

# == Chapter 1 ==

## Constructing Immigrant Identity

Many Americans view assimilation as a one-way street whereby immigrants arrive in the United States with distinctive languages and cultures and over time steadily adopt American values, acquire American tastes and habits, make American acquaintances, move into American neighborhoods, and eventually come to think and act more like “Americans.” Those born and reared abroad, of course, can never entirely shed the markers of a foreign upbringing, but second-generation immigrants born and raised in the United States experience its language, culture, and values firsthand and internalize its sensibilities as they grow up; American customs and values thus become a natural part of their identity. Eventually natives come to perceive the descendants of immigrants as “like us” and allow them to enter the intimate domains of American life, where not only schools and neighborhoods are shared but also friendship and ultimately kinship through marriage and parenthood, thereby creating the proverbial “melting pot.”

This is a common idealization of assimilation, at any rate, and one that continues to hold sway among many Americans. According to a 2004 poll, 62 percent of Americans agreed that “the U.S. should be a country with a basic American culture and values that immigrants take on when they come here” (Kennedy School of Government 2009). In their eyes, no one forced immigrants to come to this country. Immigrants decided to come because they saw some benefit to living in the United States. By choosing to emigrate, they necessarily broke with their homeland and entered into an implicit agreement to accept the United States as they found it and to make the best of the life they encountered there. If any adjustments or adaptations were to be made, they were to be made by immigrants, not Americans or their institutions. For many Americans, it is the responsibility of immigrants to adapt to U.S. society as unobtrusively as possible, without imposing costs or inconveniences on

natives and without changing American life as it existed before their arrival. In short, immigrants are a “they” who need to become more like “us,” not vice versa.

Unfortunately, as we shall see, immigrant assimilation is more complex than many Americans realize, and the process is shaped by the actions of natives as much as by immigrants’ own actions. Assimilation is very much a two-way street. Welcoming attitudes and behaviors on the part of natives facilitate integration and serve to blur boundaries between groups, whereas hostile attitudes and actions retard integration and brighten intergroup boundaries. We argue that the emergence of an increasingly harsh context of reception in the United States in recent years has erected needless and counterproductive barriers to immigrant assimilation. Although Latin American immigrants arrive with high aspirations and an abiding faith in the American Dream, the longer they remain the more likely they are to experience exploitation and exclusion on the part of natives and, as a result, the less likely they are to see themselves as Americans. In today’s hostile context of reception, in other words, we observe a negative process of assimilation in which the accumulation of discriminatory experiences over time steadily reinforces an emergent pan-ethnic “Latino” identity while promoting the formation of a new, reactive identity that explicitly rejects self-identification as “American.”

## Assimilation and Its Discontents

The canonical statement of immigration as a one-way street was set forth by Milton Gordon in his classic *Assimilation in American Life* (1964). He argued that assimilation involves an orderly passage through a series of three basic stages: acculturation, in which immigrants adopt the language and values of the host society; structural assimilation, wherein immigrants and their children enter into personal networks and social organizations dominated by natives; and finally marital assimilation, wherein the descendants of immigrants intermarry freely with native-born members of the host society. This scenario sees assimilation as an orderly, linear process, and for this reason it has sometimes been referred to as “straight-line assimilation.” The process of assimilation may be faster in some groups than others, but in the end it is inevitable and always follows the same linear progression.

When Gordon was writing in the early 1960s, the United States was not really an immigrant society anymore. Although Americans may have self-consciously described themselves as a “nation of immigrants,” by the middle of the twentieth century the United States was more accurately a “nation of the descendants of immigrants.” Whereas millions of immigrants arrived in the United States during the late nineteenth

and early twentieth centuries, over the next four decades immigration slowed to a comparative trickle, with the inflow dropping from an annual average of around 600,000 between 1880 and 1930 to just 185,000 annually between 1930 and 1970 (Massey 1995). As a result, by the time of the 1960 census, which Gordon used to support his arguments, some 80 percent of all Americans were descended from Europeans and only 5 percent had actually been born abroad, with around 11 percent being black and the remaining 4 percent Hispanic, Asian, or American Indian.

For the vast majority of Americans looking back on the experience of their ancestors from the viewpoint of the 1960s, the canonical expression of assimilation rang true. Their parents and grandparents had moved to the United States and left the “old country” behind. Although they may have encountered barriers, they persevered, moved forward through dint of hard work, and, assisted by a booming postwar economy, earned acceptance as Americans—or so it seemed. Besides adopting this rosy but selective reconstruction of past events, social research on immigration during the 1940s and 1950s was also filtered through a functionalist lens, which viewed assimilation as a logical, adaptive process of social integration inherent to modern industrial societies (Warner and Srole 1945). As a result, contemporary historical accounts read more like a hagiography of immigrants’ triumphs than a careful piecing together of what actually happened (see, for example, Handlin 1951).

Even viewed through the selective lens of the 1960s, however, the canonical account of assimilation would have revealed obvious holes to anyone who looked carefully. First, even during the classic era from 1880 to 1930, immigrants did not really make a clean break with the old country and stake their future on America as they stepped off the boat (Nugent 1992; Wyman 1993). Most of the flows from Europe were characterized by extensive circulation back and forth, and as time progressed the circularity only increased (Hatton and Williamson 1994). Estimates suggest that at least one-third of all Polish and Italian immigrants ultimately returned to their home country, and as steamship travel became faster and cheaper, the rate eventually reached 50 percent in the decade before 1914 (Hatton and Williamson 1998). The only real exceptions to the dominant pattern of circularity were the ethnic and religious minorities who were escaping persecution at home—Jews from the Russian Pale, Irish from the Protestant Ascendancy, and Scots and Welsh from the English enclosure movement (Hechter 1975; Wyman 1993).

Second, even a cursory review of American history revealed that assimilation was not as inevitable and inexorable as the canonical account suggested. Indeed, the oldest “immigrant” group with the longest exposure to U.S. society—African Americans—obviously had not made a full transition to complete assimilation in the century and a half since the end of the slave trade. Although black Americans spoke English, many

spoke a distinctive version with its own grammar, syntax, and diction (Baugh 1983). Moreover, despite overlap with the rest of American culture, African Americans continued to maintain their own distinct cultural forms (Mintz and Price 1992), and in the absence of social and residential integration, levels of black-white segregation were extreme and social networks isolated (Massey and Denton 1993). Not only was marriage between blacks and whites rare, but the act itself was illegal in many states (Wallenstein 2002). Obviously, then, under certain circumstances the canonical processes of assimilation did not proceed to their inevitable conclusion.

