

Chapter 1

Emiliana, Elena, and Ling Raise Citizens in New York City

The A train links lives across the city of New York. It has done this for nearly a century. In the 1930s, Billy Strayhorn named his new composition, "Take the A Train," after directions that Duke Ellington had given him to his home in Harlem. At that time the subway line carried New Yorkers from Harlem to eastern Brooklyn. By the turn of the twenty-first century, the line had been extended up past Harlem to Washington Heights, down the full length of Manhattan Island, and over to the farthest southeastern corner of Queens.

On July 18, 2005, if you were on the A train in the right subway car at the right time, you would have seen two Latina women and one Asian woman. The subway ride was a crucial part of each of their daily routines. These three women's homes spanned the entire length of the A—the two terminal neighborhoods of Far Rockaway, Queens, and Washington Heights in Manhattan, and one neighborhood in between, the oldest and most famous of the four Chinatowns of New York City. The women shared certain characteristics: all three were roughly the same age, in their late twenties to early thirties; all three had infants; and all three were part of a longitudinal study of child development. They would have all appreciated the air conditioning on the train (and noticed the lack of it on the subway platforms when the train made stops).

You would not have guessed, seeing these three women on the subway, that despite their demographic similarities, they differed on a crucial invisible characteristic: legal documentation status.¹ Differences in this status shaped their everyday experiences in innumerable ways: through differences in their social networks, in the programs and care settings to which their children were exposed, in the quality of their jobs, and, most importantly, in their prospects for full integration into American society. Despite these differences, Emiliana, Elena, and Ling shared one crucial characteristic: their infants were U.S. citizens. In telling the hidden stories of Emiliana, Elena, and Ling, *Immigrants Raising Citizens* shows that the undocumented status of some immigrant parents entering the United

States can have harmful consequences for their children. I focus on the 4 million of our nation's children who are citizen children of undocumented parents—nearly one-third of all children of immigrants, and about one student per classroom in every elementary school in the United States.² In an intensive, three-year study of nearly four hundred children recruited hours after birth in public hospitals and followed in the homes and neighborhoods of New York City, this increasingly common but largely unknown part of the American childhood experience emerged as a powerful and unexpected story.

Immigrants Raising Citizens describes the experience of raising very young children as an undocumented parent in the United States. It is also about the ways in which the undocumented status of immigrant parents influences the development of their U.S. citizen children. I argue that the simple fact of coming without legal papers shapes the everyday interactions of young parents with institutions and organizations, as well as their housing, jobs, and households, even when their children are U.S. citizens, with all the rights that that status implies.

I show in this book that the lack of a pathway to citizenship for their parents is harmful to children's development—particularly their cognitive and language skills—as early as ages two and three. Undocumented parents employ a tremendous range of survival strategies to provide opportunities for their children's learning, health, and development. Despite these sources of strength, parental undocumented status represents a risk, not a source of resilience, in the development of these children.

How does documentation status affect such young children's learning? In this study, two sets of influences transmitted the effect of documentation status in lowering children's cognitive skills. At twenty-four months, parents' economic hardship and psychological distress—feelings of depression, anxiety, and worry—were responsible for this effect. At thirty-six months, with more of the mothers having gone back to work, the influence of documentation status on child cognitive skills was conveyed through the disastrous work conditions of the undocumented parents in the sample, combined with lower access to center-based child care.

The undocumented are viewed in current policy debates as lawbreakers, laborers, or victims—seldom as parents raising citizen children. Policy-makers generally ignore the development of children of the undocumented. The data from this book suggest that ignoring these children has costs for society. Millions of the youngest citizens in the United States, simply by virtue of being born to a parent with a particular legal status, have less access to the learning opportunities that are the building blocks of adult productivity. The consequences of parental undocumented status, reflected in outcomes as intimate as a toddler's vocabulary at age three, are

societal in their importance, because the early cognitive skills of our youngest citizens predict the future productivity and success of the nation.

EMILIANA RAISES VICTOR

On this July afternoon, if you had taken the A train from the familiar territory of midtown Manhattan, it would have taken an hour and a half to get to Far Rockaway, the home of Emiliana and Victor. Ana, a field-worker in our study of early child development in immigrant families, took the A train from Penn Station, after coming in from her home in New Jersey. The neighborhood of Far Rockaway sits on the edge of the Atlantic, in the southeastern corner of the city, past Kennedy Airport. The neighborhood made national news in November 2001 when American Airlines flight 587 to the Dominican Republic crashed there soon after taking off from the airport, killing all 251 people on board. Far Rockaway is a largely black and Latino neighborhood. No single ethnic group predominated there in 2005, and Mexican immigrants were a relatively small proportion of the community. There was quite a bit of commercial activity in the neighborhood of the subway station, including a florist, grocers, a barbershop, a couple of pizzerias, and small convenience stores. Two chain pharmacies—Eckerd and CVS—were located near the subway stop. Some walls were covered with graffiti. The street life was relatively sparse. Emiliana's apartment, several blocks away from the station, was in a three-story house converted into three apartments. The houses on these quiet streets had well-kept lawns. Most of the homes, including Emiliana's, had gates and bars on the windows.

Nine years before, in her late twenties, Emiliana had arrived from a village in Mexico's state of Puebla, the region of origin for most Mexicans in the recent and first large wave of Mexican immigration to New York City.³ Also like most in this wave of immigration, she had come to the United States undocumented.⁴ She had two U.S.-born children with her husband, Victor Sr.: a four-year-old daughter named Luz, and Victor, the focal child in our study, an eight-month-old baby with a calm and energetic disposition.

Emiliana greeted Ana at the door. She had long straight hair, brown eyes, and medium-brown skin. She was dressed casually in sweatpants on the first visit. Although Emiliana described herself as a shy person, she had a friendly personality. Like many of the parents during the first visit of our ethnographic study, she said that she was not sure she would have anything interesting or important to say. By the end of this visit, however, she would tell Ana that she was surprised to have had so much to say about her experiences.

The apartment was a one-bedroom. During the two years that Ana visited Emiliana's apartment, the number of people living there ranged from eight at the first visit to a maximum of twelve at one point. The bedroom, about twenty square feet, was the only place where the interview could take place in the apartment because Emiliana's sister-in-law, together with her husband and two children, lived in the living room. The bedroom was just large enough to fit a queen-sized bed, a crib for Victor, a smaller twin bed for Luz, a bookcase for a headboard, a TV atop the dresser, another dresser for clothes, and Victor's changing table; there was only a tiny bit of room to walk. The only places for Ana and Emiliana to sit were two corners of a bed, about three feet apart. This made for intimate conversations.

Ana was amused by Emiliana's initial introduction of baby Victor: waving her arm like a magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat, she exclaimed, "Y aquí esta Victor." Victor was chubby, with black hair, fair skin, and brown eyes. During the first visit, there were not many times when he did not have a smile on his face. He was quite playful, trying to kiss, hug, or bite his mom's and Ana's faces. He would be calm for a bit, looking at his surroundings, and then, quite suddenly, he would laugh or jump up and down. By his second year, Emiliana had given him a buzz cut and was dressing him in fashionable outfits—one combined a green sweater, brown slacks, and blue shoes.

