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# Dreams Fulfilled, Dreams Shattered: Determinants of Segmented Assimilation in the Second Generation

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We summarize prior theories on the adaptation process of the contemporary immigrant second generation as a prelude to presenting additive and interactive models showing the impact of family variables, school contexts and academic outcomes on the process. For this purpose, we regress indicators of educational and occupational achievement in early adulthood on predictors measured three and six years earlier. The Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study, used for the analysis, allows us to establish a clear temporal order among exogenous predictors and the two dependent variables. We also construct a Downward Assimilation Index, based on six indicators and regress it on the same set of predictors. Results confirm a pattern of segmented assimilation in the second generation, with a significant proportion of the sample experiencing downward assimilation. Predictors of the latter are the obverse of those of educational and occupational achievement. Significant interaction effects emerge between these predictors and early school contexts, defined by different class and racial compositions. Implications of these results for theory and policy are examined.

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Immigration since the mid-1960s has transformed the demographic composition of the United States. As of 2008, there were 39.9 million foreign-born persons living in the country, representing 13 percent of the population. This is the largest percentage since 1890 (Passel 2009). In more recent decades, immigrants and children brought to the United States at an early age have become the fastest growing component of the American population ages 18 or younger. Today, they represent close to a fourth of young Americans (Rumbaut 2005, 2008). Second generation Mexican-Americans number more than 8 million, with an average age of 12. Clearly, the future of this young population as it reaches adulthood and seeks to integrate socially and economically is of interest to all (Hirschman 2001).

The purpose of this article is to explore the distinct paths of adaptation taken by the second generation. While the initial focus of the research was on the immigrants themselves, it quickly became apparent that the course of their offsprings' adaptation was as important, if not more so. First-generation migrants are a notoriously mobile population; many return to their countries of origin or move back and forth (Zhou 1997; Levitt 2001). They are *in* America, but not yet *of* it (Glazer 1954). By contrast, their offspring, American citizens by birth or naturalization, are here to stay and can claim their rights as full members of U.S. society.

However, these children of immigrants are not always successful in educational or occupational attainments, and this divergence has given rise to disparate theories on

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the future of this young population. To complicate matters further, contemporary immigration is split between a high human capital movement of university-level professionals and technicians and a low human capital flow of poorly educated workers. While professionals and entrepreneurs were by no means absent among European immigrants at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the bulk of that wave of immigration was composed of unskilled workers (Handlin 1973; Warner and Srole 1945). At present, the relative number of highly skilled immigrants is much higher because their arrival has been stimulated by provisions in the immigration law responding to the changing needs of the American economy and labor market (Portes and Rumbaut 2006).

In addition to differences in the human capital brought by immigrants, there is the equally important factor of differences in the context that receives them. The concept of “mode of incorporation” was coined to highlight key aspects of these contexts of reception pertaining, respectively, to the attitudes of the authorities and the public at large, plus the character of the pre-existing ethnic community. By and large, the mode of incorporation of high human capital immigrants is positive: it is defined by legal status and a receptive, or at least neutral, stance by the native-born population (Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Zhou 2001). When a co-ethnic community exists, it is generally affluent, being formed by earlier migrants with comparable levels of education. By contrast, manual labor immigrants commonly arrive illegally and, by reason of this status, a relatively low level of education and predominantly non-white physical features, are subjected to a negative reception by the authorities and the host population (Suarez-Orozco 1987; Rumbaut 2005). Also, pre-existing co-ethnic communities are frequently weak and lacking in resources needed to counteract a negative official reception (Lopez and Stanton Salazar 2001; Menjivar 2008).<sup>1</sup>

Matters are further complicated because differences in human capital and modes of incorporation among first-generation immigrants tend to overlap with geographical disparities in their origins. Immigrants with high human capital who receive positive reception generally come from Asia; manual laborers and negatively received migrants mostly arrive from Latin America and the Caribbean. China, Korea, India and the Philippines are the principal sources of high human capital immigration; Mexico, Central America, Haiti and the West Indies are the main origins of the massive low-skill flow (Passel 2009; Bean and Stevens 2003; Zhou et al. 2008). These divergent origins and composition of the immigrant first generation set the initial conditions for adaption of the second generation. Unlike the relatively uniform class origins and modes of incorporation exhibited by earlier European immigrants, the bifurcation of contemporary immigration creates very different opportunities and resources for its offspring. These differences have given rise to alternative theories on the course of adaptation of this population and its prospects for the future.