Finally, although their isolation and exclusion was nowhere near as severe as that of African Americans, white ethnic groups in the 1960s also reacted against the dominant ideology of Anglo assimilation, asserting that they had not blended completely into the American melting pot and had no wish to do so. In books such as *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Glazer and Moynihan 1963), *Why Can't They Be Like Us?* (Greeley 1971), and *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* (Novak 1972), the children and grandchildren of European immigrants began to emphasize the persistence rather than the disappearance of ethnicity in contemporary American society. By the 1970s, social scientists were emphasizing concepts such as emergent ethnicity (Yancey, Ericksen, and Juliani 1976) and reactive ethnicity (Ragin 1977) rather than assimilation, and rather than visualizing U.S. society as a melting pot, observers sought new metaphors to describe immigrant incorporation, such as the ethnic mosaic (Feagin and Feagin 1989), the ethnic salad bowl (D'Innocenzo and Sirefman 1992), and the ethnic quilt (Allen and Turner 1997).

## Alternatives to Straight-Line Assimilation

As debates about assimilation swirled among the descendants of immigrants who had arrived before the 1920s, a new era of mass immigration was quietly and quite unexpectedly beginning. As new cohorts of non-European immigrants began to dominate the foreign-born population, doubts about the canonical account of assimilation became more pronounced. Whereas immigrants to the United States before 1930 were seen by people in the 1960s as overwhelmingly "white," after 1965 most Americans perceived the new immigrants as "dark" as source countries shifted to Latin America, Asia, the Caribbean, and sub-Saharan Africa. The fact that the post-1965 immigrants were phenotypically distinct and hence more visible than their predecessors immediately raised the question of whether their descendants would be able to assimilate to the same extent as the Europeans before them. By the 1990s, scholars were speaking not of assimilation, but of the Balkanization of America (Frey 1997) and its ethnic ghettoization (Borjas 1998).

Another important change in the years after the great European migrations was the considerably greater effort by the federal government to manage the size and composition of migratory inflows (Massey 1999). Before 1921, there were few qualitative and no quantitative limits on immigration to the United States (Zolberg 2006), but by the 1970s policies governing the entry of foreigners had become central in determining not only the odds of their coming but also the likely trajectory of their assimilation after arrival. First, legislation defined new criteria for admission that increasingly determined the endowments of human, social, financial, and cultural capital that different immigrant groups possessed. Second, the legal auspices of entry—whether immigrants came in as permanent residents, temporary workers, refugees, or undocumented migrants—determined the rights, privileges, and freedoms they enjoyed or lacked as they made their way forward.

Finally, the official warmth of the welcome varied from group to group depending on a combination of economic, political, and racial criteria. Immigrants from some countries, such as Cuba, were warmly welcomed for ideological reasons as allies in the Cold War. Immigrants from other nations, such as Koreans, were strongly encouraged to come by U.S. policies that favored skills and education. Some refugee populations, such as the Vietnamese, were grudgingly admitted because of perceived moral obligations or political debts, whereas other refugee groups—Salvadorans, for example—were barely tolerated because they had the misfortune of fleeing a right-wing rather than a left-wing regime. The least likely to receive an official welcome were undocumented migrants, who entered the country without authorization or violated the terms of a temporary visa to work or stay without permission—Mexicans were the most prominent example. The welcome was particularly hostile if the undocumented migrants were also black, as with Haitians.

### *Segmented Assimilation*

Given different endowments of financial, social, and human capital among immigrants, as well as different official welcomes, different phenotypes, and different histories of migration and settlement, sociologists began to see the straight-line model of assimilation as a gross oversimplification. Herbert Gans (1992) pointed out that, even in the past, the pathway to assimilation was often “bumpy” rather than smooth. Alejandro Portes and his colleagues (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2006) went so far as to argue that assimilation was more accurately a “segmented” process in which pathways of adaptation and integration were systematically channeled in different directions depending on the characteristics of the immigrants, their history of immigration and settlement, and the nature of their official and unofficial welcome.

According to segmented assimilation theory, the characteristics of the immigrants themselves place them into one of three groups—workers, entrepreneurs, or professionals. Within each category, immigrants either arrive speaking English or do not, and depending on a group's particular history of migration and settlement, new arrivals either enter an established ethnic community or must somehow establish a beachhead in the receiving country. Upon arrival, moreover, immigrants may concentrate or disperse geographically, whether at the regional or neighborhood level. Finally, new immigrants enter in different legal categories—as legal immigrants, temporary workers, or undocumented migrants—that confer very different rights and privileges. Unofficially they may be perceived as members of the light-skinned majority or as part of the dark-skinned minority.

Depending on its standing with respect to all these variables, an immigrant group's path of assimilation tends to move upward or downward and to proceed rapidly or slowly (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006). In general, those immigrants who are skilled, educated, English-speaking, and present in the country legally experience rapid upward mobility and easy assimilation into the American mainstream. The children of these immigrants enjoy consonant acculturation with their parents, adapting to life in the United States at the same pace as the immigrant generation and generally performing well in school and experiencing significant intergenerational mobility. In contrast, immigrants who are unskilled, poorly educated, and non-English-speaking are expected to experience significant barriers to upward mobility. They are more likely to follow a relatively slow path of assimilation and their children are at heightened risk of dissonant acculturation.

Dissonant acculturation occurs when immigrant children learn English and master American culture faster than their parents, thereby weakening parental authority. If the immigrant children are dark-skinned, lack documentation, and inhabit poor, minority neighborhoods, this loss of parental control through dissonant acculturation significantly increases their odds of downward mobility. Rather than assimilating into the middle, upper-middle, or even working class, dissonantly acculturated children may adopt a cultural stance in opposition to the mainstream—detaching from school, withdrawing from work, and integrating into the informal economy—essentially becoming part of the domestic urban underclass.

### *Segmented Labor Markets*

The idea of segmentation is not new, of course, and the idea did not originate in studies of immigrants but in research on the structure and orga-

nization of labor markets (see Piore and Doeringer 1976; Tolbert, Horan, and Beck 1980). After much theoretical debate and empirical research, a consensus has emerged among social scientists that contemporary labor markets are not homogeneous but structured (for a review, see Massey et al. 1998). That is, labor markets do not comprise equivalent workers competing uniformly for similar jobs offered by identical employers. Instead, they are structured according to the characteristics of both the jobs and the workers. Rather than representing a single, homogeneous competitive arena, labor markets in advanced industrial societies are segmented into distinct sectors with very different patterns of organization and divergent opportunities (Dickens and Lang 1988).