Although Emiliana had some relatives in the city, they were not concentrated in any one neighborhood. She had arrived early in a great wave of migration, and so there was not yet a single large concentration of Mexicans in New York City (although Mexicans were a growing presence in East Harlem, the legendary *barrio* of a huge prior wave of migration to New York from Puerto Rico, as well as several other neighborhoods in the city). Although many people from Emiliana's village in Puebla had come to New York, she told Ana, they were "scattered all over the city."

Emiliana was one of the first in her family to come to the United States. Among her large family of eight siblings, only she and her next youngest brother had undergone the "adventure" of the border crossing. Her father had been the very first in the family to come; he stayed in the city for three years before returning to Mexico. She herself was sent to New York by her father immediately after she completed ninth grade in order to start working and send remittances back to the rest of the family in Puebla. In this classic path to social mobility in the sending regions of Mexico, the eldest siblings usually sacrifice the rest of their education. In Mexico, ninth grade is the end of "secundaria" (secondary education), and an age when teenagers are often considered old enough to emigrate by themselves. The path to middle- and upper-middle-class jobs would have been further study past ninth grade ("preparatoria"), but this path was closed to her

when she came to the United States. She spoke of this interruption in her education wistfully and related to Ana her hopes of eventually picking up her education. First she would have to strengthen her English. She had taken a few weeks of English classes near Penn Station soon after arrival, but the unrelenting schedules of low-wage work and then parenthood took over her life.

Emiliana and Victor Sr.'s working lives and schedules were grueling. Victor Sr. worked in a restaurant as a line cook, putting in twelve-hour days, six days a week. Undocumented himself, he had been dutifully paying taxes for eleven years and waiting for a work visa; none was forthcoming. The few times that Ana saw him during her visits, he looked exhausted. Emiliana woke up every day around six, prepared her children for preschool and child care, went to work cleaning houses, came home, prepared dinner, put her children to bed, did housework, and then waited up for Victor Sr. to return home, often after one in the morning. When he arrived, she gave him his dinner, went to bed, and woke up only a few hours later. Ana observed in more than one visit that Emiliana seemed listless and sad, though when asked about it, she always said that things were "fine."

Emiliana's older child, her daughter Luz, was in preschool, but this had happened almost accidentally. Like many undocumented parents in our study, Emiliana had not been aware that free preschool is provided to low-income families in the United States through programs like the federal Head Start program. Ana in fact was the one who told her about Head Start, although by that time of the year it was too late to enroll Luz. Emiliana subsequently had concerns about Luz's language development. (She spoke relatively few words and mumbled, so it was extremely difficult for even her mother to understand her.) When Emiliana spoke with her pediatrician about these concerns, he helped to have Luz evaluated. In this way, Luz was found to qualify for services through the federal early intervention program, and she began attending a preschool with a special focus on children with delays. She also started receiving intensive speech therapy.

Emiliana had few social supports to help take care of Victor or Luz. Neither of her parents was in New York City, and no one in that generation was available in her family. She also did not report much support from neighbors, either in her building or in the area. She was committed, however, to supporting the early learning of her children. She provided Luz with a preschool desk, which she picked up for twenty dollars at a garage sale, as well as books, markers, and crayons. From time to time she also bought English-language DVDs to play for her children (*Dumbo* was one). These forms of investment in materials for children's learning can improve early cognitive development. In her work as a housekeeper,

Emiliana learned about “structure” as U.S. parents conceive it, with children’s time divided into distinct periods: playtime, homework time, dinnertime. She wanted to provide these forms of stimulation to her children and also said that she wanted them to grow up not spoiled (“mimados”) but independent.

ELENA RAISES ALBERTO

On this same humid July afternoon, Elena Espinal, a woman in her late twenties who had arrived in the United States from the Dominican Republic eleven years before, was coming home. She was on the A train in the far northern part of Manhattan, where she would pick up her son Alberto, eight months old, from her aunt’s house. Then she would try to make it home by six, when she had scheduled a first meeting with Patricia, a field-worker from our research project who was assigned to interview Elena for the next two years.

Elena had just come from her job taking care of an elderly Dominican woman in the same neighborhood, Washington Heights, the historic center of Dominican life in New York City since the 1960s. The child care provided by her aunt, despite being close in terms of blood relations, entailed a subway ride and so was a bit too far away to fit into her busy schedule with Josefina, her ten-year-old daughter. So Elena had recently been thinking about switching to government-subsidized infant day care. One program was within a short walk from her apartment in the Heights. She worried, however, that she might not be able to trust someone who was not a relative of Alberto’s. After all, he was so young.

At that moment, Patricia, the field-worker, was taking the subway up to Washington Heights from downtown Manhattan. She was reading her notes on what to do on the first visit to a family. This was one of her first ethnographic visits, so she felt both nervous and excited to be starting after the months of discussion and training on the project. The A train was packed with people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, most of whom got off at Penn Station. A man came through the train, shouting, “Batteries, two dollars!” in Spanish and English. From Penn Station all the way up to Washington Heights, blacks and Latinos outnumbered whites on the train. Patricia had never been so far north in Manhattan; her friends had told her in recent days that she should be very careful because “that’s not a nice neighborhood.” Patricia was worried about her return home in the evening after her visit, when she would walk by herself back to the subway.

Walking straight ahead from the subway station, Patricia felt nostalgic as she listened to the music coming from the stores she passed. They were playing merengue, salsa, and bachata. The music, the voices of people speaking Spanish on the streets, four older men playing dominoes on the

sidewalk—it all reminded Patricia of Rio Piedras, a part of San Juan in her native Puerto Rico. The streets were congested in the middle of the evening rush hour, but there was not a single taxi in sight.

Washington Heights is one of the liveliest residential neighborhoods in New York City. Its commercial core is an unending parade of small businesses lining upper Broadway, a thoroughfare that was once the Wick-quasgeck Trail, used by American Indian tribes for centuries to make their way through the swamps and ridges of the island of “Manahatta.” Within two blocks of the subway station closest to Elena’s home, on Broadway, were several restaurants, both fast-food and ethnic, a bakery that advertised DOMINICAN CAKE, and an ice cream store. National small-box stores like Radio Shack and Payless Shoes coexisted with inexpensive clothing stores that put racks out on the sidewalk. There was an H&R Block and three banks—Washington Mutual, Banco Popular (a Puerto Rican bank), and Chase. The banks had big banners shouting WE CASH CHECKS. In another storefront was a little “multi-purpose” travel agency that dealt with immigration issues, insurance, and “envios” (money sent overseas). Unlike Far Rockaway, a substantial proportion of the small businesses in Washington Heights focused on hiring, serving, or selling to immigrants, Dominicans in particular. And as these businesses suggested, the concentration of Dominicans in this part of Washington Heights was very high—over 50 percent, according to the 2000 U.S. census. In contrast, no Mexican family in our study lived in a census tract with more than 27 percent Mexican families.

The density of commercial activity in this part of Washington Heights was matched by the density of socializing between adults and children: there was far more activity and monitoring of children on the streets of Washington Heights than Ana ever saw in Far Rockaway. Elena’s street was very lively—about eight children on small bikes were playing under the supervision of several adults, who were sitting on beach chairs that they had put out on the sidewalk. An older man was fixing one of the kids’ bikes, and the children were getting impatient because they wanted to ride. Patricia also saw from a distance a group of men playing dominoes and laughing. She did not at that point know that one of the men was Alberto’s father, Ramon, but she would recognize him there on later visits.

