
Introduction: Inheriting the City

Immigration is squarely on the American political agenda. With the influx of migrants continuing at high levels, it is destined to remain there. Although its salience as an issue may rise and fall, immigration poses fundamental questions about what it means to be an American and whether the nation can deliver on its historic promise to provide upward mobility to newcomers and their children.

Scholars usually frame the debate in terms of the economic and demographic impacts of high levels of immigration. Yet the broad passions excited by the issue point to deeper concerns about the ways in which mass migration is reshaping American society and culture (Zolberg 2006). Many wonder what sort of Americans the latest immigrants will become and what sort of America will be their legacy—and ours. Even those who think that immigration has a generally benevolent economic impact often worry that the huge numbers of largely nonwhite immigrants who have come to the United States since the mid-1960s will not “assimilate” or will put native born minorities at a further disadvantage.

The answer to the question of what large scale migration will mean for American society, however, lies less with the immigrants themselves than with their ambivalently American children. The March 2005 Current Population Survey (CPS) reported that this new “second generation”—the children of at least one immigrant parent born in the United States or who arrived by the age of 12—accounted for one out of six 18- to 32-year-olds in the nation and one out of four of all Americans under 18. In many ways, they will define how today’s immigrant groups become tomorrow’s American ethnic groups. In the process, they will not only reshape American racial and ethnic relations but define the character of American social, cultural, and political life.

This book is about their lives. It is the culmination of a decade-long

research project by a large team of researchers who interviewed members of the second and 1.5 generations in and around New York City. (We define the second generation as those born in the United States to at least one immigrant parent and the 1.5 generation as those born abroad but who arrived by age 12 and then grew up in the United States.) By looking at what life is like for them and those who will follow them, the project sought to understand the longer term consequences of immigration for American society. Over time, however, it also became a study of what it is like to be a young adult in New York today. We learned about the struggles and joys experienced by young adults coming of age in a tough town, a place of ever-present dangers, of backbreaking competition, but also of extraordinary possibilities.

As such, it is also a book about New York City. This city of “eight million stories” houses more adult immigrants and more children of immigrants than any other city in the United States and its metropolitan area more than anywhere else but Greater Los Angeles. Yet while large scale international migration to Los Angeles did not take place until well into the twentieth century, it has a much longer history in New York. Indeed, the children of immigrants, past and present, have often been seen as the quintessential New Yorkers. Today’s second generation grows up among local institutions and attitudes that were shaped by the region’s long, deep, and diverse immigrant traditions.

Writing this book has made us more aware of how difficult it can be to grow up in New York, yet how the city can still welcome newcomers. These qualities will no doubt lead some readers to think our research and conclusions apply only to New York. The city’s enthusiasts and detractors alike tend to exaggerate its difference from the rest of the United States—an “island off the coast of America,” in the words of Spalding Grey. Yet the problems faced by the second generation in New York are pretty much the same as those anywhere else. If New Yorkers have forged distinctive answers to those problems, they may offer positive or negative lessons to the rest of the nation.

Why is it important to assess how New York and the nation are incorporating this new second generation? One reason is sheer numbers. Immigrants and their children now form a majority of the population in New York, Miami, and Los Angeles. According to the March 2005 CPS, 35 percent of all New Yorkers were foreign born, and their native born children constituted another 17 percent. Their presence is even greater among the city’s 18- to 32-year-old residents, more than a fifth of whom were born here to immigrant parents; another fifth arrived by age 12 and

grew up here, and a final fifth arrived as young adult immigrants. In short, most young adult New Yorkers are of immigrant origin. These trends are even more pronounced among those who are under 18. Thus, even if immigration were to end magically tomorrow, the question of how the children of immigrants will fit into U.S. society would be with us for decades. Simply put, the children of immigrants are the future of New York and many other parts of the nation.

A second reason to study the children of immigrants involves the future of American ethnic and racial relations. Before 1965, immigrants to the United States were overwhelmingly European. Since then, most have come from other parts of the globe. Given how the United States has historically constructed racial categories, they are not generally regarded as “white.” Yet they are not African Americans either. Since the cleavage between the “white” descendants of immigrants and the “black” descendants of American slaves has so strongly marked big cities, the emergence of a large and rapidly growing group that does not fit easily into either of these categories has enormous potential consequences. To a degree, the arrival of this group was presaged by New York’s large Puerto Rican population, which is also neither unambiguously white nor unambiguously black. Glazer and Moynihan (1963) suggested that this large “intermediate” group would temper the city’s race relations. Since that largely turned out not to be the case, we must be careful about any conclusions we draw from the experience of the new immigrants.

New York City is a rich site for studying how immigration is affecting race relations. Its immigrants are staggeringly diverse, and newcomers have altered the makeup of every racial category. No one group dominates the flow of immigrants to New York as Cubans have in Miami or Mexicans in Los Angeles. About 45 percent of the city’s black population are immigrants or the children of immigrants, as are 40 percent of the white population. The same is true of 59 percent of the Hispanic population and 95 percent of the Asian population. Most native Hispanics with native parents are Puerto Ricans who were born on the mainland but whose parents or grandparents migrated from the island, so even they have a strong migrant heritage, though they are all American citizens.

Immigrants are having a huge impact on the city’s labor market. Like other American cities, New York incorporated the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century immigrants in part because their arrival coincided with, and fed, the growth of its manufacturing sector, which provided jobs and a living to people with limited education or who did not speak English. Today, many wonder whether a service sector economy that places a pre-

mium on education and communication can accommodate new immigrant workers. As the top of the city's household income distribution pulls away from the bottom, others worry that while immigrants may find low wage jobs, their children will lack opportunities for upward mobility in an "hourglass"-shaped economy.