The most fundamental segmentation is between primary and secondary labor markets; this bifurcation is intrinsic to the structure of advanced industrial societies and stems from the powerful consequences of economic dualism, hierarchical social organization, and contemporary demography (Piore 1979). Economic dualism refers to the fact that capital is a fixed factor of production that can be idled but not laid off, meaning that owners bear the costs of its unemployment. In contrast, labor is a variable factor of production that can be released by employers when demand falls, forcing workers to bear the costs of their own unemployment. To the extent possible, therefore, firm owners seek to identify the stable, permanent portion of demand and reserve it for the deployment of capital and attempt to meet the variable portion of demand by adding or subtracting labor.

Because capital-intensive methods are used to meet constant demand and labor-intensive methods are reserved for variable, fluctuating components of demand, a fundamental distinction arises between workers in the two sectors. Those in the capital-intensive primary sector enjoy access to stable, skilled jobs and work with advanced equipment. Because the jobs are often complicated and require considerable knowledge and experience to perform, a premium is placed on education and firm-specific human capital. Primary-sector workers tend to be unionized or highly professionalized and to work under contracts that require employers to bear a substantial share of the costs of their idling (in the form of severance pay and unemployment benefits). Because of these costs and obligations, workers in the primary sector become expensive to let go; they become more like capital. In the labor-intensive secondary sector, however, workers hold unstable, unskilled jobs from which they may be laid off at any time at little or no cost to the employer. They are a variable factor of production and thus expendable. There are few ladders of mobility and little long-term growth in earnings or occupational status. In this way, the inherent dualism between labor and capital yields a segmented labor market structure.

The effects of dualism are reinforced by structural inflation, which occurs because wages are determined not only by labor supply and demand but also by the hierarchies of status and prestige that characterize socially embedded labor markets. If employers seek to attract workers for unskilled jobs at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy, they cannot simply raise entry-level wages, because doing so would violate socially defined relationships between status and remuneration. As a result, if wages are increased at the bottom, strong social pressures arise to raise wages by corresponding amounts at other levels of the hierarchy, leading to structural inflation that greatly increases costs and threatens profitability.

Occupational hierarchies also have important implications for worker motivation since, as social beings, people work not only for income but also for the accumulation and maintenance of social status. Acute motivational problems arise at the bottom of any hierarchy because there is no status to be maintained at the bottom and there are few avenues for upward mobility. The problem is inescapable and structural because the bottom cannot be eliminated. There is always a bottom. Mechanization to eliminate the least desirable and lowest-skill jobs simply creates a new bottom tier.

The problems of motivation and structural inflation are inherent in modern occupational hierarchies, and together with economic dualism, they create a steady demand for workers who are willing to labor long hours under unpleasant conditions, at low wages, with great instability, and with little chance for advancement. The workers who fit this bill are those who view the job simply as a means to an economic end, not as a source of status, prestige, or personal satisfaction. In the past, this demand was met by three sets of people who are now in scarce supply in developed nations because of demographic trends: women, teenagers, and rural-to-urban migrants.

Historically, women worked up to the time of marriage or first birth, and to a lesser extent after their children left home, seeking to earn supplemental income for themselves and their families. Women endured low wages and instability not only because of patriarchal constraints but also because they viewed their work as transient and their earnings as supplemental and therefore not threatening to their main social status, which was grounded in the family. Likewise, teenagers historically worked to earn extra money, to gain experience, and to try out different occupational roles. With the expectation of getting better jobs in the future, teens did not view dead-end jobs as problematic and worked primarily to earn spending money that could provide them with clothes, cars, and consumer goods that enhanced their status among same-aged peers. Rural areas also used to provide industrial cities with a steady

supply of low-wage workers. Movement from social and economic backwaters to the excitement of the city created a sense of upward mobility and personal improvement. Menial urban jobs provided in-migrants with access to housing, food, goods, and services that often constituted a real improvement compared with what was available in the impoverished countryside.

In contemporary developed societies, however, these historical sources of workers have disappeared because of powerful demographic shifts. Female labor force participation and the feminist revolution have transformed women's jobs into careers pursued for social status, and the rise in divorce rates has changed female jobs into a source of primary income support for women rather than a mere supplement to a husband's earnings. The decline in fertility rates associated with rising female education and labor force participation now produces small cohorts of teenagers who remain in school longer rather than enter the labor force. Finally, the full urbanization of society eliminated rural migrants as a source of unskilled workers.

It is the imbalance between the structural demand for entry-level workers and domestic supplies that generates the long-term demand for immigrants in developed societies. As a result, every developed country has now become a nation of immigration (Massey and Taylor 2004). Immigrants satisfy this structural demand because they typically begin as target earners—that is, they seek to earn money for a specific goal that will improve their status or well-being *at home*, such as building a house, paying for school, buying land, or acquiring consumer goods. Moreover, the contrast in living standards between developed and developing societies makes even low wages abroad appear generous by the standards of the home country. Although immigrants realize that a foreign job carries low status in the host society, at least initially they do not view themselves as being part of that society.

The problem for employers, of course, is that the longer their immigrant employees spend in the host country, the more they come to see themselves as members of the receiving society and participants in its system of status and prestige (Piore 1979). The longer they stay abroad, the more likely they are to shift their aspirations and goals from the home country to the United States and to seek a way out of the secondary labor market for themselves and especially their children. Meanwhile, the children of immigrants, having grown up in the United States and been socialized into its values, are just as put off as natives are by the low status and lousy working conditions of the secondary labor market, and so they are much more reluctant to take the dead-end jobs that were acceptable to their parents. Thus, the structural demand for unskilled labor persists over time despite immigration.

### *Immigrant Enclaves*

Shifting from a job in the secondary sector to one in the primary sector is a difficult and daunting prospect for unskilled immigrants with limited English proficiency and low levels of education, and for those without legal documents it is virtually impossible. For unskilled or undocumented immigrants, such barriers to economic advancement yield feelings of frustration and exclusion. Whereas segmented assimilation into the underclass is one possible response to limited mobility prospects in the United States, another is the immigrant enclave. In their analysis of the process by which Cuban immigrants have been incorporated into the United States, Alejandro Portes and Robert Bach (1985) uncovered a third labor market sector that blends features of primary and secondary labor markets; they labeled this third sector the “ethnic enclave.”