Elena was a little chubby, had her hair up in a ponytail, and wore black leggings and a white T-shirt that said MIAMI. Her hair was dyed a reddish color, though its natural color was dark brown. She had gold jewelry on, but wore no makeup. She had come to the United States, at the age of eighteen, from the large, fertile Cibao region north of Santo Domingo, the origin of many of the Dominican families in New York City. As was common for many Dominicans who came to New York late in the 1990s, sev-

eral decades after the great wave of immigration that had begun after Trujillo's death in 1961, Elena was not the first of her family to come to the United States; many of her family members were already here, including two of her three siblings and both of her parents. She had come initially on a tourist visa, but eventually her father was able to sponsor her for her green card.

During the first visit, her son Alberto kept making a lot of funny faces that everyone laughed at. He had learned how to wave "bye-bye" and did it all the time when family members told him to. He waved in slow motion, and his gesture looked more like flamenco than a good-bye. He also smiled at everyone, and after a few minutes of intently observing Patricia, he smiled at her too.

What was most memorable to Patricia about this first visit with Elena—aside from her own relief at the relative safety of the neighborhood—was the ease with which she, a research interviewer and stranger to the household, was integrated into the large network centered on Elena and her children. Even before her first visit, as Patricia was scheduling it on the phone, she could hear Elena's husband Ramon interjecting that if she came on such-and-such a day they could make "asopao" (a Dominican stew) for her. About twenty minutes into the first visit, Lola, Elena's aunt, arrived without notice and kissed Patricia in greeting as if unsurprised to see her there. Then, about an hour later, Maria Graciela, Elena's mother, arrived. She also kissed Patricia hello as if she were part of the family. Elena did not introduce Patricia to either woman; perhaps she said, "This is Patricia," but she did not say who she was or why she was there. Neither Lola nor Maria Graciela asked. It turned out that this was nothing unusual for the family. Over the course of the next nine visits, Patricia was to observe again and again visits from relatives and other people, both within the building and around the neighborhood. Alberto's godmother, Elena's cousin, visited at least once a week. At various times Elena's great-uncle and Maria Graciela's husband visited. Maria Graciela came herself every day right after she completed her work as a home care attendant. These visitors interacted regularly with Alberto. Maria Graciela, in particular, was a major figure in his life. As Alberto grew into toddlerhood, Patricia observed that Maria Graciela read to him regularly.

Not only were the extended networks rich in social interactions in the Espinal household, but they were important in their work lives as well. Elena had obtained her job through her mother: they worked at the same home health care agency. Unlike Emiliana's and Victor's jobs, this was a unionized job, so that when Elena had to undergo an emergency C-section at Alberto's birth, she was able to take off three paid months to recover. Elena's extended network formed a web of supports that was centered on her work and the children's care and school schedules but was also avail-

able for the unexpected needs that came up. Elena's sister, who lived down the block, visited the family nearly every day and took care of Alberto when Elena needed to run errands.

How might these support figures in Alberto's life have mattered for his development? Multiple figures in the Espinal household provided Alberto with not only love and affection but also stimulation in the form of early language activities. Right from birth, Alberto was exposed to both Spanish and English. Elena and Ramon tended to watch Spanish-language TV, but when Josefina, Alberto's nine-year-old sister, entered the room, she would switch the TV to English-language programs. She also spoke both Spanish and English to Alberto, unlike Elena and Ramon, who spoke only Spanish. As is common in the later development of the second generation, by age ten Josefina had started to respond to her mother in English.

Patricia observed book-reading activities in the Espinal household. One book in English had thick cardboard pages with big pictures and large-font text. During a visit when Alberto was twenty months old, he flipped the pages of this book and "talked" as if he were reading. He said "guaw guaw" ("woof woof") when he saw a picture of a dog in the book. Whenever he did this, Elena would smile back and say in Spanish, "What's that? The guaw guaw? Show me where it is." Maria Graciela did this too. Studies show that these forms of conversation—elaborating on children's speech and linking objects in everyday life with the words that refer to them—help support vocabulary development.

Alberto's learning was aided not only by multiple generations of adults in the household but by his older sister. Josefina was skilled in interacting with her younger brother. In one visit, Patricia observed Josefina teaching Alberto how to play with a puzzle. She began by showing him the puzzle deconstructed, but Alberto had no idea of what it should look like. When she realized this, she started to put the right pieces in the right positions, close to where they belonged, so that Alberto could just put them where they went. Whenever he was unsuccessful at putting the right piece in the right space, she would take his hand and move and direct his action in such a way that he would be able to put it where it belonged. This kind of teaching by "scaffolding"—gently directing a child in actions that are just out of his or her developmental reach—supports language development in young children.

LING RAISES GUANG

Yong, our field-worker assigned to Ling, a mother in her thirties from China, will never forget his second meeting with her family. He had tried to arrange the meeting for midafternoon on a weekday. Two days before

the meeting, Ling called. She was abrupt in her Mandarin: "Can you come meet us in midtown at this address at 7:45 Wednesday morning?" The address was not near her home, which was in Chinatown. Yong, who had been trained to be flexible and responsive to the often shifting and non-standard schedules of parents in our study, immediately said yes. Much to his surprise, the meeting place that Ling had chosen was an administrative office of the New York City Department of Education. The meeting would not be what Yong had expected: a relaxed chance to hang out and observe the daily routine of Ling, her husband Wei, and their son Guang. Instead, he was being recruited as a translator to help transfer Guang to another school. Lacking a large network of extended family like Elena's, Ling, a mother from Fujian province on the eastern coast of China, was adept at recruiting the relatively few members of her social network for instrumental aid.

Guang, an eleven-year-old with a prematurely dry sense of humor, was the older of Ling and Wei's two children. As a language broker in training, Guang would wink occasionally at Yong while he was translating for Ling. Ling and Wei felt that Guang was much less close to them emotionally than their younger child, their daughter Mei. They thought this might have been because they sent him back as an infant to China for several years, between the ages of four months and four years. In one of the big surprises of our study, we were unable to follow the Chinese infants we recruited at birth because the vast majority of them were taken on this very same journey in the first years of their lives. Guang's story was therefore our only ethnographic window into the experience of these infants and how they fared after their return to the United States, usually at the age of four or five.

Guang often asked his parents, "Why did you send me back?" He did not know that Ling and Wei had sent about \$1,500 a year back in remittances to Ling's parents to help raise him. At entry into preschool, shortly after his return from Fujian province, a teacher in his Manhattan Chinatown preschool asked Guang, "Did your parents treat you nice?" He replied, "No—only my grandparents." The transition from grandparents he trusted and loved to parents he had never known was not easy, and even seven years later this separation was steadfastly lodged in his psyche.

