.5	18	12	30
Second generation	19	27	46
1.5 age at arrival			
Zero to five	3	5	8
Six to ten	12	7	19
Eleven to twelve	3	0	3
N	37	39	76

Source: Author's compilation based on data from the Dominican and Colombian Immigrant Family Study (2009).

patterns have created Dominican and Colombian populations in the United States that have quite different social and demographic characteristics. Dominican immigration has for the most part followed the more traditional economic model. Early waves of migrants were middle-class Dominicans fleeing political instability in the wake of the assassination of dictator Rafael Trujillo and the invasion of the U.S. Marines in 1965. A more socioeconomically diverse group of immigrants started to leave the island during the 1970s, pushed out by the Dominican Republic's severe economic problems in the form of high foreign debt and high oil prices (Torres-Saillant and Hernández 1998; Hernández 2002). From the 1980s onward, the nation's economic picture continued to deteriorate, with estimates that the actual per capita income in 1992 was below what it had been in the early 1970s (Pessar and Graham 2001). The result was increased migration to the United States as an overwhelming number of unskilled workers were joined by a stream of their better skilled counterparts, who were pushed out as well by a decline in good jobs and the plummeting value of the nation's currency (Torres-Saillant and Hernández 1998).

By comparison, Colombian immigration to the United States, more deeply intertwined with political unrest, violence, and declining economic conditions, has seen a more pronounced stream of highly skilled and better-off migrants seeking to escape this combination of factors

(Guarnizo and Diaz 1999). There have been three waves of Colombian immigration to the United States: the first came in the wake of *La Violencia*, the civil war that dominated the 1950s (Roldan 2002), the effects of which continued to be felt until the late 1970s. The first wave included immigrants of all social class backgrounds in Colombia, although most were from the lower and lower-middle class strata. The second wave, which occurred from the late 1970s through the mid-1990s, continued to be characterized by a socioeconomically diverse stream of migrants, with a rise in those from the middle and upper strata. What distinguished the second wave was the drug war between Colombian drug cartels and the United States; everyday violence such as extortion and kidnapping became more common. Confidence in the nation's institutions waned (Safford and Palacios 2002). Although Colombia's economy was actually doing relatively well, particularly compared to other Latin American nations (Bushnell 1993), the nation's instability drove the flow of migrants.¹³ We are currently in the midst of the third wave of immigration, which continues to be diverse but has also brought a marked rise in well-to-do professionals seeking to flee an increasingly complex web of violence, which has become less prevalent in recent years but remains strong (Collier and Gamarra 2001, 3–4).¹⁴ Given their varied motivations for migrating, it is not surprising that Colombians in the United States are more likely to have higher incomes than Dominicans do, to have more education, and to own their homes (U.S. Census Bureau 2000).

The children we spoke with came from family backgrounds consistent with these histories and demographics. The Dominicans were thus more likely to report that their parents migrated to the United States to seek better economic opportunities. Two-thirds of the Dominican children's survey responses framed the immigrant journey along these lines, while fewer than half of the Colombians' responses did.¹⁵ The Colombian children's families were generally doing better. Although more than half of the children in both groups reported growing up with one or two risk factors identified as barriers to college (Schneider and Stevenson 1999; Swail, Cabrera, and Lee 2004),¹⁶ the Colombians nonetheless had more material advantages: their parents were more likely to own their home, and the children were about twice as likely as the Dominicans to have grown up without any form of public assistance.¹⁷ The Dominicans had mostly grown up in urban neighborhoods, where Latinos were a substantial presence or the majority, often with Puerto Rican neighbors and sometimes among African Americans (Newman 1999; Waters, Mollenkopf, and Kasinitz 1999). Their accounts speak to the poverty that accompanied the residential segregation of Latinos during the 1980s and 1990s (Massey 2007).¹⁸ By contrast, fewer than half of the Colombian respondents grew up in mostly urban ethnic or panethnic communities, and the neighborhoods of those who did grow up in such communities

not only tended to be different from where the Dominicans lived but also seemed to have fewer issues with poverty and crime. The remainder of the Colombians grew up in mostly white middle-class areas, and some joined an immigrant stream to the nation's suburbs (Jones-Correa 2008). Although I do not have more extensive geographically based information, this contrast between the Dominican and Colombian families is consistent with the findings of Philip Kasinitz and his coauthors in their *Immigrant Second Generation in Metropolitan New York Study* (ISGMNY). Compared to their South American counterparts, the median Dominican second-generation respondents lived in areas with more social disorganization (Kasinitz et al. 2008).¹⁹

There was one important difference between national data and the families of my respondents—the latter were better off than the average foreign-born Dominican or Colombian. As the appendix shows, the educational level of the Colombian and Dominican mothers and the rates of family home ownership were higher in my sample, and some of the parents were found in more skilled occupations. Another indicator of the relative advantage of the families in my sample had to do with how far all children in the United States, not just the ones we interviewed, had gone with schooling. Only two Dominican respondents reported having a sibling (a brother) who had dropped out of high school. Most of the children we interviewed reported that their siblings had at least completed high school or a GED. The variation among the respondents' siblings came with the transition to college—namely, who went to college, what kind of college they attended, and who graduated. Finally, although we did not ask questions about documentation status, it was clear that the parents were overwhelmingly documented immigrants, a status that was a great advantage in finding better jobs, receiving financial aid for their children's schooling, and probably just feeling optimistic as a family about life in the United States.²⁰ As noted earlier, the prospects for undocumented immigrants here have grown increasingly grim.