## **Second Generation Incorporation: Theoretical Perspectives**

Until recently, the reigning theoretical perspective in this field was Milton Gordon's *Assimilation in American Life*. Written in 1964, when the incorporation of turn-of-the-

century Europeans and their children had been largely completed, the book synthesized the collective sociological wisdom of the time as to how the process had unfolded. Under the influence of the structural-functionalist paradigm dominant at the time, Gordon's theory focused on the successive stages through which social equilibrium was restored after the disruptions caused by mass immigration (Gordon 1964). Migrants and their offspring first underwent acculturation which, when successfully completed, led to secondary structural assimilation or integration into the formal organizations of the dominant society. This, in turn, could usher primary structural assimilation or entry into more intimate contact with the native population, leading ultimately to amalgamation or intermarriage. Finally, identificational assimilation would erase the remaining differences, with descendants of immigrants seeing themselves as full members of American society (Gordon 1964; Alba and Nee 2003).

Gordon never asserted that the process was inexorable and, in fact, pointed to the many difficulties that some immigrant groups had in translating acculturation into structural assimilation. He believed that acculturation almost always took place, but that entry into the families and intimate circles of American society was more problematic. Nonetheless, the process was uniform and unilinear in the sense that, if an immigrant group was to assimilate successfully, it had to undergo this series of stages and, that after a particular stage had been reached, it was largely irreversible. Gordon's theory was supplemented by those of other sociologists, such as Warner and Srole, who developed an ethnic-racial hierarchy based on language, religion and race. Position in this hierarchy was determined by relative distance to the dominant white Anglo-Saxon Protestant majority and pointed to the relative speed with which particular groups completed the process of assimilation. (Warner and Srole 1945).

During the 1970s and 1980s, the assimilation perspective was severely criticized for its empirical and ideological shortcomings. Empirically, scholars such as Greeley (1971) and, especially Glazer and Moynihan (1970), pointed toward the durability of ethnic sub-societies that persisted and prospered across generations—groups that did not seem particularly keen to be integrated into the Anglo-Saxon Protestant mainstream. Ideologically, assimilation was criticized for its functionalist bias and the evident positive value that it placed on the adoption by immigrants of the culture and language of the dominant group (Rosenblum 1973; Gerschwender 1978). Glazer and Moynihan (1970) went as far as declaring that “the point about the melting pot is that it did not happen” and, some years later, the first of these authors declared that “we’re all multiculturalists now.” (Glazer 1998)

In a vigorous attempt to rescue the assimilation perspective from oblivion, Alba and Nee (2003) by-passed Gordon in order to go back to the classic origins of this perspective in the writings of Robert Park and his collaborators of the Chicago School. According to Alba and Nee, Park and his followers never posited a uniform mainstream or an inexorable or unilinear process of assimilation. Instead, whatever “mainstream” existed then or now is malleable, flexible and inclusive, and newcomers may or may not seek to assimilate into it. The “mainstream” according to these authors includes the native middle-class, working-class and even poor minorities (Alba and Nee 2003:12).

An immediate difficulty with Alba and Nee's rescue attempt is that, in its effort to respond to the numerous critiques of assimilation theory, it gave so much ground as to turn it into an all-encompassing and unfalsifiable set of generalities. When "mainstream" can signify anything from the upper-class to the minority poor, and assimilation may or may not happen across generations, there is little heuristic power left in the theory. Such statements can be readily accepted without advancing any specific prediction about the course of adaptation followed or to be followed by foreign groups. In the end, Alba and Nee's assimilationism devolves into a benign expectation that immigrants and their descendants will eventually join, in one way or another, a multifaceted American mainstream (Alba and Nee 2003; Portes and Rumbaut 2005).

Another pair of authors, Perlmann and Waldinger, has adopted a more muscular approach asserting that the process of immigrant incorporation today is not fundamentally different from what happened to early European immigrants and their descendants (Perlmann and Waldinger 1997). They criticize the conventional depiction of assimilation into American life as too linear and too unproblematic. In reality, they believe, the process was far more difficult and complex and not too different, in that sense, to the barriers confronted by today's foreign migrants (Waldinger 2007).