Like the secondary labor market, ethnic enclaves contain mostly low-status jobs that are routinely shunned by natives and characterized by low pay, instability, and unpleasant working conditions. Unlike the secondary labor market, however, the enclave provides immigrants, even those without documents, with significant economic opportunities and real returns to experience. Immigrant enclaves arise when mass immigration produces a geographically concentrated ethnic community that in-group entrepreneurs can exploit, either by catering to specialized ethnic tastes or by drawing on cultural and social capital within the enclave to gain privileged access to low-cost labor to produce goods and services for the wider market (Wilson and Martin 1982; Portes and Stepick 1993).

In the latter case, immigrants working in the enclave trade low wages and harsh conditions upon arrival for the chance of advancement and independence later on (Portes and Bach 1985). The implicit contract between employers and workers stems from the norms of ethnic solidarity (cultural capital) that suffuse the immigrant community (Portes and Manning 1986; Portes and Rumbaut 2006), while personal linkages to other entrepreneurs (social capital) are mobilized to launch new immigrants on independent careers in small business. Once established, new entrepreneurs are expected to promote other immigrants in return, creating an economic mobility ladder that would otherwise be lacking in the receiving society and providing a viable alternative to segmented assimilation.

### *Transnationalism*

Another potential escape from the poverty trap of the secondary labor market is transnationalism—the channeling of one’s hopes, dreams, efforts, and earnings into projects in the sending country. Whereas upward mobility may be blocked in the United States, the dollars earned there,

although meager by American standards, still count for something at home and can be invested and spent in ways that bring real improvements in status and material well-being to migrants and their families. By financing mobility at home, menial wage labor offers immigrants the possibility of maintaining a positive identity and self-respect in the face of a U.S. experience characterized by grueling conditions, low status, and a constant threat of arrest and deportation.

Although by the 1980s circularity was visible in a variety of immigrant flows around the world, it was particularly salient among immigrants from the Americas, and nowhere was it more prominent than among Mexicans. The obvious circularity that characterizes much of the new immigration prompted theorists to hypothesize a new, transnational option for migrants seeking to construct identity and broker hard boundaries. This option reflects the reality of life in a globalizing market economy (Sassen 2007) and represents an example of “globalization from below”—ordinary people responding to profound structural shifts in the political economy by migrating internationally (Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Portes 1999). Over time, extensive movement back and forth across international boundaries produces a set of “transnational villages” (Kyle 2000; Levitt 2001) in which communities of origin and destination are linked together to form regular “transnational circuits” (Mahler 1995; Smith 2006) within which people move to create “transnational social spaces” (Pries 1999; Faist and Özveren 2004) and “transnational social fields” (Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Blanc-Szanton 1994; Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004).

The processes that unfold within transnational social fields combine elements from both origin and destination areas but are not fully a part of either context. Instead, they constitute a hybrid and yield a social reality that is *sui generis*—meaningful and fully comprehensible only to the migrants themselves (Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992). Some theorists posit that the resulting hybridization of cultures and identities (Ong 1999; Faist 2000) will ultimately challenge the monopoly of the nation-state on cultural production and identity formation (Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Blanc-Szanton 1994; Sassen 1996). Transnationalism thus offers another alternative to straight-line assimilation—a new kind of selective assimilation in which migrants do not abandon the language and culture of their homeland, but pick and choose strategically from sending and receiving societies in ways that advance their interests in both, often creating and sustaining new transnational identities and multinational cultures that incorporate disparate elements (Lie 1995; Smith 1997; Portes 1999; Kivisto 2002; Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller 2003; Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006; Kasinitz et al. 2008).

The interpersonal social structures that migrants create to overcome distance and facilitate circulation are generally labeled “transnational

networks" (McKeown 2001; DiCarlo 2008), whereas the social organizations they construct are "transnational institutions" (Portes, Escobar, and Radford 2007). Together networks and institutions support the circulation not only of people but of money, ideas, and values, giving rise to financial remittances (Massey and Parrado 1994), social remittances (Levitt 1998), and cultural remittances (Flores 2008). Together, the arrival of financial, social, and cultural remittances systematically changes people and institutions, creating a "culture of migration" that supports international migration normatively (Massey and Kandel 2002).

The current wave of globalization and the accompanying rise of transnationalism are still relatively new, and many questions remain unanswered. Although the circulation of migrants and their social and financial remittances have been well documented in a variety of migratory systems (see Levitt and Jaworsky 2007), the long-term viability of transnationalism as a way of life remains an open question. It remains unclear, for example, whether current circulations of people, ideas, and funds will continue at the same rate as migrants accumulate time at places of destination, or whether they will persist at the same level into the second generation, or whether circulation by people of unauthorized status can survive internal arrests and tightened enforcement at the borders.

### **Assimilation as Boundary-Brokering**

Despite discontent with assimilation theory, the proliferation of revisionist theories, and the recognition that assimilation can proceed faster or slower and go upward or downward, by the 1990s a scholarly consensus had emerged that the descendants of the European immigrants who arrived between 1880 and 1930 had in fact substantially integrated into American society (Alba and Nee 2003). As a result of widespread socioeconomic mobility and intermarriage, once-distinct European origins had blended together to form a single Euro-American "white" population within which ethnic identification was an "option" that was voluntary and contingent rather than involuntary and invariant (Waters 1990). Even religion had ceased to be a significant marker, since the increase in generations and the rise of education led to extensive intermarriage between Jews, Catholics, and Protestants (Sherkat 2003). For Richard Alba (1985, 1990), these trends were moving descendants of earlier generations of European immigrants into "the twilight of ethnicity."

Given this evidence of massive assimilation among Euro-Americans by the 1990s, but also evidence of segmentation and transnationalism among new immigrant arrivals, social scientists began to shift their focus to view assimilation not as a one-way process of immigrant accommoda-

tion, but as a two-way process of boundary negotiation carried out by immigrants and natives (Alba and Nee 2003). Assimilation occurred as group boundaries were crossed in a growing number of ways by a growing number of people moving in both directions. By sharing ties of friendship, kinship, and intermarriage as well as social and residential spaces, formerly "bright" dividing lines between immigrants and natives become "blurred," and social categories were reconfigured.