Unlike their predecessors, the children of the current immigrants are becoming American in the midst of continuing immigration. Our understanding of assimilation has been largely shaped by the experience of the descendants of the southern and eastern European immigrants who came to the United States between roughly 1882 and 1924 (Foner 2000, 2005). Their incorporation took place after legislative changes in the 1920s, the Depression, and World War II sharply reduced new immigration. Their children came of age in a context of low immigration with few new arrivals to reinvigorate ties to the old country or to reinforce old country ways. Americanization was further reinforced for many by the experience of serving in the American armed forces in World War II. Today, by contrast, members of the new second generation rub shoulders with recently arrived immigrants their own age in the streets, classrooms, and workplaces of New York. There is therefore a good deal less distinction between the first and second generations than in the past (Rumbaut 2004; Waters and Jiménez 2005; Foner and Kasinitz 2007).

Today's second generation also grows up in communities where the parents have more transnational connections than in the past. Modern communications and cheap transportation enable immigrants to remain socially connected to their home communities. Today's transnational immigrants (or "trans/migrants") and their children remain active in social networks that make it possible for them to live in more than one society at a time, perhaps never fully committing to either (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Stanton 1992; Portes 1999; Levitt 2001, 2007; Levitt and Waters 2002). New York's immigrant neighborhoods are jammed with businesses selling low cost phone calls and instant money transfers to remote parts of the globe. In every group, some second generation people remain strongly tied to their parents' homelands. They visit often, send money back, and even contemplate settling there. A surprising number of first generation West Indian and Latin American parents "send back" children to live with relatives when the dangers of the New York streets terrify them or they suddenly lose their child-care arrangements. These transnational connections may be quite important to the American lives of the new second generation.

Finally, it is important to study the second generation because so many

first generation parents worry about what will happen to their American children. While social scientists cannot automatically accept their view of their community's problems, we should nevertheless take their concerns seriously. Anyone spending time in America's growing immigrant communities will hear parental concern over the second generation. "We are afraid for our kids," we have been told. With a mixture of awe, fear, and disdain, immigrant parents say their children are "becoming American." This is the stuff of sermons in Korean churches, of discussion in Ecuadoran hometown associations, of debate in Chinese newspapers.

Sometimes this is only a vague but nagging fear about cultural loss among people who are otherwise quite happy in America. Jhumpa Lahiri's fictional couple, for example, find themselves inexplicably afraid for their U.S.-born son at Harvard: "So we drive to Cambridge to visit him or bring him home for the weekend so that he can eat rice with us with his hands and speak Bengali, things we sometimes worry he will no longer do after we die" (Lahiri 1999:197). Other times the fear is more pointed. West Indian Brooklynites told Mary Waters that "we are losing our kids to the streets," a shorthand both for the manifold dangers of the American ghetto and for the less well understood but nonetheless frightening impact that being considered a black person in racist America was having on their children (Waters 1999).

This fear is part of the paradox of the immigrant experience. Immigrants come to America to improve their lives and those of their children. Most manage to do just that. They overcome hardships and obstacles to give their children the chance to become Americans. At the same time, parents are often uncomfortable with and anxious about the future of the new Americans they have created. Whether the experience of the immigrant second and 1.5 generations in New York justifies these fears or not is the most important question that we hope this book can answer.

The State of the Debate

The discussion of how America will incorporate today's immigrants always involves an implicit or explicit comparison with the experience of those descended from the last great wave of immigration. This is unfair. It is also inevitable. Americans, and particularly New Yorkers, justifiably celebrate the incorporation of that group of immigrants and their descendants. We have made the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island into shrines for what makes America unique. At the same time, America's (and especially New

York's) proud history of incorporating immigrants stands in sharp contrast to the troubled history of America's native racial minorities.

Social scientific observers of the last great wave of European immigrants tended to assume that assimilation was both probable and desirable. Writing at the height of American self-confidence, they saw assimilation as closely tied to upward mobility and often wrote as if assimilation, acculturation, and upward mobility were virtually the same thing. While they disagreed on whether immigrants would drop immigrant values in favor of Anglo-Saxon norms or develop some hybrid instead, they assumed, as the popular discourse continues to assume, that immigrants would achieve upward mobility by embracing the main elements of the culture of the dominant society. Whatever the psychic toll the shedding of old cultural identities might cause, substantial upward mobility would be the reward (Hansen 1938; Park 1950; Gordon 1964; Shibutani and Kwan 1965).

William Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole's (1945) study of ethnic groups in "Yankee City" remains the most complete discussion of the identity and experience of the second generation of this historical period. Warner and Srole describe a generational march of the ethnic groups from initial poverty amidst residential and occupational segregation to residential, occupational, and identity integration and Americanization. This orderly pattern of mobility has come to be called the "straight line" model of assimilation (Warner and Srole 1945:72): "Each consecutive ethnic generation pushes progressively farther out of the bottom level and into each of the successive layers above. That the class index of an ethnic group is related to the length of its settlement in the city is a manifestation of the continuous advance achieved in the hierarchy of each new generation."

In a chapter on the children of the immigrants, Warner and Srole explore the forces affecting the children's relations with their parents' generation and the wider society. They argue that the parents orient the child's early socialization to the values and beliefs of the old country. As soon as the child enters into social relations outside the home, however, he begins to reorient himself toward the wider American society. The child quickly absorbs values and skills specific to American society and experiences tension when these clash or disagree with those of his parents. Schools, peer groups, and the mass media all teach American ways. As the child absorbs these values, he or she often leads the rest of the family in adapting to the new world. This process, Warner and Srole argue, can turn the traditional parent-child relationship on its head. With knowledge

about U.S. society, the child teaches the parent. This role reversal often leads to conflict within the personality of the child as well as between children and parents.