Ling had come to the United States at the beginning of the 1990s, early in the wave of immigration from Fujian province that came to dominate low-income Chinese immigration to this country in that decade.⁵ This was exactly the same period when Mexican migration to New York swelled from a trickle to a steady stream. Like the Cantonese who had come during the previous decades and had formed the majority of Chinatowns in U.S. cities, the Fujianese came from largely rural backgrounds in one of the eastern provinces. (Fujian province is just north of Guangdong, or

Canton, province.) Ling left because “there was nothing to do—no jobs there” (that is, in the town near Fuzhou city where she lived). She was the first in her immediate family to go to the United States, her connection there being Wei, to whom she was already married. She had met her husband at a tire factory, and Wei had left for New York three years before her. Like most of the Fujianese wave of migrants to New York, they were undocumented and arrived in the city with the assistance of the “snake-heads” to whom they paid enormous sums to make the crossing. Sums of tens of thousands of dollars are impossible for most emigrants to pay at once, and so they incur large debts. The combined pressure of these debts and the high cost of infant child care in the United States compelled many in this wave of pioneers, who did not have their own parents around, to send their babies born within the first several years of arrival back to Fujian province to be raised by their grandparents. Ling, like most of her female counterparts from Fujian prior to 9/11, worked in the garment industry to pay off the debt. Her husband worked in Chinese restaurants. After several years of twelve-hour work shifts, six days a week, Fujianese immigrants are usually able to pay off their debts.⁶

Guang’s family lived at the edge of Manhattan’s Chinatown, the far downtown historic center of many waves of Chinese immigration since the nineteenth century, though only one of several Chinese ethnic enclaves in today’s city. East Broadway is the center of the most recent Fujianese settlement, and the area is as important to that community as upper Broadway is to the Dominicans. This street is on the eastern border of Chinatown, angled toward the East River, and bears no relation to the better-known Broadway. The ramp to the Manhattan Bridge looms over this part of Chinatown. The neighborhood is a mix of public housing projects and private apartments in tenement walk-ups. On Ling’s block, a couple of blocks away from East Broadway, Yong saw two nail salons, a McDonald’s, and a ninety-nine-cent store. There were many people out on these streets at the border of Chinatown and the Lower East Side—Chinese, black, Latino, white, and Jewish Orthodox. Yong did not see a predominance of Chinese immigrants in the area. But within ten blocks were many organizations with decades-long histories of serving the Chinese immigrant community, including social service, faith-based, and political organizations.

Like nearly all of our Chinese and Mexican families, Ling lived in a cramped private apartment outside the housing subsidy system. As an undocumented immigrant, the key in-kind support of public housing or Section 8—a lifeline in the most expensive city in the United States—was not accessible to her. Her apartment was in a crumbling, five-story walk-up with a broken front-door lock.

Like Emiliana, Ling had few support figures in her life to help with

important tasks such as navigating New York City schools and other institutions. Her life was quite isolated: she did beading work at home, while her husband Wei worked long days stretching into the evenings at a Chinese restaurant in Brooklyn. She did not appear to have many friends or visitors to the apartment. Ling did say that financial support in the form of loans—sometimes even very large amounts in the thousands—was common practice among family networks of the Fujianese. She reported, for example, that she had loaned large amounts of money to her brother to assist in the down payment for an apartment, and she described that loan as an “unquestionable duty.” She also reported the existence of formal lending pools—*做会*, or *zuohui*—in the Fujianese community that extended beyond family to friends and other nonrelatives. However, she did not trust the *zuo hui*—“It’s like they will give you money if you need, and then we give the money bit by bit. But if you run away, there goes the organization. I dare not try it.” The extended social networks available to the Dominican families in our study were characteristic of neither our Chinese (largely Fujianese) families nor our Mexican families. So when Yong entered Ling’s family’s life as a field-worker who would interview them ten times, he was immediately recruited as a language broker.

Ling had a mixed—sometimes *laissez-faire*, and sometimes very proactive—attitude toward Guang’s learning. She did not have very high expectations for his school success: “I told my husband, I think we don’t have the talent: we didn’t have people who studied in the last generation.” She pointed out the family across the hall in their Chinatown building: the father had graduated from Qinghua University, one of the top four universities of China. She felt certain that her neighbor’s children would succeed in school without even trying: “Now his children all play the video games, and his mother wouldn’t care about him, but he could pass the exam and got in the secondary school, you see, how terrific he is?” Despite these statements, her actions generally showed her commitment to facilitating Guang’s learning and education. With Yong’s help, she enrolled her son in what she felt was a better school. Earlier in his life, she had felt that it was very important to enroll Guang in preschool, and she had made sure that he returned to the United States in time to enter preschool and receive this early exposure to English. She berated him if he did not help his seven-year-old sister Mei with her homework. However, she enrolled him for only a brief time in “shadow schooling,” or Chinese language school—a common way for immigrant parents to bolster their children’s schooling and maintain their Chinese fluency.⁷ Ling reported that she “got lazy” about making the extra commute that was involved in getting Guang to the weekend school. Contrary to the findings of many scholars of East Asian parenting, Ling seemed to believe that innate ability matters more than effort in children’s school success.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The stories of Emiliana, Elena, and Ling suggest striking differences in their everyday experiences as mothers of young children. Despite sharing the same city and subway line, many features of their daily routines—support from social networks, work conditions, access to in-kind supports like housing or child care subsidies, knowledge about preschools and schools, and neighborhood resources—were different. These features are all important influences on children’s learning in the first years of life. The *developmental contexts* of Victor, Alberto, and Guang—not only the settings in which they spent their own days and nights but also their parents’ settings, which indirectly affected them—were very different. These differences occurred even though we chose families for our sample to be as similar as possible on traditional indicators of socioeconomic status, such as income, parental education, and employment. Newborns were recruited from public hospitals serving largely low-income families; they were all born in the United States, nearly all of them to first-generation immigrant mothers; and they all lived in New York City. They represented the three immigrant groups we sampled for our study: Dominicans, Mexicans, and Chinese.

When our research team recruited these mothers at the time of their children’s birth, we did not realize that they would differ on a key legal marker that appears to have a profound influence on the everyday routines and resources in these households: undocumented status. This story emerged from the qualitative interviews and became an important part of the study as our fieldwork team realized the impact that documentation status can have on children’s development.

Emiliana’s and Ling’s undocumented status and Elena’s documented status fit a pattern that was common at this point in the history of New York City and U.S. immigration policy. Their statuses were representative of their respective immigrant groups. The majority of low-income Mexicans and close to a majority of the low-income Chinese who arrived in New York during the period our families came were undocumented.⁸ The undocumented immigrants, arriving after both the federal amnesty of 1986 and passage of the highly restrictive immigration and welfare reform laws of 1996, had no clear path to citizenship.⁹ Victor Sr., a taxpaying immigrant working twelve-hour days, six days a week, had been waiting for a work visa for eleven years—in vain. Ling and her husband Wei came to New York bearing crushing debts of tens of thousands of dollars to the smugglers who brought them into the country. Their long work hours in their first years in the United States (like Victor Sr.’s, they typically worked twelve hours a day, six days a week) were devoted to fighting their way up to a zero balance in their finances. On the other hand, Dominicans who

came to New York during this period included a much smaller proportion of undocumented because, having arrived late in a decades-long wave of immigration, this group was much more likely to have relatives with permanent resident or citizenship status already in the States.¹⁰ Many of the Dominican parents in our study were therefore able to enter under family reunification provisions or with work or tourist visas obtained with the help of these older pioneer generations.