In this conceptualization of assimilation as boundary-blurring, the central theoretical task is specifying the conditions under which formerly impermeable boundaries come to be crossed with increasing frequency and ultimately blur to eliminate categorical divisions (Lamont 2000; Lamont and Molnar 2002; Tilly 2005; Zelizer and Tilly 2006). The associated empirical task is to model the process by which boundary-blurring occurs and to determine how various independent variables influence its frequency and pace (Alba and Nee 2003). Since power and resources tend to be skewed toward natives, another way of approaching the issue is to ask under what conditions natives do or do not take steps to maintain intergroup boundaries and enforce mechanisms of exclusion directed at immigrants and their descendants.

According to Alba (2009), the remarkable assimilation of European-origin groups in postwar American society was facilitated by a variety of factors, including the forty-year suspension of immigration from 1930 to 1970, the relative "whiteness" of Europeans despite their diverse national origins, and of course, the strong motivation of immigrants and their descendants to advance economically. By far the most important enabling factor identified by Alba, however, was the structural transformation of the American economy during the New Deal and the remarkable economic boom that unfolded after the Second World War, which together brought steadily rising incomes, declining inequality, and massive occupational mobility (Hout 1988; Danziger and Gottschalk 1995; Levy 1998).

Postwar economic growth was such that upward social mobility by second- and third-generation immigrants was "non-zero sum," in the sense that their progress did not come at the expense of existing white elites (Alba 2009). With the economic pie growing for all, the descendants of earlier northern and western European immigrants felt comfortable in relaxing the mechanisms of exclusion and exploitation directed at the descendants of more recently arrived southern and eastern Europeans. Barriers to the entry of Italians, Jews, and Poles into elite domains were gradually lowered, and discrimination in labor and housing markets waned, enabling these immigrant groups to achieve social contact, spatial proximity, and ultimately biological melding with people of British, German, and Scandinavian extraction, who in turn recon-

figured their cognitive maps to identify the descendants of southern and eastern Europeans as true “Americans” who were de facto and de jure equals (Alba 2009).

Ultimately, then, assimilation is about the restructuring of group identities and the redefinition of social boundaries so that immigrants and their descendants are perceived and treated by natives as “us” rather than “them.” From the perspective of natives, boundaries are blurred or brightened through psychological processes of *framing*, by which social actors in the host society attach positive or negative meanings to immigrants and their descendants and emphasize group differences (Kahneman and Tversky 2000), and socially through processes of *boundary work*, by which natives create mechanisms that either facilitate or inhibit interactions with persons of foreign origin and thus serve to incorporate or exclude them (see Gieryn 1983; Lamont and Molnar 2002).

In general, social actors who control more resources in society—those positioned at the top of the stratification system—have the upper hand in framing and boundary work. Whites, for example, have historically perpetuated negative stereotypes of African Americans as unintelligent, violent, and shiftless (Schuman et al. 1998) and devised a host of anti-black mechanisms of exclusion and discrimination to maintain social boundaries (Foner 1988; Massey and Denton 1993; Katznelson 2005). Within any system of stratification, people with power and authority are prone to undertake boundary work to define one or more out-groups and then frame them as lacking basic human attributes of warmth and competence, thus justifying their ongoing exploitation and exclusion (Tilly 1998; Massey 2007).

Throughout American history, a succession of immigrant groups have been subject to framing and boundary work done by natives to define them as undeserving and hence excludable (Higham 1955). In their time, the Irish, Chinese, Japanese, Italians, Poles, and eastern European Jews were all subject to harsh anti-immigrant campaigns that framed them as threats to American society and thus meriting the discrimination and exclusion inflicted on them. Immigrants naturally resisted these actions and engaged in their own framing and boundary work to position themselves favorably in the eyes of natives and ultimately to gain access to material resources, such as wealth and income, as well as to emotional resources, such as respect and esteem.

Fredrik Barth (1969) argues that ethnic identities are thus formed through a complex interaction between processes of ascription (negative framing and boundary work undertaken by natives) and processes of self-definition (positive framing and boundary work done by immigrants). Foreigners arrive with their own aspirations, motivations, and expectations about what the host society will be like. Over time, they learn about the stereotypes that natives have about their group. They

embrace those that advance their interests in the host society and resist those that serve to justify their exploitation and exclusion. Through this two-way encounter, immigrants actively participate in the construction of their identity: they broker the boundaries to help define the content of their ethnicity in the host society, embracing some elements ascribed to them and rejecting others, while simultaneously experiencing the constraints and opportunities associated with their social status.

Through daily interactions with native citizens and host-country institutions, immigrants construct an understanding of the host country's identity system, gradually piecing together mental constructs of meaning and content for themselves (Barth 1981). Like all human beings, immigrants and natives have both group and individual identities, and membership in social categories plays a critical role in how people develop a sense of themselves as social beings (Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986; Capozza and Brown 2000). Whenever two people interact, they engage one another not only as individuals but as representatives of the social groups to which they belong. In their interaction, they broker intergroup boundaries and through this process of brokering extract meaning to construct and modify identity on an ongoing basis.

Sociologists have theorized two basic processes of identity formation. *Emergent ethnicity* views ethnic identity as developing out of the "structural conditions characterizing American cities and the position of groups in American social structure"; the role of the analyst is to determine "under what conditions ethnic culture emerges" and "what social forces promote the crystallization and development of ethnic solidarity and identification" (Yancey, Ericksen, and Juliani 1976, 391). *Reactive ethnicity*, in contrast, views identity as "the product of confrontation with an adverse native mainstream and the rise of defensive identities and solidarities to counter it" in which "the discourses and self-images that it creates develop as a situational response to present realities" (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 284). Reactive identities are rooted in shared perceptions of exclusion and exploitation that are spread through social networks extending transnationally through postmodern means of telecommunication such as the Internet, cell phones, and calling cards to create, under certain circumstances, powerful "resistance identities" that may become associated with specific political projects (Castells 2004).

In a sense, emergent ethnicity views identity formation as the cultivation of in-group solidarity, whereas reactive ethnicity sees identity as arising in opposition to rejection and exclusion by members of the host society. In this book, we focus on the expression of "American" and "Latino" identities among Latin American immigrants and draw on their words and images to discern the meanings and content ascribed to each category and to learn about the nature of the boundary between them. The key issue for us is determining whether the intergroup boundary is

brightening or blurring and, relatedly, whether self-identification as Latino versus American is occurring emergently or reactively.