There are a few additional caveats worth noting. First, the parents were not newcomers to the United States—they had been here long enough to have experienced and come to understand economic and social mobility. We had information on length of residence for about four-fifths of the parents; of these, only 13 percent had been in the United States for fifteen years or less, with nearly half having been here sixteen to thirty years and the remainder longer than that.²¹ Second, given how well some of the Colombian parents had done, the transition to college of some of the children only reproduced their family's high status, especially pre-migration, in what we would call a process of social reproduction rather than upward mobility (Feliciano 2008; Zhou and Lee 2007; Rumbaut 2008).²² Third, the children were distinctive for having made the transition to postsecondary schools.²³ By way of comparison, in

the ISGMNY Dominicans were struggling the most out of the second-generation groups, with 16 percent not finishing high school. About three-fifths of both Dominicans and Colombians in that study had completed high school without going on to earn a bachelor's degree. Fourth, the majority of the children were also attending four-year and higher-prestige institutions,²⁴ in sharp contrast to the overrepresentation of the nation's Latinos in two-year colleges and less selective and public four-year institutions (Swail, Cabrera, and Lee 2004).²⁵ The children's college selectivity profile was also quite different from the ISGMNY samples, among whom only 4 percent of the South Americans and Dominicans attended a top-tier public or private college.²⁶ The appendix provides a full listing of the schools attended and a more detailed picture of the selectivity of the children's four-year colleges, along with ethnic differences in attendance, at least some a function of sampling.

In sum, the children we interviewed tended to come from families who were documented, had been here a long while, and were doing better than their conationals on average, and the children themselves were doing well educationally. *Keeping the Immigrant Bargain* was so named to invoke the idea that not only had the children honored the bargain with their immigrant parents, but in the process the immigrant families had in some measure kept their end of the bargain with their new country. In short, the next generation had assimilated linguistically and was poised for some degree of individual mobility through schooling. These families shared an abiding faith in the ideals enshrined in the American Dream. What helped the immigrants and their children to win these bargains, and what made the process difficult? What can we learn from their experiences? And what are the implications for the America that we will all inherit? The rest of this book looks at these questions.

The Plan of the Book

Chapter 2 begins with a look at the immigrant families' shared belief in the American Dream in the context of their varied mobility paths. So begins the immigrant bargain: regardless of the degree of success they attached to their own journey, the parents invested their hopes in their children, as the next generation was seen as not being subject to the same kinds of language and cultural barriers and related adjustments. A dual frame of reference is crucial to showing how mobility was experienced economically and interpreted in non-economic terms. Chapter 3 discusses the concept of social exclusion in the assimilation processes of the immigrant parents. If immigrant optimism emerged from the promise and rewards of the American opportunity structure and the political freedoms and stability here, immigrant pessimism—or a shared immigrant identity—was reactive, based on the lack of acceptance from na-

tive Americans. Even very upwardly mobile immigrant parents, who were working in non-ethnic institutions and living in non-ethnic neighborhoods, did not feel themselves to be assimilated. Chapter 4 situates the parents' involvement with their children's schooling in the context of these mobility and assimilation patterns. Because parents and schools were out of sync about their expectations for parental involvement, partly owing to the parents' sense of social exclusion, the children ended up feeling themselves to be on their own in school. Overall, chapters 2 through 4 show how the immigrant journey of the parents, in both its downside and its upside, gave way to the family immigrant bargain. But it was also the challenge of the immigrant journey that could make it difficult for the children to meet their parents' expectations.

Chapter 5 looks at how the children drew on nonfamily supports, especially mentors, to win the immigrant bargain. Who gave the children—and sometimes the parents—the information they needed to know about the American system of education and how to succeed? Chapter 6 builds from one assumption of the immigrant bargain—namely, that with the credentials of higher education the children will experience upward mobility. This analysis looks at how we can understand the seemingly paradoxical ways in which the children made sense of this proposition in the wider context of their views on and experiences with college. Chapter 7 shows that, in contrast to the social exclusion experienced by their parents, the children believed themselves to be very much included in America. For them, being American had to do with abstract egalitarian principles; thus, anyone could be American, including those who had grown up in ethnic home cultures. Overall, the children's identities were multiple and coexisted—they saw themselves as ethnic, Latino, pan-minority, and American.

Chapter 8 concludes with a look at both the past and the future. I argue that this story of immigrant optimism about their mobility and freedom here coexisting with pessimism about whether America will accept them as truly American is distinctive to the contemporary era. This is very different from the greater pessimism and alienation of the European immigrants, who arrived in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The chapter closes with a discussion of the implications for further research, policy, and practice with respect to first and second generations of immigrants—namely, how to better integrate immigrants and how to better educate the children of immigrants.