At its core, Perlmann and Waldinger's theorizing comes down to the assertion that, despite the major bifurcation of contemporary immigration, nothing significant has changed and the process of assimilation will unfold along pretty much the same lines as it always has. To buttress this position, Perlmann conducted a detailed comparison of the educational and occupational attainment of Italian immigrants and their descendants at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and of Mexicans and their offspring at present (Perlmann 2005). The difficulty is that Perlmann's data do not support his theory very well, as he is repeatedly compelled to acknowledge differences in the adaptation process of both groups and the unusual difficulties that Mexican-American children face in competing for educational and economic mobility today. The study finds that the Mexican second generation is doubly handicapped by its lower educational achievement relative to whites and by the much higher returns to education at present relative to those facing Italian-Americans in an earlier period. Hence, "the Mexican [second generation] brings their great handicap in educational profile into the labor market in the worst possible context, when the returns to educational advantage are higher than at any point in the period 1940 to 2000." (Perlmann 2005:95)

Further, Perlmann notes that while 9 percent of native white males and 16 percent of black males left school without a high school diploma in 2000, the rate among second-generation Mexican-American males was 33 percent. This huge disparity leads him (2005:82) to acknowledge that, "Mexican-American dropout rates should bring to mind the warnings of the segmented assimilation hypothesis: that an important part of the contemporary second generation will assimilate downwards."

Segmented assimilation theory asserts that the big disparities in human capital and modes of incorporation among contemporary immigrants necessarily translate into patterned differences in the course of adaptation followed by their offspring.

The power of these two causal factors is supplemented by a third—family structure. In addition to differences in human capital, contemporary immigrant groups also vary in the extent to which families remain together. The three factors jointly play a significant role, according to the theory, as these children confront barriers to educational and occupational mobility in contemporary society (Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Rumbaut 2005; Zhou 1997).

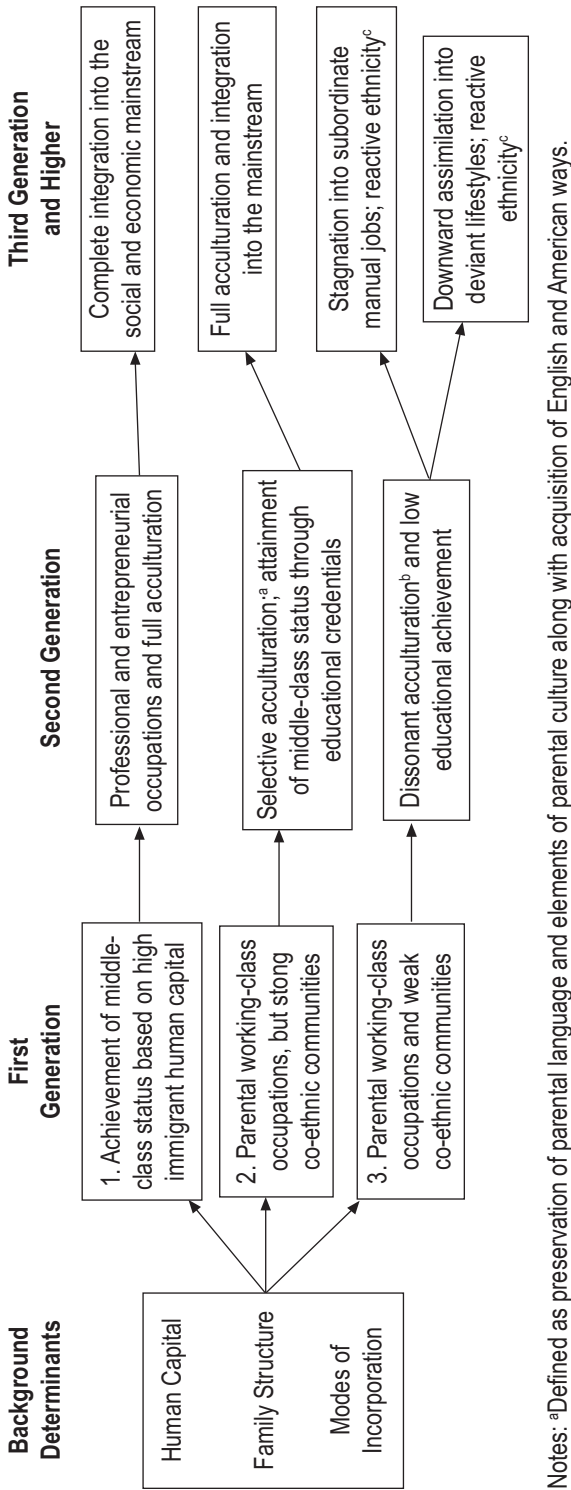
Barriers to successful adaptation, according to this theory, are three-fold: first, lingering racial prejudice because the majority of today's second generation is non-white; second, de-industrialization and the bifurcation of the American labor market into highly-paid professional occupations requiring advanced training and low-paid manual jobs; third, the proliferation of gangs and the drug trade that provide an alternative path to staying in school and completing an education (Portes and Zhou 1993).