Looking back with the advantage of more than a half century of historical knowledge, we can see the weaknesses of this approach. Warner and Srole assumed that immigrant children would be absorbed into a single, unified, middle class “American culture.” They ignored the diversity among natives and the ways in which immigrants were being assimilated into distinct segments of U.S. society (Portes and Zhou 1993). They also ignored the possibility that immigrants might improve their prospects for upward mobility by *retaining* their immigrant culture. The model also discounted the ways in which immigrants, in the words of Alba and Nee (2003), “remade the American mainstream” and gradually brought the immigrant world and American world closer together. Their model takes for granted that “American” culture has a higher status than immigrant culture (Warner and Srole 1945:145): “In any judgments of rank, the American social system, being the most vigorous and having also the dominance of host status, is affirmed the higher. Since the child identifies himself with it, his position in the present reciprocal is higher.”

Straight line theory also proposes a one-dimensional model of assimilation. In fact, however, groups often assimilated in one sphere of life while remaining distinct in others. Eastern European Jews, for example, are often considered the archetype of immigrant success. Starting out low status and highly stigmatized, they achieved substantial educational and economic mobility in one generation. As the straight line theory predicts, they evinced clear signs of acculturation in their rapid adoption of English, their almost complete loss of Yiddish, their residential assimilation, and so on. At least through the 1960s, however, Jews remained the least assimilated of European immigrants in many other respects. They maintained highly developed ethnic organizations and exhibited high degrees of occupational concentration and distinctive voting patterns. Despite the fretting of Jewish leaders over the rise of out-marriage, Jews are not likely to “disappear” into mainstream America even today, upward mobility notwithstanding.

The straight line model came under increasing attack after the 1960s. As intellectuals lost confidence in America’s ability to overcome its racial problems and the civil right movement waned, some critics reminded us that “assimilation” had historically been for “whites only.” Others (Novak 1974) celebrated the “unmeltable” white ethnics. Yet while the line may

have been more “bumpy” (Gans 1979) and the ethnic cultures more resilient than predicted, the large majority of the second, third, and fourth generation descendants of European immigrants did join the American mainstream in most respects, albeit remaking that mainstream in the process (Alba and Nee 2003). Those “white ethnics” who asserted a “symbolic ethnicity” during the 1960s and 1970s usually did so in the form of individualistic and “optional” celebrations of culture, often mediated through mass consumption. Although important to many people’s self-concept, such cultural celebrations had little direct bearing on their daily life or life chances (Gans 1979; Alba 1990; Waters 1990).

Will the contemporary second generation follow this path? Many social scientists have been skeptical. In 1992 sociologist Herbert Gans (1992) inverted the straight line model of assimilation by proposing what he termed the “second generation decline.” Gans outlined ways in which members of the post-1965 second generation could do worse than their parents. Children who refused to accept the low level, poorly paid jobs of their parents could face a difficult bind (Gans 1992: 173–174): “In adulthood, some members of the second generation, especially those whose parents did not themselves escape poverty, will end up in persistent poverty, because they will be reluctant to work at immigrant wages and hours like their parents, but lack the job opportunities and skills and connections to do better.”

By having the same reactions toward these low level jobs as poor young native whites, blacks, and Hispanics, members of the second generation might risk sliding into persistent poverty. Indeed, some may “become American” by adopting negative attitudes toward school, opportunity, hard work, and the “American dream.” By contrast, those who retain their ties to their parents’ ethnic community may, Gans suggests, do better while assimilating less: “The people who have secured an economically viable ethnic niche acculturating less than did the European 2nd and 3rd generation and those without such a niche escaping condemnation to dead end immigrant and other jobs mainly by becoming very poor and persistently jobless Americans.”

Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou (1992, 1993) greatly expanded on these notions by proposing the idea of “segmented assimilation.” Perhaps the single most influential concept in the contemporary study of the second generation, this notion was further developed in Portes and Rubén Rumbaut’s 2001 book, *Legacies* (see also Rumbaut 1997, 2004, and 2005b; Zhou 1997a, 1997b; Feliciano and Rumbaut 2005; Portes

and Rumbaut 2005). The segmented assimilation model argues that the varying modes of incorporation of the first generation endow the second generation with differing amounts of cultural and social capital in the form of ethnic jobs, networks, and values and expose it to differing opportunities. This in turn exerts differential pulls and pushes on the allegiances of the second generation.

Second generation youth with strong ties to American minorities, whose parents lack the ability to provide them with jobs or to protect them from the influence of the native poor, tend to develop an “adversarial stance” toward the dominant white society similar to that of American minorities. According to this view, those facing high levels of discrimination or who live close to American minorities are particularly likely to adopt such a “reactive” ethnicity. They may become skeptical about the possibility of upward mobility and the value of education. Like Gans, Portes and his colleagues concluded that second generation young people who cast their lot with America’s minority groups will experience downward social mobility, in part because high levels of discrimination will preclude the option of joining the white mainstream, even if they are highly acculturated. Joining the native circles to which they have access may be a ticket to permanent subordination and disadvantage (Portes and Zhou 1993).

While Gans stresses that deindustrialization has sharply reduced the kinds of jobs that eased generational mobility a century ago, Portes and Zhou focus on how cultural organization interacts with economic opportunity. Gans believes that the second generation must attain skills in one generation to succeed, that took European immigrants several generations to gain. Portes and Zhou instead highlight how strong kinship ties among the Chinese, or the religious affiliations of the Koreans, constitute “social capital” that increases the ability of the first generation to instill loyalty and obedience in their children. Simultaneously, they involve few ties to U.S. minorities. When these groups resist acculturation into the broader American culture—or allow their children to acculturate only selectively while retaining strong ties to the ethnic community—they paradoxically provide their children with better means to get ahead.