## **Bright Boundaries and Reactive Identities**

Whatever labels a society imposes on immigrants, whatever boundaries natives erect to exclude them, and whatever meanings natives attach to people from different lands, immigrants nonetheless are always active agents in negotiating, constructing, and elaborating their own identities (Barth 1969). As they encounter actors and institutions in the receiving society and learn about the categorical boundaries maintained by natives, they *broker* those boundaries and try to influence the meaning and content of the social categories defined by those boundaries. We thus conceptualize immigrant assimilation as a process of boundary-brokering in which immigrants, encountering categorical boundaries that separate them from natives, do whatever they can to challenge, circumvent, or accommodate those divisions to advance their interests. We see three basic inputs into the process of boundary-brokering and identity formation.

First are the characteristics and motivations of the immigrants themselves—who they are, what they look like, the language they speak, their cultural beliefs, and most particularly what they are trying to achieve by migrating to the United States. Second are the characteristics and motivations of natives, with respect to both themselves and the newcomers—how secure they feel socially and economically, how they define themselves as an in-group, and the frames and boundaries they deploy to define and characterize immigrants as an out-group. Finally, the third input into boundary-brokering and identity formation is the daily encounter in a real-world setting—workplaces, schools, offices, stores, parks, and streets; both immigrants and natives broker these everyday interactions by means of competing frames and motivations from which both parties extract meaning.

In this book, we approach the construction of immigrant identity using this tripartite conceptualization and begin by outlining the characteristics, traits, motivations, and aspirations of the immigrants themselves. At present, Latin Americans constitute 35 percent of all legal immigrants to the United States and 80 percent of those present in the country without authorization (Passel and Cohn 2009). Given that Latin Americans constitute the largest single bloc of immigrants to the United States, are the principal target of contemporary anti-immigrant rhetoric, and not coincidentally are the group for which the authors have the greatest cultural knowledge and expertise, this book focuses on them.

In appendix A, we outline the strategy we used to compile a sample of 159 first- and second-generation Latin American immigrants living in

the urban corridor running from New York through New Jersey to Philadelphia. We specified a quota design that called for recruiting roughly equal numbers of Mexicans, Central Americans, South Americans, and Caribbeans living in New York, New Jersey, and Philadelphia, divided evenly between males and females and first- and second-generation migrants. We then recruited respondents to fill these quotas by visiting streets, shops, restaurants, businesses, schools, and other settings that outwardly suggested the presence of Latin American immigrants. We spoke to those we recruited at considerable length, following a semi-structured schedule that reviewed different facets of the immigrant experience and focused on issues related to identity.

These interviews were taped, transcribed, and coded to produce the data analyzed here. Those interested in the methodological details of data collection, coding, and analysis are invited to consult the appendices, but those who are more interested in the findings themselves can simply read the ensuing chapters with no loss. As described in appendix A, all information used in this book—both the transcribed qualitative interviews and the coded quantitative data—is publicly available to users for download from the website of the Latin American Migration Project (<http://opr.princeton.edu/archive/iip>).

In chapter 2, we introduce our informants to readers, describing their social, economic, and physical characteristics, their motives for migrating to the United States, and their long-term intentions with respect to settlement versus return. Our informants originated in fifteen countries from throughout Latin America. Most come from the middle strata of their home countries, and many, though not all, have access to significant human and social capital. Although the immigrants we interviewed are concentrated in the labor force ages (eighteen to sixty-four), the sample also includes younger and older immigrants. We spoke to males and females, people with and without documents, and members of the first, second, and “1.5” generations (those who were born abroad and arrived in the United States as children). Our respondents include persons of mixed European and indigenous ancestry, but also people with antecedents originating in Africa and Asia, yielding a diversity of phenotypes and skin tones ranging from very light to very dark.

Although the large majority of our respondents were gainfully employed at the time of the interview, not everyone had come to the United States for economic reasons. Indeed, some did not want to come at all and were compelled to leave their home country for family reasons. Others had had no plans to emigrate until people in their social network induced them to go; a few people left to escape domestic or civil violence. Even those who had left for economic reasons offered a diversity of rationales for their departure. Some came to achieve economic mobility in the United States; others sought to finance economic mobility at home;

and still others left home because an unanticipated event had created an urgent need for income. Relatively few first-generation respondents were fully committed to life and mobility in the United States, and a majority expressed a desire ultimately to return home.

Having considered what our respondents bring to the brokering of boundaries in the United States, in chapter 3 we consider the reception they faced upon arrival. Because a critical determinant of natives' willingness to abandon mechanisms of exclusion and allow boundaries to blur is the health of the U.S. economy, we begin by considering economic trends. As of 2009, the U.S. economy is far removed from the non-zero-sum configuration that is most conducive to boundary-blurring and assimilation. Between 1968 and 2008, income inequality rose and the economic fortunes of the lower, middle, and upper classes diverged. In response, most American households put themselves at serious risk of insolvency in the event of a loss of income by taking on debt, drawing down savings, and accumulating rising interest payments. The illness or injury of a breadwinner became a particular threat as the rate of health insurance coverage eroded. These trends came to a head in the economic meltdown of 2008 through 2009, when the economy shrank, joblessness surged, and bankruptcies rose to record levels despite congressional efforts to tighten bankruptcy law. In response, during 2009 consumer confidence dipped to record low levels.

The deterioration of economic conditions in the United States was accompanied by a new framing of Latino immigrants as a threat to American society. After 1965, avenues for legal immigration from Latin America were progressively closed off, leading to a rise in unauthorized migration that enabled a framing of Latino immigrants as "illegal" and thus threatening. Martial metaphors were increasingly used to depict Latino immigration as a hostile "invasion" of "aliens" that threatened to "overrun" the "defenses" at the border and achieve the "conquest" of the United States. The events of September 11, 2001, only exacerbated the negative framing of immigrants, enabling propagandists to portray them not just as criminals or hostile invaders but as dangerous terrorists. The deteriorating economy and rise in anti-immigrant rhetoric combined to create a climate of public opinion in which politicians felt compelled to implement harsh, restrictive, and increasingly repressive policies against foreigners, legal as well as illegal.

In the remainder of the book, we consider how the emergence of such a hostile context of reception affects our first- and second-generation Latino respondents as they navigate daily life in the urban Northeast. Given that the initial point of contact between immigrants and natives occurs in the labor market, in chapter 4 we begin our substantive analysis of boundary-brokering by considering the comments of respondents about their U.S. work experiences. What they describe is a world of un-

stable jobs that offer low wages for hard work under stressful conditions and exploitive terms of employment, with employers taking advantage of their status as stigmatized, undocumented minorities without legal rights. Labor subcontracting arrangements, which open the door to numerous violations of tax, labor, safety, and health regulations, are common. Most respondents are paid in cash with no benefits and in those few instances where taxes are deducted, the respondents have no idea how much money has been withheld or for what purposes. They receive no formal accounting of either pay or deductions, and most do not expect to see the money again or to receive any concrete benefits in return.