Despite the differences in the legal statuses of their parents, the children of Emiliana, Elena, and Ling, as well as all of the focal children in our study, shared a single status: U.S. citizenship. Our study recruited newborns in New York City, so by definition these children were born with all the rights of U.S. citizens. In this respect, too, our families were representative of their counterparts across the nation. In nearly all U.S. families with at least one undocumented parent and a child under six (91 percent), that child is a U.S. citizen.¹¹ Many families in this study shared this most common type of “mixed status”—undocumented parent with citizen child—with the households of roughly 4 million children in the United States.¹²

Emiliana, Elena, and Ling came to New York with the hopes of economic success. They also came during their prime childbearing years. The average age of our Mexican mothers when they came to the United States was twenty; for the Dominicans the arrival age was seventeen, and for the Chinese it was twenty-three. There was a larger range of ages for the Dominicans (stretching from early childhood into adulthood), with smaller ranges for the Mexicans and Chinese, who generally came as adults. Although we did not obtain information on their decision to have children in the United States, one cause for the widely observed “immigrant optimism” among the recently arrived—optimism concerning future prospects, economic success, and even lower perceptions of discrimination—may be the future potential not only to become U.S. citizens but to raise children who are citizens from birth and thus fully integrated into U.S. society.¹³ Within the first decade of their arrivals in New York, Emiliana, Elena, and Ling had children. (On this front we do not have any comparison group of childless immigrants, as our study by definition was of babies born in New York City hospitals.)

Should we be concerned about the development of the children of Emiliana, Elena, and Ling—Victor, Alberto, and Guang? Hundreds of studies suggest the importance of early cognitive, social, emotional, and attentional skills for later school and life success.¹⁴ Owing in part to the foundations of brain architecture being laid in the first years of life, infancy and early childhood is a developmental period that is highly sensitive to environmental influence. Without adequate cognitive stimulation and resources from adults, proper nutrition and health care, and the constant “serve and return” of early responsive and nurturing caregiving, child de-

velopment can be delayed or go off track. In this book, I ask whether parental undocumented status, by altering the everyday experiences and resources available to households, harms children's development above and beyond the effects of relatively low parental income and education.

The public view of children of undocumented immigrants is not rosy. Some policymakers decry their use of public resources, such as welfare or health care. From this vantage point, these children are burdens to the nation, taking resources away from other families. On the other hand, these children are likely to spend the bulk of their lives in the United States, and therefore as a society we must care about their future success, well-being, and productivity.

Young children are particularly important to consider because early cognitive skills are important for lifetime success. At as early as three years of age, these skills are linked to later school readiness, subsequent achievement, and even adult earnings. Although cognitive skills are one of the most stable individual characteristics,¹⁵ in the first years of life they are malleable and sensitive to environmental influence.¹⁶ The Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman posits that because early skills beget later skills, investment in cognitive development in the first years of life provides greater long-term returns, in the form of later economic productivity, than investment in middle childhood or adolescence.

In this volume, I aim to describe the story of how undocumented parents raise their citizen children in the United States. This story, ignored in the public and scholarly domains, reframes the undocumented as parents of current and future citizens of the nation. By focusing on the everyday experiences of parenting and child development in these families, I also am able to describe the consequences of undocumented status for the developmental contexts and early learning of children in the first years of life. Using a mix of ethnographic, survey, and child assessment data collected between birth and age three, I present both detailed descriptions of the everyday experiences of being an undocumented parent and quantitative analysis of how such experiences matter for the actual developmental status of children.

The Development of Young Children of Undocumented Parents: What We Know

How are young children of undocumented parents faring? Although data on this population are hard to come by—most survey studies do not ask about documentation status *per se*—we can glean some patterns from a few studies that have asked about the citizenship status of parents. And as a rough proxy, we can examine the relative developmental status of children from groups that differ in proportions of undocumented in the

United States. In interpreting these findings, we need to examine how differences among groups hold up after adjusting for traditional indicators of socioeconomic status (SES), since undocumented immigrants are likely to have lower SES than those who arrive with permanent resident or citizenship status.¹⁷

National data show that children from immigrant groups with higher proportions of undocumented are faring less well, especially on early cognitive school readiness, than their counterparts from groups with lower proportions of undocumented. One of the national studies is the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K). Data from this study, which recruited more than twenty thousand young children in a nationally representative sample in 2002, show some reason for concern about the early development of children in Mexican families, who have the highest proportion of undocumented parents among immigrant groups in the United States. Young children of Mexican immigrant parents are generally performing less well on standardized reading and math skills at kindergarten entry relative not only to white children of native-born parents but also to African American children and children of Dominican immigrant parents.¹⁸ The contrast to Dominican children is striking in that Dominican immigrant parents have lower levels of undocumented status than their Mexican counterparts (as we will see in chapter 2) but share with them relatively low SES and Latino backgrounds. These differences are of moderate to large magnitude (about 0.40 standard deviation relative to African American and Dominican children and about 0.90 standard deviation relative to white children). The differences are reduced, but do not disappear, after adjusting for traditional indicators and correlates of socioeconomic status, such as parental education, employment, income, and family structure.¹⁹ Using data from a parallel study that started at nine months of age, the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), Bruce Fuller and his colleagues found, similarly, that Mexican children are at particular risk: they scored lower on overall cognitive development (the Bayley mental index) at twenty-four months than children from other Latino, African American, white, and Asian groups.²⁰ In their study, the difference of about half a standard deviation between Mexicans' and whites' cognitive scores is barely reduced after controlling for indicators of family structure, father presence, parent cognitive stimulation, parent depression, feeding practices, parental education, and parent full- and part-time employment.

However, these and other national data sets, such as the twenty-city Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study, show that on measures of behavioral development and infant health, Mexican children are performing at the same levels as white children. These include measures of attentiveness and persistence, early behavior problems such as withdrawn or

aggressive behaviors, and birth and early health outcomes, such as birth-weight.²¹ Some of these findings may be driven by what is known as “positive selection”: those who emigrate are healthier, on average, than their counterparts who do not emigrate, and healthier even than their U.S.-born counterparts in the same ethnic group. For example, more recently immigrated or first-generation adult Latino populations are healthier, on average, than their second-generation counterparts, even controlling for socioeconomic status and neighborhood residence.²² Although these studies do not distinguish documented from undocumented immigrants, they suggest that this “immigrant health paradox” applies to the undocumented. This may be true because, even within the poorer regions of countries of origin with high rates of sending the undocumented, emigrants are often of somewhat higher educational and economic status than their peers who do not leave the country.²³

In addition to doing well on early behavioral and health measures, children of immigrant parents from East Asian countries (those from China and Korea being the most numerous) perform at higher levels than white children on reading and math skills in kindergarten.²⁴ In the long run, however, there is some reason to worry about the emotional well-being of this group. Several recent studies show that Chinese adolescents, while performing very well academically, report higher levels of depression and social isolation than their black, Latino, and white counterparts. Although most studies showing this pattern focus on Chinese in urban, multiethnic public schools,²⁵ some are national studies.²⁶