The idea that assimilation has costs and “paradoxes” is not new, as Rumbaut carefully notes (1999). Observers of early twentieth century immigrants often commented on the heartache produced by intergenerational conflict (Thomas and Znaniecki 1927). Leonard Covello, a leading educator in New York’s Italian American community in the mid-twentieth

century, famously recalled of his own second generation childhood: “We were becoming Americans by learning how to be ashamed of our parents” (quoted in Iorizzo and Mondello 1980:118). Years later, as principal of an East Harlem high school, Covello introduced the teaching of Italian as a means of preserving ethnic heritage and keeping assimilation partially at bay.

Complaints that the children of immigrants were becoming the “wrong kind” of Americans are also not new. As early as 1906, *The Outlook* magazine warned “against rushing Italian children into the ‘streetiness’ and ‘cheap Americanism’ which ‘so overwhelms Italian youngsters in the cities’” (Kahn 1987:244). Even the notion that a dense “ethnic enclave” can provide a bulwark against the worst effects of the American street, a case made forcefully by Zhou and Bankston (1998), is foreshadowed by studies of New York’s Jewish community in the early twentieth century in which juvenile delinquency among boys and sexual promiscuity among girls are seen as the result of overly rapid Americanization (Landesman 1969; Prell 1999).

Yet if the literature on the last great wave of migration contained most of the arguments made in the segmented assimilation model, such skeptical voices were very much in the minority. Against a background of falling real wages, rising income inequality, and continuing racial conflict, doubts about the possibility and value of assimilation are more common today. Some have nevertheless taken up the tattered banner of assimilation. In their major book on the subject, Richard Alba and Victor Nee (2003) argue that assimilation not only accurately describes the experiences of white immigrants from Europe and their descendants in the twentieth century; it is also happening among new nonwhite immigrants and their descendants in the twenty-first century. They argue that the segmented assimilation model exaggerates the factors working against assimilation among contemporary nonwhite immigrants, and the scholarship on the revival of ethnicity among whites misses the forest for the trees. Ethnic occupational niches have diminished for the latter over time, while a declining portion of ethnic populations live in ethnic neighborhoods. Intermarriage is eroding ethnic boundaries among Asians and some Latino groups as well as whites.

Few immigrants in any period, Alba and Nee remind us, ever made a conscious decision to “assimilate.” Assimilation is the sum of a million small decisions and tiny changes in daily life that often occur despite the immigrant’s efforts to ward off assimilation. Many immigrant parents,

past and present, make heroic efforts to inculcate “old country ways” in their U.S.-born children. They lecture their offspring on the virtues of traditional values and of speaking the parental language. Yet they also tend to support their children’s use of English, move them to “better”—that is, less ethnic—neighborhoods, and send them to “better”—that is, less ethnic—schools.

The debate over the new second and 1.5 generations has been lively, but largely speculative. Until recently, this group has been too young to permit a robust assessment of their educational attainment, labor force participation, marriage and fertility patterns, and political participation. Data have also been lacking. The U.S. Census stopped asking about parents’ place of birth in 1970. While the Current Population Survey did begin to ask this question in 1994, this sample survey permits fine-grained analysis only of the largest first and second generation groups, like Mexicans, mainly at the national level (J. Smith 2003; Perlmann 2005). Most other surveys use categories like “black” and “Hispanic” that do not distinguish the children of immigrants from native stock populations, so the second generation statistically disappears into increasingly problematic racial categories. Valiant efforts have been made to draw conclusions about adult life chances from surveys documenting the expectations and attitudes of adolescents (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995; Portes and Rumbaut 2001); but as any parent can attest, this is a questionable enterprise. Excellent case studies of particular communities provide some indications about the adult second generation (Min 2002; Smith 2006), but not broad evidence.

Until recently, then, we have not been able to *assess* how the second and 1.5 generations are actually doing *as adults*. This provided the impetus for our effort to gather data. Our way was paved by Portes and Rumbaut’s path-breaking Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS), which initially studied eighth graders in Miami and San Diego and has now followed respondents into their mid-twenties (Portes and Rumbaut 2005). Data-gathering efforts shaped partly by our study have also recently been completed in Greater Los Angeles and the big cities of eight European countries. These studies have begun to permit meaningful comparisons of second generation young adults from different backgrounds and in different settings.

Our Study

This book is based on a three-part study of five immigrant-origin groups and three native born comparison groups. Between 1998 and 2000, we conducted a telephone survey of 3,415 young adults (aged 18 to 32) living in the ten counties within metropolitan New York where the 1990 Census indicated our target populations were present in sufficient numbers to be sampled economically—in at least 1.5 percent of the households. (This sample frame included New York City except for Staten Island; the inner suburban counties of Nassau and Westchester in New York; and Essex, Hudson, Passaic, and Union counties in northeastern New Jersey.) This area contained about 12 million of the region's 21 million people in 2000, and our study groups made up 81 percent of that total population. Eighteen was our lower age boundary because it did not make sense to collect data on education and work on younger people. Thirty-two was the upper boundary because that was the oldest a child born in the United States to a post-1965 immigrant parent could be when we went into the field.

We located respondents in two waves of screening. The first round of “random-digit dialing” within the study area produced the necessary quota (about 400) of native white, black, and Puerto Rican respondents, along with varying numbers for the other second generation groups. A second round of random-digit dialing took place only in telephone exchanges that yielded at least one eligible respondent in the first wave. The response rate among those who were identified as eligible for an interview was 53.3 percent. Response rates were higher among the second generation groups and lower among all three native groups—whites, blacks, and Puerto Ricans, ranging from 67 percent among the Chinese to 41 percent among the native born blacks. The telephone interviews were thirty to forty minutes long and provided many of the statistics presented in the following chapters. (See the Methodological Appendix for more information on the technical aspects of this survey and for response rates by group.) The map on page xii provides an overview of where our respondents lived.