These obstacles interact with the human capital and mode of incorporation of immigrant groups, leading to several distinct paths of adaptation: many second-generation youths succeed educationally and economically riding on stable families, high human capital in the parental generation and a positive mode of incorporation; others succeed, despite low parental education and income, because of strong families and cohesive co-ethnic communities that support parental discipline and guidance. Still others confront barriers to successful adaptation with the disadvantages linked to low parental human capital, a negative mode of incorporation because of race or undocumented status, and weak co-ethnic communities. These children are at risk of undergoing *downward assimilation*, thus labeled because in this case learning American ways would not lead to upward mobility but exactly the opposite. These ways are those of the street—linked to dropping out of school, joining gangs or stagnating into low-paid menial jobs (Zhou and Bankston 1996; Vigil 2002).

Figure 1 summarizes the main tenets of this theory. Empirically, it makes two key predictions: First, that a sizable minority is falling behind because of the barriers it confronts; second, that this minority is not distributed randomly, but concentrated among groups marked by low average parental human capital, a negative mode of incorporation, and/or unstable families.

In opposition to segmented assimilation theory, classical assimilation and its contemporary variants envision a uniform and generally benign process in which the offspring of all immigrants, regardless of national origin and other parental characteristics, integrate more or less swiftly into the American mainstream. The assimilationist position has garnered momentum from a recent study of second-generation adults in New York City. Based on a cross-sectional sample of both second-generation and comparable native minority persons, the study found that, on average, second-generation youths are doing better, educationally and occupationally, than their minority counterparts and have advanced significantly ahead of their parents' generation (Kasinitz et al. 2008). These results lead these authors to proclaim a blanket "second generation advantage," reversing earlier premonitions by Gans (1992) who had warned about a likely "second generation decline" in the contemporary period.

Figure 1. Paths of Mobility across Generations



Notes: <sup>a</sup>Defined as preservation of parental language and elements of parental culture along with acquisition of English and American ways.

<sup>b</sup>Defined as rejection of parental culture and breakdown of communication across generations.

<sup>c</sup>Defined as ethnic militance in reaction to perceived discrimination by the mainstream.

Source: Adapted from Portes and Rumbaut 2001.



In effect, Kasinitz and his associates dismiss the possibility of downward assimilation to posit a uniform forward path embraced by all or most children of immigrants. Given the size and growth rates of the population of second-generation children and young adults, these alternative theoretical predictions have more than a purely academic interest: if adaptation is uniformly successful, as affirmed by classical assimilation theory and its contemporary supporters, it will pose no problems to American society in the future; on the other hand, if a sizable segment is at risk of downward assimilation, this should be of concern; this path leads to the self-reinforcing structural exclusion long affecting domestic minorities, and perpetuates inner-city poverty and disadvantage (Wacquant and Wilson 1989; Vigil 2002).

To examine these predictions, longitudinal data are necessary. Such data enable examination of adaptation over time and the sequence leading to particular outcomes. By contrast, cross-sectional surveys of the second generation conducted in adulthood censor those who have been removed from normal patterns of their age cohorts (e.g. through incarceration). Most of the crises leading to negative adaptation outcomes originate in adolescence. This is a shortcoming of the Kasinitz et al. (2008) study, and it weakens the thesis of second-generation advantage.

## Methods

### *Data Source*

To examine these questions, we have made use of the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study, the largest longitudinal dataset focused on the second generation. Census data alone do not suffice because the decennial census contains no questions on parental place of birth, making it impossible to identify second-generation respondents. Similarly, the CPS permits only “limited longitudinal analysis and the investigation of short-run labor dynamics” (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2002:12-13), and its respondents from immigrant communities are too few and scattered to permit detailed analysis. CILS is a survey of 5,262 second-generation youths from 77 different nationalities. The operational definition of “second generation” used by this survey is children born in the United States with at least one foreign-born parent or children born abroad who had entered the United States by age 5. The original survey was conducted at average age 14 in 49 schools in the metropolitan areas of Miami/Ft. Lauderdale and San Diego and is representative of second-generation youth in these areas in the early 1990s (Portes and Rumbaut 2005).