None of these studies directly measures undocumented status and links it to children’s development. The only large-scale study to date to do so, by Alexander Ortega and his colleagues, explored parent documentation status and parents’ reports of their children’s development in a large sample of California residents.²⁷ Parents of children under age six were interviewed not only about their documentation and citizenship status but also about the general developmental status of their children, using a ten-item scale. (Unfortunately, this study does not distinguish between different domains of child development.) In this study, the authors were able to compare undocumented and documented Mexican immigrant parents and both Mexican and white U.S.-born parents. After adjusting for confounding characteristics such as parental education, income, and language spoken at home, the researchers found that children of Mexican undocumented parents are at higher developmental risk than children of U.S.-born white parents.²⁸

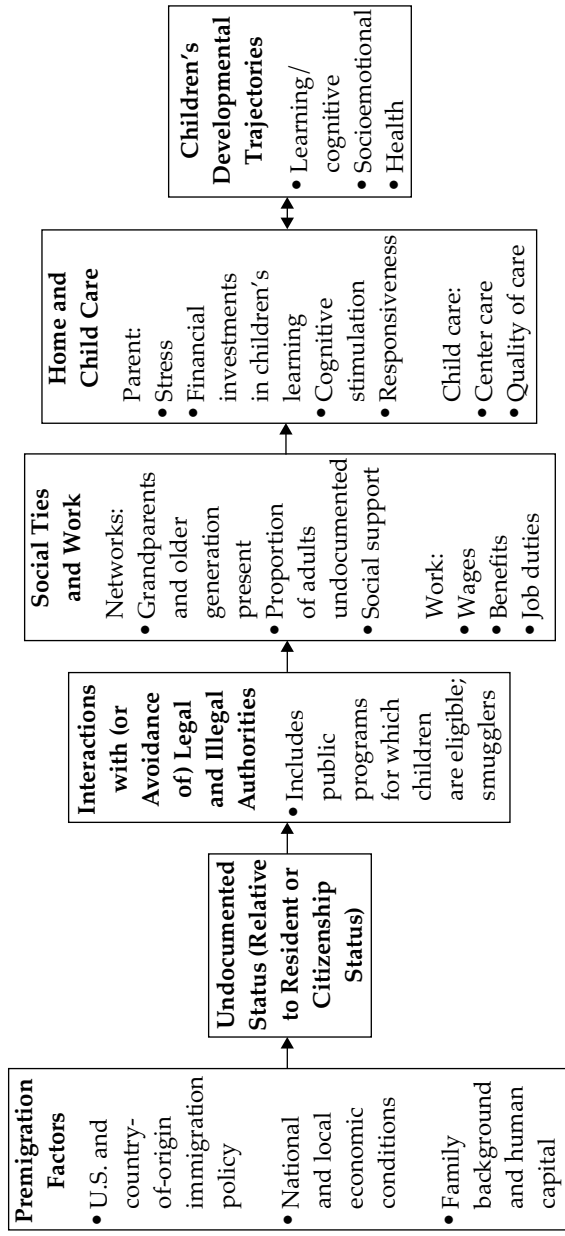
Why might children of undocumented parents perform less well than children of documented parents in their early learning and cognitive skills? Here the scholarly literature provides almost no clues. The only research that sheds some light on this question considers the roles of food

insecurity, work conditions, and access to preschool education. For example, Jennifer van Hook and Ariel Kalil, in studies conducted on two different national data sets, found that children of noncitizen parents are more likely than children of citizen parents to experience food insecurity.²⁹ This difference holds up even after controlling for education, employment, and income. In studies conducted in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York comparing documented to undocumented workers, all in low-wage jobs, researchers found higher rates of wage violations and unsafe working conditions among the undocumented.³⁰ In a study of adult Mexicans in California who either were citizens, had a green card, or were undocumented, the undocumented reported lower levels of use of health care and lower rates of having a usual source of health care than did the documented, but they also reported lower levels of difficulty finding care.³¹ And several studies have found that young children from Mexican backgrounds are less likely than children in other Latino groups and white non-Hispanic, black non-Hispanic, and Asian children to attend preschool.³² The data do not permit the conclusion that higher proportions of undocumented parents among Mexicans are responsible for this difference. But the fact that enrollment is lower than it is for other Latino groups, together with controls for other indicators of disadvantage, suggests that this characteristic may be playing a role.

A Conceptual Model of How Parental Undocumented Status Affects Developmental Contexts and Early Learning

In this book, I provide a comprehensive picture of how parent undocumented status can harm the development of children in the first years of their lives. I argue that undocumented status is an often unobserved factor that helps explain disparities in cognitive skills—emerging as early as twenty-four months in national studies—between groups with high rates of undocumented status and those with lower rates. Ethnographic data are ideally suited to the task of unearthing the everyday experiences of undocumented status that might affect children. In gathering that data, we focused on the struggles and triumphs of parenthood and child development between the first and third years of life; the methodology of visiting every ten weeks or so proved ideal to the task of tracking the full range of home and community settings within which each family lived. From the ethnography, several sets of experiences most clearly distinguished the undocumented from the documented within our immigrant groups. They are outlined in the conceptual model underpinning this book (figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Model of Parent Undocumented Status and the Developmental Contexts of Children



Source: Author's graphic.

From one scholarly perspective, the model depicts what sociologists refer to as experiences of incorporation—the gradual integration of newcomers into the networks, organizations, and institutions of the host country.³³ In conveying these mothers' experiences of New York and the United States, ranging from neighborhood organizations and social networks to public policies, these data address some of the central aspects of incorporation. The large, seminal studies on youth of the second generation conducted in the past twenty years have considered incorporation from such standpoints as peer relationships, discrimination, ethnic identity, work opportunities, and quality of schooling.³⁴

I focus more narrowly on aspects of incorporation that might be linked in particular to undocumented status, on the one hand, and to early childhood development, on the other. The flip side of incorporation—exclusion—is in many ways more characteristic of the undocumented experience. I also conceptualize developmental contexts as not just those settings and interactions that children directly experience, like parenting and child care, but also those everyday experiences of parents that influence children indirectly, like job quality or program eligibility. The developmental contexts that influence children more indirectly are listed on the left side of figure 1.1, and those that influence children more directly are on the right side.

From another scholarly perspective, the concerns of this book are also closely related to research on the assimilation of the post-1965 second generation.³⁵ Sociologists of assimilation consider the contexts that influence the very diverse patterns of youth educational attainment and success among the second generation. Neighborhood factors in the United States (“contexts of reception”) such as concentrated poverty, the presence of organizations and peer networks that can facilitate or impede youth learning, and family relationships and supports are all hypothesized to explain why some immigrant youth succeed spectacularly well and some have difficulties, even coming from the same immigrant groups with similar levels of parent education and skills. In this scholarly literature, documentation status has been presented as an instance of political exclusion that can affect assimilation.³⁶

One other literature relevant to this book comprises qualitative studies of the everyday experiences of undocumented immigrants. Several studies of undocumented Mexican immigrants in California, conducted in the 1980s and the 1990s, examine the contexts of migration, work, and family life.³⁷ Experiences of incorporation—whether in networks of family members and other households living in close proximity or through the acculturative experiences of U.S.-born children in adolescence—were specific to an area of the country with a long-standing pattern of undocumented migration from Mexico. In both cases the settlements were characterized

by very high concentrations of fellow Mexicans. In contrast, as I show in this volume, the undocumented Mexicans in our study were part of a much more recent wave of migration to New York City; for the most part, this group did not live in a concentrated enclave. Robert Smith has documented the new Mexican migration to New York, though from the different standpoint of transnational ties of communities and families and the experiences of youth who travel back and forth between the two countries.³⁸ As for Asian undocumented immigrants, work on the Fujianese in New York has been conducted by Peter Kwong and Zai Liang.³⁹ Again, none of these researchers have focused on undocumented parents or the effects of parental undocumented status on children.