In the second stage of our study we conducted detailed, open-ended, face-to-face interviews with 333 of our telephone respondents. The interviews began a month after the respondents answered the telephone survey and continued into 2001. Our interviewers were advanced graduate students in the social sciences. They used an interview protocol but were

encouraged to follow the conversation where it led when that seemed appropriate. These interviews lasted from two to four hours. Most took place in the respondents' homes, although some were conducted at university facilities or in public places. These respondents are broadly representative of the wider sample, although they have slightly more educational attainment. (The characteristics of the in-depth interview sample and the total telephone sample are further discussed in the Methodological Appendix.) Then, in an effort to learn more about how the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent sharp economic downturn affected the respondents, we re-interviewed 172 of these respondents in 2002 and 2003. All the interviews were taped, transcribed, and coded. The quotations presented in the book come from these in-depth interviews.

Finally, since surveys and interviews can reify ethnic groups and miss the importance of institutional context, we also fielded six ethnographers to investigate domains where second generation and native groups were interacting between 2000 and 2002: high schools, community colleges, university campuses, workplaces, unions, community organizations, and church congregations. These projects, along with other qualitative research by the in-depth interviewers, are presented in a companion volume, *Becoming New Yorkers* (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters 2004). Many insights drawn from the ethnographic work inform this volume as well.

Our selection of groups reflects several strategic choices. We considered gathering data from a representative cross section of all second generation young people, rather than by specific ethnic groups. Yet if we had done so, the fact that New York's immigrants come from so many different national origins would have prevented us from being able to make meaningful group comparisons. We also felt that many previous studies of the second generation had suffered from the lack of native born "control groups." We wanted to be able to compare the second generation groups with black, white, and Latino natives of native parentage.

Dominicans were an obvious choice. They are the largest national-origin immigrant group and play an important role in the city's economy and politics. Because most Dominicans appear racially "mixed" by North American standards, having African, European, and Amerindian ancestry, the group is also theoretically interesting. It does not fit easily into North American racial categories. Our study often compares the Dominican second generation with New York's longstanding Puerto Rican and "Nuyorican" population. We surveyed only Puerto Rican young people

who had been born on the U.S. mainland, most of whom were lifelong New Yorkers, as were many of their parents.

We also wanted to compare both Dominicans and Puerto Ricans with New York's growing population of non-Caribbean Hispanics. Because no other single Hispanic national group was large enough to be sampled on its own, we combined the three largest South American groups, Colombians, Ecuadorans, and Peruvians. First generation South American immigrants tend to have more education, slightly higher incomes, and less African ancestry than first generation Dominicans. Although there are differences among these three groups, they tend to live near each other, work in similar occupations, and often intermarry. (We discuss their similarities and differences in Chapter 2.) They generally have more in common with each other than with Dominicans and Puerto Ricans. We did not study New York's rapidly growing Mexican population because it is still new and has a small adult second generation (Smith 2006).

We also wanted to compare the children of Caribbean Hispanic immigrants with those of English-speaking West Indian parents. By "West Indian," we mean the thirteen Caricom nations making up the "British West Indies" prior to their independence starting in 1962. These former colonies have different cultures and histories, but their premigration commonalities far outweigh these differences and, in any event, they constitute a single ethnic group in New York City (Kasinitz 1992; Waters 1999). Taken together, West Indians are the largest immigrant community in New York City. Although Indo-Caribbeans play a fascinating role in the racial stratification of West Indian New Yorkers (Warikoo 2004), we interviewed only those West Indians of African descent.

The Chinese are the largest Asian population in metropolitan New York. We oversampled Chinese respondents in order to distinguish those with parents from People's Republic from those whose parents hail from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Chinese diaspora. Finally, we selected the largest "white" second generation group, the children of Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union, whom we compare with native white New Yorkers of native parentage. We selected only those with a Jewish background in part to control for religion and in part to approximate the boundaries of ethnic solidarity as it is lived in daily life in New York today. Such boundaries are often imprecise and shifting (Zeltzer-Zubida 2004a), but this group does clearly have a subjective sense of identity.

Our book investigates many aspects of the lives of members of the new

second generation. Chapter 2 begins with how the second generation's immigrant parents came to New York, where they settled, what kinds of jobs they do, and what kinds of families they formed. Chapter 3 introduces the reader to our second generation respondents and examines how they sort themselves into the ethnic groups. Chapter 4 describes the dynamics of the families in which they grew up and how they experienced the neighborhoods where their parents had settled. These neighborhoods varied greatly in terms of the quality of their schools, the mixture of groups and classes, and even their physical safety. Chapter 5 follows the second generation young people as they enter their crucial high school years and the many who go on to some college experience. Chapter 6 examines their entry into the labor force, the jobs they do, and the ethnic composition of the places where they work. Chapter 7 asks when and how they have children of their own and form marriages. It also examines the surprisingly different ways in which groups time and combine parenting and marriage. Chapter 8 explores the extent to which immigrant cultures continue to shape the patterns of adaptation of these young people. Chapter 9 examines questions of civic engagement and politics, a topic that contemporary immigration scholars too often ignore. Chapter 10 takes up the thorny issue of the continuing salience that racism has in shaping people's life chances.

Second Generation Advantage

This book does not tell a simple story. The data we gathered are rich but complicated. They provide exceptions for every generalization and require caveats for every assertion. Although there is considerable variation across ethnic groups, there is also much variation within each group. Both dimensions must be taken into account in order to understand the relationship between cultural adaptation and economic, social, and political status. Incorporation is also not a single story. Young people are being incorporated into different spheres in different ways.