A few respondents with significant educational achievements, strong English-language skills, and, perhaps most importantly, legal documentation were able to attain stable, well-paying jobs in the primary labor market. A few undocumented migrants reported decent treatment and mobility in the secondary sector, and a few others were able to advance economically through individual entrepreneurship. The large majority of undocumented workers, however, have simply cycled through an endless series of dead-end jobs with little hope of improving their status or income over time. The only practical way to raise income for most respondents is to increase their hours of work, but in many cases hours can grow so long that workers literally wear themselves out. Although respondents were proud of being hard workers and dedicated employees and rarely volunteered complaints about their circumstances, they did perceive rampant inequalities in the world of work around them and had few illusions about getting very far ahead in American society. These narrative reports are confirmed by quantitative analyses of coded interview data.

In chapter 5, we show how these negative experiences primed respondents for disillusionment and disappointment in the United States. They arrived holding fast to the dream of America as a land of opportunity and equality that would offer abundant opportunities for work at wages that would be high by the standards of their own countries. Although our respondents initially viewed opportunities as open and accessible, over time they came to appreciate and, more importantly, experience significant barriers to advancement. A majority of respondents said that inequality in the United States is the same or worse than in their home country, and 60 percent said that they had personally experienced or witnessed discrimination in the United States. Thus, over time, they increasingly came to see the United States as a place riven with categorical inequalities on the basis of race, gender, and legal status, and most told horror stories about their negative experiences in brokering the categorical boundaries they had encountered as they moved through American society. Statistical models once again confirm these qualitative reports.

As noted earlier, one potential escape from the poverty trap of the secondary labor market is transnationalism—the channeling of migrants’ hopes, dreams, efforts, and earnings into projects in the sending country. In chapter 6, we confirm the existence of a vibrant transnationalism among our respondents—both the documented and the undocumented—that shows little sign of dissipating across the generations. Virtually all respondents (92 percent) communicated with friends and relatives in the sending country and regularly sent back “social remittances” by calling home to exchange ideas, information, concepts, and perceptions. Respondents found telephone conversations to be essential for maintaining emotional bonds to their friends and relatives abroad. The Internet, by enabling the rapid transmission of photographs and other mementos of family life, generally served as a complement to rather than a substitute for phone calls. Virtually no one relied on regular postal mail as a means of communication.

Although not quite as universal as social remittances, financial remittances were sent abroad by the large majority of migrants, with nearly 80 percent regularly remitting cash and 54 percent sending gifts and presents. Among those making such remittances, a majority sent funds at least once a month, and most sent a steady amount; one-quarter said that they regularly remitted between one-fifth and one-half of their earnings. The remittances, which were mainly sent via money orders, were generally viewed as a moral obligation; this social debt was usually not suspended until relatives at home no longer needed support or they had all died or moved to the United States. The bulk of the funds went to family maintenance, but some money was usually also directed to productive investments in order to advance the family’s economic interests at home.

Transnational practices are thus an essential part of life for our respondents and a fundamental component of their identities. Detailed multivariate analyses suggest, moreover, that transnational practices are intrinsic to the immigrant experience itself, not a reaction to circumstances in the United States. We found no evidence that migrants respond to negative experiences or blocked mobility in the United States by intensifying contacts with friends and relatives abroad, increasing the frequency or amount of their remittances, or channeling funds toward more productive ends; nor do these transnational behaviors weaken appreciably with time spent in the United States or across the generations. The most we can say is that, as people become more socially integrated in the United States—acquiring documents and becoming fluent in English—they shift their remittances more toward consumption than investment, but even those who say they no longer plan to return home do not cease remitting, though the frequency and amount of the remittances do decline. In general, both social and financial remit-

tances continue as long as there are close friends or relatives at home to receive them.

Both qualitative and quantitative data thus paint a decidedly mixed picture of boundary-brokering for Latin American immigrants in the United States. Most arrive with dreams of social or material advancement and initially perceive the United States as a land of opportunity. Over time, they encounter a harsh world of work and experience the indignities of prejudice, discrimination, and blocked opportunities, and most eventually come to see the United States as a place of inequality and racism. They experience the categorical boundaries imposed on them by the framing and boundary work undertaken by American natives. The dual reality of ongoing engagement and disillusion with the United States suggests a fundamental tension between American and Latino identities and yields a bright categorical boundary that Latin American immigrants must broker in their daily lives.

We explore this tension in chapter 7 by analyzing answers to questions we posed about the meaning and content assigned to the labels “Latino” and “American,” which we discovered were expressed in emergent and reactive ways, respectively. Interview data revealed widespread adherence to a common Latino identity among our respondents, even those from Brazil. More than 80 percent perceived the existence of such an identity, and around three-quarters personally identified themselves as Latinos. As with transnationalism, a Latino identification appeared to be a fundamental and intrinsic component of immigrant identity that was relatively constant in its expression and did not depend on circumstances. Among our respondents, the perception of an emergent Latino identity seemed to be a global reality that is unrelated to individual perceptions, motivations, characteristics, or experiences. It unfolds automatically after arrival in the United States.

In contrast to the near-universal embrace of Latino identity, two-thirds of the immigrants in our sample explicitly rejected an American identity. Moreover, among the one-third who did report the adoption of an American identity, their adherence to it was contingent and highly selective. Contrary to the predictions of classical assimilation theory, adopting an American identity grew progressively *less likely* the more time a migrant had spent in the United States. The likelihood of adopting an American identity was also negatively related to experiencing discrimination in the United States and to hours of labor. Thus, the more time migrants spent in the workplace—that is, the more knowledge they gained about exploitive conditions in the secondary labor market and the more they came to know and experience discrimination—the more likely they were explicitly to dis-identify as American.

The brightness of the categorical boundary between Latino and American identity came through clearly in the words of respondents.

When asked what made them feel Latino, respondents mentioned a strong attachment to the Spanish language, pride in being mestizo and having mixed racial roots, appreciation of Latin American food and music, self-reliance and hard work, and the willingness to persevere without complaints. They also reported a strong and palpable sense of solidarity among Latinos, one characterized by intense devotion to family, loyalty to friends, interest in helping others, and commitment to mutual support to achieve common goals. In terms of personality, respondents spoke of the warmth, spontaneity, joy, and passion expressed by Latinos, as evidenced by their love of banter and lively conversation, strong sense of humor, appreciation of colorful clothes and lively styles—as exemplified in salsa dancing and Latin music—and frequent expression of physical affection.