Unlike these prior studies of incorporation, assimilation, and undocumented adults, I focus on the experiences of families with infants and toddlers. Many of the influences on youth development that have been explored in the sociological and psychological studies of the second generation are not relevant to this much earlier developmental period. After all, infants and toddlers are not choosing their own peer networks for the most part; they are not in school; they have not developed their ethnic identities; and they do not perceive that their parents are immigrants, let alone that they are documented or undocumented. The influences of parents' documentation status on the youngest must occur through a different set of developmental contexts than those that are studied in much of the literature on incorporation or assimilation.

Proceeding from left to right in figure 1.1, I first acknowledge (under "Premigration Factors") the fact that a complex mix of push-and-pull factors in both the country of origin and the host country drives flows of undocumented migration to the United States. In chapter 2, I outline the particular forces that led Emiliana, Elena, Ling, and their Mexican, Dominican, and Chinese counterparts in our larger study to come to the United States when they did, and with the particular family backgrounds and legal statuses that they had. I tell this back story by describing the recent waves of low-income migration from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and China to New York. The push-and-pull factors include economic factors in countries and regions of origin; the recent history of immigration policies in the United States and emigration policies in the three sending nations; and the network and human capital resources of migrant families. These forces shaped the dramatic, and sometimes harrowing, narratives of how Emiliana, Elena, and Ling came from Puebla, Cibao, and Fujian to the great metropolis of New York City.

The rest of the model outlines four kinds of developmental contexts that, I argue, can transmit the influence of parents' undocumented status on early child development. Each of these sets of influences is discussed in chapters 3 through 6. The first set of experiences includes the interactions

with legal and illegal authorities that become an everyday part of undocumented immigrants' experiences the minute they set foot in the United States or overstay a visa. Legal authorities represent the local, state, and federal agencies that can determine whether a parent is deported, as well as those that can offer a variety of forms of aid to citizen children. The central paradox here is that the very same government that legally excludes undocumented parents from various social institutions also offers help to their citizen children in the form of benefits and programs. Undocumented parents in this study reported avoiding contact with most government authorities, whether they were associated with deportation, like U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), or with help, like the agencies administering child care subsidies or food stamps programs, for which their citizen children were usually eligible. This avoidance unfortunately results in low rates of enrollment of citizen children in programs that we know could help foster their early learning, such as center-based child care. I discuss these experiences relating to legal authorities in chapter 3. I also discuss the debts that undocumented parents often owe to illegal authorities (smugglers) early in their lives in the United States and the impact of such debts on their financial well-being, their overall level of hardship, and even the transnational migration of their infants. These interactions with legal and illegal authorities are primary channels for transmitting the influence of being undocumented to children because these experiences are so specific to that status.

The second set of experiences is embedded in more informal social ties. Although the daily routines of undocumented immigrants might appear at first glance to be the same as those of documented immigrants, the parents in our study told us about crucial differences in their households, their social networks, and the community organizations in their neighborhoods. First, in virtually all of the households of undocumented parents in our study, it appeared that all other adults in the household were also undocumented. Thus, lack of access to resources that require identification, such as savings and checking accounts and driver's licenses, characterized entire households, not just the parents in the study. Second, as recent arrivals, these parents had less social support available in their larger networks. Despite having more adults in the household, the undocumented in our sample reported having fewer people available to help with child care and making ends meet than were available to the documented. Grandparents were also much less likely to reside in the United States, in the city, or down the street. Finally, many of our undocumented parents lived in neighborhoods with few organizations serving their group and even fewer responding to the needs and potential organizing power of the undocumented. However, the picture was not all bleak: most of the Chinese families and a few of the Mexican families lived in estab-

lished or emerging ethnic enclaves. The Mexican families in our study who lived in the growing enclave of East Harlem provided a picture of greater access to the coethnic community resources, networks, and organizing that may represent the future of this group, which is currently scattered across the city in neighborhoods with low proportions of fellow Mexicans. And the Chinese, despite being part of a regionally specific wave of migration from Fujian province, had relatively easy access to a variety of organizations and providers with at least fluency in Mandarin, if not Fujianese. (Most of the Fujianese immigrant mothers in our study spoke Mandarin.)

The third set of experiences that distinguished the documented from undocumented members of our ethnographic sample centered on work conditions. Experiences of work differed dramatically depending on parents' documentation status. Exploitation in employment in the first months after arrival, an extremely high number of hours worked, wage stagnation, lack of access to job benefits, and low levels of autonomy in job duties were much more common among our undocumented than documented parents. High rates of wage violations (hourly wages below the legal minimum) among our undocumented parents indicate that many of them worked at the very bottom of the urban labor market. In chapter 5, I draw on the field of work-family research to examine how the work lives of parents appear to differ depending on their documentation status.

These three sets of experiences associated with parents' undocumented status—interactions with legal and illegal authorities; everyday social ties with households, networks, and organizations; and work conditions—affect children's early development through the intimacy of the settings in which infants and toddlers spend the most time—specifically, home and child care settings. These settings represent the fourth set of developmental contexts that link parent undocumented status to children's development. I list these factors in the column at the far right of figure 1.1; they represent hypotheses drawn from decades of research in developmental psychology.

First, the broader developmental contexts linked to undocumented status may act as stressors to parents and increase their levels of distress, anxiety, and depression. Everyday experiences such as poor work conditions, lowered availability of social support, or fear of deportation may result over time in higher levels of psychological distress in parents who are undocumented, relative to those who are documented. Parental depression has been linked to lower levels of learning, because parental distress can reduce the quantity or quality of language in the home.⁴⁰ As a result of distress, parents may become withdrawn or harsh in their parenting of young children.⁴¹ Parental stress may also affect children's biological responses and risk for disease through chronic overactivation of

biological stress mechanisms or the immune system.⁴² As I show in chapter 4, parents' economic hardship and distress transmitted the influence of undocumented status on children's cognitive skills at twenty-four months of age.