Attempting to measure the progress or the "assimilation" of the second generation immediately poses questions: Assimilation into what? And progress compared to whom? Second generation young people may see themselves as very "American" compared to their immigrant parents and yet still feel—and seem—very much like foreigners compared to the children of natives. Further, the United States remains very much an ethnically and racially stratified society. It is probably unrealistic to expect black

and Hispanic immigrants to come to resemble white natives in one generation. The fact that often they have not achieved parity with native whites is, we feel, too easily seized upon by those who would minimize the progress these second generation young people are making. (Indeed, in the past it often took *white* immigrants more than one generation to reach parity with white natives.) Of course, it *is* important to note those areas in which the children of immigrants do not do as well as the children of white natives. At the same time, it is equally if not more important to see how the black and Hispanic second generation compares with the black and Hispanic children of natives. In the pages that follow we make all these comparisons. We feel, however, that the clearest reference groups for the second generation are other young people who share their “racial” backgrounds. Thus we compare second and 1.5 generation Dominicans and South Americans with mainland born Puerto Ricans, West Indians with the children of native born African Americans, and Russians with the children of native born whites. There is, of course, no obvious large racial comparison group for the second generation Chinese. Here, comparison with native whites probably gives the clearest benchmark.

Given these comparisons, we are guardedly optimistic about the second generation. On measures of educational attainment and labor force status, two-fifths of the second generation have already gone beyond their immigrant parents. Except among Dominican men, there is little evidence of second generation decline. In every case, the second generation young people we have studied are doing at least somewhat better than natives of the same race, even after adjusting for various advantages in family background. Indeed, we find the greatest evidence of persistent disadvantage, not among the second generation groups, but among African Americans and Puerto Ricans—particularly among young men.

The children of immigrants have not achieved these successes by clinging to the networks and enclaves of their immigrant communities. Instead, they have joined the mainstream, at least in the sense that their educational and occupational profiles look more like those of each other and native young people their age than they do those of their immigrant parents. Chinese youngsters have achieved the greatest educational and economic success relative to their parents’ often humble origins. Members of the Chinese first generation often live and work within a well-developed ethnic enclave (Wilson and Portes 1980; Zhou 1992). Yet their children have moved farther than any other group in terms of their dis-

tance from their parents' occupations, educational levels, and even attitudes. Whatever advantages the enclave provided their parents, the second generation young people did not embrace them. As a result, the Chinese enclave appears largely to be a first generation phenomenon. (Portes recently reached a similar conclusion about the Cuban enclave in South Florida [Portes and Shafer 2007].)

Nor are Chinese second generation young people unique in distancing themselves from their parents. Most members of the other second generation groups are forsaking ethnic niches and joining the mainstream. This does not mean they always experience rapid upward mobility. Many members of this generation are in fact joining New York's working class. Yet their problems and opportunities are generally common among young people working in entry level positions. Rarely do they stem from the status of being the children of immigrants.

In addition, many black and Hispanic second generation young people have benefitted from civil rights era policies and institutions initially designed to help African Americans and Puerto Ricans. While originally intended to address the age-old racial cleavages in American society, such policies may actually be more effective in aiding the incorporation of recent immigrants "of color" and their children. As a result, we conclude that being racialized as a member of a "minority" group can have positive impacts in contemporary America along with the negative effects stressed by segmented assimilation theory.

The second generation is also remaking the mainstream with a truly remarkable speed and creative energy. By and large, black and Hispanic members of the second generation have not closed their gap with native whites (although Chinese and Russian Jews have done so on many measures). Given the continued salience of race in American society and the low human capital of many minority parents, it would be highly unrealistic to expect minority members of the second generation to close the gap with whites within a single generation. Yet second generation minority youth rarely worry about how they stack up to native white young people, perhaps because they rarely meet native whites in their schools, work sites, and neighborhoods. They do meet and compare themselves to members of native minority groups and are often doing quite well by that metric. They also meet each other. As they interact with each other and native minorities, the children of immigrants are creating a new cultural and economic landscape.

Of course, there is no one measure of "doing well." Different groups

achieve varying levels in different spheres of incorporation. The dynamics of the spheres themselves are distinct. Economic mobility, for example, does not guarantee cultural inclusion, and neither economic mobility nor cultural inclusion correlates perfectly with political inclusion or political efficacy. Relatively well-off West Indians, for example, are just as likely to think that the police single them out for abuse and disrespect as do African Americans. This may lead them to feel less at ease and less comfortable as “Americans” than members of other groups, despite their comparative success in the labor market. Upwardly mobile Russians and Chinese are not the most likely to participate in American civic or political life. Nor does upward mobility guarantee happiness and harmonious family lives. The Chinese second generation has had a steeply rising career trajectory, but many second generation youth express profound personal dissatisfactions and difficulties communicating with their parents—with whom they nevertheless live longer than most other groups. In short, progress in one sphere of incorporation does not guarantee forward movement in all the others.

Finally, we have concluded that culture counts. Despite their overall assimilation, the different groups organize their lives in markedly different ways in terms of timing and sequencing major decisions in the transition to adulthood. They vary in when they leave home, finish their education, begin full time employment, find spouses or partners, and have children. We have some trepidation in saying that culture counts. Social scientists often shy away from culture when discussing ethnic and racial differences for fear that mentioning culture will lead to invidious distinctions, stereotypes, “victim blaming,” or racism. Yet even when distinct groups face common problems of survival in New York, they bring different ideas, values, repertoires of action, and strategies to bear on these problems. At the same time, we understand that culture is highly contingent on social structure. What aspect of a cultural repertoire an individual brings to bear on any particular problem depends on a host of considerations. Social context facilitates some approaches and discourages others. Further, different cultural strategies also have different practical results in people’s lives.