American identity, in contrast, was defined in polar opposite terms. Americans were seen as judgmental and rejecting, concerned with racial purity and suspicious of racial mixture, and cold, calculating, and hyper-competitive. American food was seen as bland and American music as uninspiring, and respondents mentioned a tendency of Americans to complain while making others do all the work. Americans were seen as excessively individualistic—always looking out for themselves and not devoting enough time and energy to friends or family. Respondents perceived them as having little respect for other people, especially members of the older generation and other authority figures, and lacking a sense of humor and playfulness. Americans were perceived as distant and dry in their interpersonal relations and hesitant to engage in playful banter, to touch one another, or to display physical affection in the form of kisses, hugs, and embraces.

These contrasting verbal descriptions of Latino and American identity were confirmed by an experiment in visual sociology in which we gave two disposable cameras to a subsample of respondents, labeling one “American” and the other “Latino.” As explained in chapter 8, we then asked respondents to take pictures of things, people, or situations in their daily lives that, to them, seemed American or Latino. After developing the resulting photographs, we subjected them to a content analysis, which yielded a rather stark contrast in the themes and imagery associated with the two identities.

To depict American identity, respondents took pictures of skyscrapers and monumental buildings, public spaces devoid of people, cars and traffic, commercial symbols, signs announcing discounts and sales, discarded consumer goods stacked on sidewalks, and crumbling apartment houses. To a remarkable degree, the “American” photos focused on places and things rather than people, and there was a notable absence of facial close-ups among the photos. Judging from the photos, our respondents apparently viewed American identity as being about size and

power, motion and haste, competition and individualism, impersonality and alienation, and barrenness and waste. The imagery seemed to convey the underlying moral that power, motion, commerce, and competition have produced a wealthy, monumental society, but have also squandered resources and dehumanized interpersonal relations.

In contrast, respondents portrayed Latino identity by taking pictures of people in different social settings, with many facial close-ups and many smiles. Common settings for these person-oriented pictures were work, home, and Hispanic businesses such as restaurants and shops. When not focused on people, the pictures tended to concentrate on Latin American cultural products and symbols. A few pictures depicted gang-related graffiti and displayed gang hand signals, suggesting the possibility of dissonant acculturation and its sequela of downward assimilation and oppositional identity. There were few of these photos, however, and on the whole the pictures suggested that the building blocks of Latino identity are work, home, family, friends, Hispanic business enterprises, and emblematic cultural products and symbols. In general, the photographic images offered by our respondents suggest the construction of Latino identity through social links and interpersonal networks experienced predominantly through face-to-face interactions with other immigrants.

In Chapter 9 we close by returning to our conceptualization of assimilation as a two-way street, on which integration is contingent on the actions and beliefs of both immigrants and natives, although natives do have greater power in determining the context of reception and the structural conditions that channel immigrant identification in reactive or integrative directions. We argue that public discourse and political actions in recent years have been counterproductive, serving to brighten intergroup boundaries, heighten categorical divisions, and discourage the crossing of social and psychological boundaries. Rather than facilitating assimilation, anti-immigrant rhetoric and boundary work have brought about a rejection of American identity by immigrants who otherwise are disposed to believe and follow the American dream. Although immigrants inevitably bear the lion's share of the burden in brokering categorical boundaries within the United States, we don't have to make it so difficult for them.

## **Immigrant Identity in Anti-Immigrant Times**

In this chapter, we have argued that immigrant identity is not a primordial sentiment passed down through the ages or inherited from a "pure" national culture abroad, but a dynamic repertoire of practices, beliefs, and behaviors that are subject to constant readjustment and reorganiza-

tion in response to changing circumstances. Immigrants do not arrive with a static identity and progressively shed it to adopt a new American identity over time. Instead, they arrive with their own dynamic tool kit of practices and beliefs, learn about the prevailing practices and beliefs in the host country, and then select those cultural elements from each repertoire that work best in trying to survive and prosper in the host society, often creating new beliefs and practices in the process. Natives respond either by accepting the immigrants and their innovations, and thus making it easy for them to cross boundaries and gain access to societal resources, or by rejecting them and making it hard for immigrants to accumulate resources and cross boundaries. Over time, this negotiation between immigrants and natives leads to boundaries that are either blurred or brightened.

For Latin American immigrants in the United States today, the processes of assimilation and identity formation are unfolding within a context characterized by an exceptional degree of anti-immigrant framing and immigrant-isolating boundary work. The tail wagging the dog is undocumented migration. Within the media and in political discourse, the line between legal and illegal immigrants is elided and foreigners are increasingly portrayed as criminals, invaders, and terrorists who threaten American society. As a result, the more time immigrants spend in the United States, the more they come to perceive themselves as subject to discrimination and exclusion. In this hostile context, immigrants from Latin America quickly embrace a Latino identity that emphasizes their common linguistic and cultural roots, but over time they increasingly adopt a reactive identity that explicitly rejects American identity.

At this point, of course, no one knows exactly how the assimilation of Latin American immigrants will unfold or what configuration their identities will ultimately take. Nonetheless, the boundaries between immigrants and mainstream American society are presently harder than they have been in generations. Whether in the coming years those boundaries are blurred or brightened remains to be seen, but from the immigrants' point of view the bright lines of today must still be brokered on a daily basis.

There are two schools of thought about where today's brokering will lead. A pessimistic school sees considerable potential for underclass formation owing to the rising prevalence of undocumented status, the ongoing racialization and demonization of Latinos in the media, and an increasingly hostile context of reception directed toward foreigners (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006; Massey 2007; Telles and Ortiz 2008). By contrast, an optimistic school sees today's immigrants following the path of earlier generations of foreigners, who, despite experiencing prejudice, discrimination, and racialization, nonetheless managed to become incorporated into the American mainstream (Foner 2000; Alba and Nee

2003; Perlman 2005). Some of the optimists see particular potential in the impending retirement of baby boomers, which they hope will open up new positions throughout the occupational hierarchy and create a new round of non-zero-sum mobility for second- and third-generation immigrants (Myers 2007; Alba 2009). Although it is impossible to say with certainty which scenario will prevail in the future, perhaps the best place to begin an assessment is by listening to what the immigrants themselves have to say.