Second, undocumented parents may be less able to purchase learning materials for their children and engage in cognitively stimulating activities with them. Many studies have shown that this investment pathway links economic disadvantage to children's early cognitive skills. Undocumented status, above and beyond traditional indicators of socioeconomic status such as parental education or income, may reduce parents' ability to purchase learning materials for their children. Undocumented parents, for example, are less likely to enroll their citizen children in in-kind programs that could increase their disposable household income, such as food stamps or child care subsidies. Parents with less disposable income are less able to purchase learning materials. Cognitively stimulating interactions, such as reading or storytelling, may also be affected by a lower ability to purchase books, a higher number of work hours, or parental stress. These factors robustly predict early cognitive skills in young children.⁴³

Finally, a third mechanism through which parents' everyday experiences of being undocumented could affect child learning is lower use of center care. This form of care is associated with higher early cognitive skills in children, especially for lower-income families.⁴⁴ This may be because, relative to other forms of out-of-home care in the first year, centers usually have caregivers with higher levels of training and skills and a greater variety of stimulating materials. Nonrelative home-based care, in particular, tends to be of lower quality than center-based care, as measured by the presence of responsive and language-rich interactions with young children.⁴⁵

In chapter 6, I draw on our full-sample data to examine the family experiences through which undocumented status can affect children's development. I also include some of the broader contexts discussed in chapters 3, 4, and 5 when information about them is available in our survey data. In these quantitative analyses, I find that the best proxy for documentation status in the survey, household access to resources requiring identification like checking accounts, savings accounts, and driver's licenses, does indeed distinguish our groups: Mexican parents reported much lower access to such resources than Dominicans or African Americans. (Because the vast majority of Chinese infants were sent back to China in the first six months of life, we were not able to follow up the Chinese sample; I tell the story of why this occurred in chapter 2.) Lower household access to these resources, in turn, was associated with lower job autonomy and wages, lower rates of center care use, and ultimately lower cognitive skills in children at thirty-six months. These links in the

quantitative data are not explained away by other potentially confounding characteristics, such as parental education, family structure, years in the United States, preferences in child care, primary language in the home, or even earlier levels of child cognitive skills as measured at fourteen months.

Interestingly, I find little support for cognitive stimulation as a pathway through which undocumented status affects three-year-old children's cognitive skills. Indeed, parents of the different ethnic groups in this study, as the stories of Emiliana, Elena, and Ling show, were equally likely to engage in stimulating activities with their children. They showed equal dedication to supporting the learning of their citizen children. There is no support in the data for cultural differences in mothers' support of their children's learning, as reflected in rates of reading to children, storytelling, or playing with toys and other stimulating materials.

In the final chapter, I spell out the implications of this work for three areas of practice and policy. First, I explore the potential benefits for undocumented parents and their children of providing a pathway to citizenship in immigration policy. Second, I suggest improvements in labor law enforcement and other routes to improving the terrible job conditions of undocumented parents. Finally, I suggest ways in which community-based programs and organizations can provide responsive services and venues for advocacy and organizing that undocumented parents will trust.

THE STUDY METHODS

All the data reported in this book are drawn from the work of the Center for Research on Culture, Development, and Education, a project funded by the National Science Foundation since 2002 and directed by Catherine Tamis-LeMonda, Diane Hughes, Niobe Way, Ronit Kahana-Kalman, Ajay Chaudry, and myself. This book is based on data from one of the two major longitudinal studies that are part of the center's work, a study of infants from 375 Dominican, Mexican, Chinese, and African American families in New York City (109 Dominican, 97 Mexican, 56 Chinese, and 113 African American). The infant study has been co-directed by Tamis-LeMonda, Kahana-Kalman, and myself; the other study (of adolescents) is directed by Hughes and Way. In 2004 and 2005, mothers of healthy newborn infants were recruited on maternity wards of public hospitals in New York City during the first day or two of their baby's life by a team of multilingual research assistants. All of the Mexican and Chinese mothers, and 85 percent of the Dominican mothers, were first-generation immigrants. All of the African American mothers were U.S.-born. The children have been followed over the course of their early development, and this book focuses on the first three years of their lives.

Several sources of data form the basis of the findings reported in this book—mainly longitudinal qualitative interviews and participant observation, but also direct child assessments and parent surveys. (For more details regarding the methodology of this study, see the appendix.) A large team of researchers administered surveys as in-person structured interviews with mothers, first on the maternity ward and then at one, six, fourteen, twenty-four, and thirty-six months. Home visits, including direct child assessments of cognitive skills, were also conducted at the fourteen-, twenty-four-, and thirty-six-month time points. All of these assessments were conducted in the language of preference of the parent and the dominant language of the child.

A sample of twenty-three families from our three immigrant groups—eleven Mexican, nine Dominican, and three Chinese—form the basis for all of the qualitative data presented in the book, including the data concerning Elena, Emiliana, and Ling. This embedded qualitative study was co-directed by Ajay Chaudry and myself. Most of these families were randomly chosen from the larger cohort of 376. The rest were drawn from an initial ethnographic study, conducted in 2002 and 2003, that preceded the recruitment of the birth cohort. Each of these families was visited between six and twelve times. Our field-workers engaged in participant-observation at home and in a variety of neighborhood settings at every visit. In addition, semistructured, recorded interviews occurred at every other visit. Visits were made when the infants were between the ages of seven and thirty months, on average once every ten weeks. Our qualitative data consist of interviews transcribed and translated from Spanish and Mandarin as well as field notes written in English by our multiethnic, multilingual team of field-workers.

The primary comparison in this book is of undocumented and documented first-generation immigrant parents. I make distinctions among the documented—that is, between legal permanent residents and citizens—in a few places where it is relevant, primarily in the sections of the book on policy access. There were no parents with refugee status in the qualitative sample. The ethnic groups in this study appeared to differ markedly in their likelihood of being undocumented, with high proportions among Mexican and Chinese parents and relatively low proportions among Dominican parents. Ten out of eleven Mexican mothers in the qualitative study were undocumented, including the vast majority of the fathers; in contrast, only one out of nine Dominican mothers was undocumented, and only one family with a Dominican mother had an undocumented father. (He was of Mexican origin.) Because there were only three Chinese in our ethnographic sample, I have no meaningful estimate of this status among them; however, 72 percent of the Chinese mothers recruited at birth sent their babies back to China within a few months. As

we will see later, it is likely that the majority of this 72 percent were undocumented, as Ling was when she and Wei sent Guang back to Fuzhou. Because of this sending-back phenomenon, we stopped recruiting the Chinese sample midway through the recruitment period. We did not follow up this group with surveys and child assessments; I therefore lack information on how this group's children fared. The very few Chinese cases in the qualitative sample had not sent their young child back to China; however, one family (Ling's, as it turns out) had already gone through the sending and return of an older child. Therefore, Ling and Guang have particular prominence in the presentation of qualitative data on the Chinese families. Information about Guang, who was much older than the infants and toddlers in the sample, is presented to illustrate the transnational experience of children being sent back to China as newborns and returning to live with parents they do not remember having known.

The African Americans in the sample, all U.S.-born mothers, were therefore all citizens. They were not an immigrant group, although a very small proportion of these mothers were second-generation immigrants from families of West Indian backgrounds. Owing to my focus on a comparison of documented and undocumented first-generation immigrants, I do not present qualitative analyses of the African American families. In a few places where I present quantitative comparisons of the ethnic groups, however, the African American families are included because they represented the largest low-income, native-born racial-ethnic group among parents in New York City.

Documentation status is a difficult topic to research quantitatively.⁴⁶ We did not ask about undocumented status directly in any of our survey visits with families in the larger sample. I therefore can present neither data from the survey sample on rates of undocumented status nor quantitative estimates of its effects on parents or children. In the many discussions with field-workers about their everyday lives, however, Mexican, Dominican, and Chinese parents in the ethnographic sample were open about this aspect of their experience. Everyday experiences that might be associated with undocumented status are the focus of this book. To protect the identities of our families, many details have been masked or combined, and direct quotes are kept to a minimum, but this has been done in such a way that the relevant patterns in the data are retained.