How do we explain why we reach more optimistic conclusions than do some other researchers, or indeed than do worried immigrant parents? One reason is that we undertook our research in more prosperous times. Gans (1992) developed his “second generation decline” scenario and Portes and Zhou (1993) originally formulated the segmented assimilation

model at a time when the crack epidemic, crime, and the growing concentration of poverty were having a devastating impact on inner city neighborhoods. By the time our research began, many urban areas, particularly New York, had begun to reinvent themselves amidst a long national economic expansion. In particular, New York City's declining crime rate yielded a dramatically improved quality of life.

Lack of legal status may also have been less detrimental for the parents of our respondents than for more recent immigrants, or indeed for the first and second generation in other parts of the country. Our second generation respondents are all citizens, and only a few of our 1.5 generation respondents reported not being legally documented. Although many of their parents had been undocumented at some point in the past, the vast majority of them had found ways to become legal residents or U.S. citizens. The earliest members of one group, the Russian Jews, were cold war refugees who obtained legal status quite easily. Among the other groups, most of the parents came to the United States between the late 1960s and late 1980s, when becoming "legal" was easier than it is today.

New York's immigrants are also less likely to be undocumented than those in many other parts of the country. The undocumented are estimated to comprise between 15 and 20 percent of New York's foreign born as opposed to around 40 percent in California and over 50 percent in Greater Los Angeles. (We also did not study Mexicans, a group with comparatively high levels of undocumented people.) As a result, even respondents whose parents were originally undocumented did not grow up in communities where most adults lacked legal status. Indeed, their families tended to be of mixed status, containing U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents along with temporary visa holders and undocumented persons.

New York's undocumented are not clustered together or especially stigmatized. Most entered on a temporary visa that they subsequently overstayed. It was unusual to have the traumatic experience of being smuggled across the border. It is reasonable to assume that as visa abusers rather than illegal border crossers, having once obtained a tourist or student visa, they were better positioned to become legal permanently. The immigrants most likely to enter the country without documents, Mexicans, have only recently become a growing presence in the city. While Mexicans constitute more than 40 percent of the immigrants in Chicago, Los Angeles, and Houston, they are less than 5 percent of the foreign born population in New York (Foner 2005).

New York also has an extensive public sector, a well-developed social welfare system, and a large and open public university system developed in large part in response to earlier waves of immigrants and their children. Immigration is a messy business. False starts and disrupted trajectories are common. New York's institutional structure allows for many "second chances." New York sees itself as a place where people can remake themselves, and the local culture celebrates those who do. That one is allowed second, third, and fourth chances is a particularly good fit for the children of immigrants.

Finally, many previous observers have worried that the children of immigrants will be caught between two worlds, rejecting their parents' "old country" ways, yet not fully Americanized. While this may sometimes be a problem for them, we feel that social scientists have not sufficiently appreciated how "in between-ness" can provide the second generation with real advantages.

Park and Warner and Srole assumed that members of the second generation could share the *native advantages* of the majority by distancing themselves from their immigrant parents. Through assimilation, they would become familiar with American culture and access a relatively open opportunity structure. Perhaps they understood that these were white native advantages. In assimilating, European immigrants were, in effect, becoming fully and unambiguously white. On the other side, Gans, Portes, and Zhou posit that the children of nonwhite immigrants would come to share the *native disadvantages* of racial minorities. Discrimination and racial segregation would block their access to educational opportunities and decent jobs. To avoid this tendency, some members of the second generation would retain the *immigrant advantages* stemming from their parents' positive selection, their embeddedness in ethnic networks and economies, and their cultural orientations (Rumbaut 2004). Of course, their parents' *immigrant disadvantages*, such as lack of English, low human capital, and discordant cultural orientations, might also hold them back.

While our research yields examples of all these scenarios, it suggests an additional possibility: members of the second generation can sometimes negotiate among the different combinations of immigrant and native advantage and disadvantage to choose the best combination for themselves. In other words, we believe that the ability to select the best traits from their immigrant parents and their native born peers yields distinct *second generation advantages*. Members of the second generation neither simply

continue their parents' ways of doing things nor simply adopt native ways. Growing up in a different society from that of their parents, they know they must choose between immigrant and native ways of doing things. Sometimes they choose one, sometimes the other, and sometimes they try to combine the best of both worlds. They also sometimes create something wholly new. They do not always choose wisely or well. But they are more aware than most people that they have a choice. Being "in between" allows many members of this generation to engage in forms of cultural innovation that New Yorkers have received well.

Just as we have learned about how young people come of age, we have also learned about New York. Our respondents constantly reminded us just how hard it can be to grow up in the city. Even middle class youngsters and their parents had to compete ferociously for things that middle class Americans elsewhere can take for granted, from a seat in a good elementary school to a spot on the little league team. The situation is many times worse for the poor. The crack epidemic of the late 1980s ravaged many of the neighborhoods in which our informants grew up. Housing remains extremely expensive for young people starting out, even in the poorest neighborhoods. Competition for jobs is fierce, not only from the constant supply of new immigrants, but from young educated people moving from other parts of the United States to try to make it in the city that never sleeps.

As tough as New York is, it has also historically been good to immigrants. It offers extraordinary opportunities and rewards the improvisation that comes easily to the second generation. Immigrants and their children, past and present, have helped New York emerge as the dominant city in American (and perhaps world) culture and commerce in the mid-twentieth century. New York's brusque local culture is not exactly welcoming, but it offers a rough-and-tumble tolerance to newcomers who can use second generation advantages to best effect. Its native white population celebrates its immigrant origins. If their cousins turned into "unhyphenated" whites after crossing the Hudson, the remaining native whites continue to have social networks and life chances shaped by ethnic histories.

Ethnicity thus has legitimacy. To borrow Elijah Anderson's (2004) phrase for physical and social spaces that celebrate difference, the city's "cosmopolitan canopy" is large and vibrant. When Republicans in Congress proposed criminalizing illegal immigrants and building a fence at the border, New York's Republican mayor dismissively called on them to "get

real.” Only the chair of the City Council Immigration Committee, a 1973 migrant from Guyana, disagreed: he chided the mayor for not coming out strongly for an unconditional amnesty (Chan 2006:B6). That the city has no clear ethnic majority means that it was “no big deal” for our second generation respondents to have immigrant parents. They rarely felt like outsiders or exotics. Most of their friends were in a similar situation, and anyway, everyone is from somewhere. “Immigrants” are the people who arrived last week, while the only native white “Americans” without accents they know are the ones they see on television. They are New Yorkers, comfortable with the city they have inherited. Without thinking too much about it, they live multicultural lives in the streets, workplaces, and nightclubs of a city that put the tortuously self-conscious “diversity” of elite educational institutions to shame.

Our young respondents appreciated this cosmopolitanism. Cultural diversity was one of the things they liked most about their city. Of course, their explanation of why diversity is good often began and ended with the variety of restaurants. Still, even if practice falls short of theory, they take it for granted that one *should* have friends of many races and backgrounds and think contact with people different from oneself enriches one’s life. That belief is important. It is one of the best things about this generation and about New York.

Thinking about Groups

A few caveats are in order before proceeding. Most of the analysis presented in this book is structured around the comparison of ethnic groups. We hope that our evidence will convince the reader that these groups are in some sense real, not just our own nominal creation. Indeed, we think the data make clear how group membership shapes people’s lives. Time after time in the pages that follow we will present evidence that even after controlling for all the other relevant variables we have measured in our study, there is still a group effect that we cannot explain away. Nevertheless, we are aware that intergroup comparisons—“the Chinese do this, the Dominicans do that”—sometimes reify groupness more than reality warrants. The variation within the ethnic groups is often as great as the differences between them. When we focus on the differences between ethnic groups, we do not mean to imply that this is the most important factor in their lives, or that other factors like gender or age or race are not sometimes more important. We also recognize that the importance of ethnic

identity, as well as the degree to which ethnic groups actually function as groups, varies from group to group and rises and falls over time (Cohen 1974; Brubaker 2004).

We further recognize it is possible to read group comparisons as stereotypes or even racist generalizations. Let us be clear: any reference to group differences makes groups appear more homogenous than they actually are. Our young respondents belonged not only to ethnic groups but also to social classes, genders, social groups, and neighborhoods. Like all modern people, they had a multiplicity of interacting social roles and identities. Although a quick reading of a table comparing groups will not always make this apparent, we have tried to remain sensitive to individual variation without losing sight of the real difference that ethnicity makes. When we highlight ethnic group differences, we are referring to differences in central tendencies with larger, overlapping distributions.

Further, when we, or our informants, refer to the norms, values, or cultures of any particular group, we are talking about the particular, historically selected group now present in New York. When we refer to the “Chinese” or the “Ecuadorans,” we are talking about the specific people who migrated to New York and raised children there between the late 1960s and early 1990s. They represent specific regional, class, linguistic, political, and occupational segments of their countries of origin. They have sometimes created communities in New York that are bizarre parallels to their homelands. “Russian” New York is made up of urban mostly Jewish Russian speakers. “Chinese” New York is disproportionately comprised of Cantonese speakers from particular villages in southern China, with struggling newcomers from Fujian and middle class migrants from Taiwan. Needless to say, the “Russian” or “Chinese” cultural practices of these communities may seem odd to many people in Russia or China.

With all these caveats in mind, we nonetheless believe that membership in and differences among ethnic and racial groups have real and important impacts on the lives of children. As Glazer and Moynihan (1963) argued, later members of ethnic groups inherit a social position derived from the ways in which earlier members entered and became situated in the city, and they function as interest groups that transcend waves of arrival. When members of the Russian Jewish second generation get help from social service agencies created by an earlier generation of Russian Jewish New Yorkers, or when a West Indian avails him- or herself of programs originally created to help African Americans, past group identities, networks, and social positions are shaping their lives, even if they are not fully aware

of it. Even when children do not think that their parents' national origin is particularly important, they inherit structures of advantage and disadvantage. Native born white Americans, for example, need not be aware of their "white privilege" to enjoy what Roediger (1999) terms the "wages of whiteness."

Ethnic groups have different modal levels of education, employment, and social capital. Although, as we recognize, all groups vary along these dimensions in ways that overlap with one another, their central tendencies differ significantly, reflecting the group position within the larger society. Moreover, the ways in which traits vary around those central tendencies also differ systematically across groups. Put in plain English, it is better to be part of a poor group that has some well-off members than to be part of a uniformly poor group. These patterns of difference reflect not only conditions in the home countries but also the "selection" of the immigrant first generation from these national populations. While immigrants from poor countries have fewer advantages than those from rich countries, even immigrants from poor countries usually have advantages over those whom they left behind. Groups also have different connections with their home country, proximity to native born ethnic groups, and legal status on entry. Finally, groups vary in how tightly and how densely members are bound to each other and how much they function *as* groups. Given the larger society's tendency to hold ethnic stereotypes, these patterns clearly have real consequences for group members.

Ethnic differences as experienced in the United States are constantly being shaped and reshaped as the groups interact with the larger society and as its patterns of race, social class, education, and a host of other factors evolve. Men and women experience ethnic differences in divergent ways as well. By itself, ethnicity explains nothing. Yet ethnic differences are not a myth obscuring some more fundamental underlying reality. As E. P. Thompson (1966) remarked about class, ethnicity is a historically contingent event, constantly changing, but real nonetheless, and of vital importance to the young people whose lives we are striving to understand.