The sample, drawn from the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades, was followed and reinterviewed three years later by the time of high school graduation at average age 17. Students who had dropped out of school were also tracked and, whenever possible, reinterviewed. In total, this follow-up retrieved 4,288 respondents or 81.5 percent of the original sample.

In 2001-03, 10 years after the original survey, a second follow-up was conducted. The sample now averaged 24 years of age and hence “hard” outcomes indicative of different paths of adaptation could be measured. In total, this survey—labeled CILS-III—retrieved 3,613 respondents representing 68.9 percent of the original sample and 84.3 percent of the first follow-up. This level of sample attrition is similar or lower to that found in na-



tional surveys conducted in the United States recently, such as the General Social Survey (Smith 2002). Nevertheless, with 31 percent of the original sample missing, it became necessary to address the issue of missing data.

The limitations of CILS data include both sample attrition in the last follow-up and restriction of the original sample to two gateway cities, Miami and San Diego. Nevertheless, its longitudinal design provides a unique advantage, insofar as it allows us to construct time-ordered causal models of all major second-generation outcomes in early adulthood. Moreover, the CILS design allows us to identify individuals who have dropped out of normal civilian life, such as those behind bars, who are excluded from cross-sectional surveys of the “normal” adult population. Such cases are important, insofar as they provide direct evidence bearing on the likelihood of downward assimilation.

## Research Questions

The following analysis seeks to provide answers to these basic questions:

1. Whether distinct paths of adaptation exist in the second generation and, in particular, whether there is evidence of downward assimilation.
2. If so, whether these outcomes are distributed randomly among immigrant nationalities or whether they tend to concentrate in specific groups, according to different levels of parental human capital and modes of incorporation.
3. What are the principal causal factors accounting for observed differences in education, occupational status and other adaptation outcomes among children of immigrants.
4. To what extent academic achievement and educational expectations in adolescence mediate the effects of exogenous parental variables and modes of incorporation on second generation outcomes.
5. To what extent the school contexts that children of immigrants encounter interact with early family variables and subsequent factors in affecting the course of subsequent adaptation.

## Results

### *Preliminary Evidence*

Table 1 presents descriptive results of the final CILS survey on possible indicators of different adaptation paths, broken down by major nationalities. The 12 nationalities identified comprise more than 85 percent of the present U.S. immigrant population. They include a sizable sample of Mexican Americans, the largest group. We combined respondents of Chinese and Korean origin because of the observed similarities in parental background and modes of incorporation, and in order to create a sufficiently

sizable group for further analysis. Respondents categorized as “Other Latin” are mostly the children of Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants with a smattering of other Central and South American nationalities. “Other Asian” is a diverse category with parents from many countries and no predominant nationality.<sup>2</sup>

While variations among second-generation nationalities in average years of education are minor, those relating to dropout rates or quitting study after high school are not. Youths who failed to pursue their studies beyond high school range from a low of 6.9 percent among Chinese and Koreans to a high of 26 percent among Nicaraguans, 38 percent among Mexican-Americans in California, and a remarkable 47 percent among children of Cambodian and Laotian refugees. The proportion of second-generation Cambodians and Laotians with no more than a high school education is roughly the same as the proportion of their parents who did not attain this level. Mexican-Americans, on the other hand, have advanced significantly beyond the first generation. Their below-average achievement relative to other nationalities is a consequence of the very low educational levels of most of their first-generation parents (Rumbaut 2005; Lopez and Stanton-Salazar 2001).

Family incomes follow closely these differences. The richest nationalities are Cuban in South Florida and Filipino in California. The poorest groups in both mean and median incomes are the two predominantly black nationalities in Florida—Haitians and Jamaicans/West Indians—plus Mexicans and Laotian/Cambodians in California. Median incomes of second-generation Haitians and Laotian/Cambodians are approximately \$15,000 lower than those of non-Hispanic whites 18 to 30 years of age in the 2000 U.S. Census (\$40,600). Those of Mexican-American and Jamaican-Americans are about \$10,000 lower (IPUMS 2000).

The dictum that “the rich get richer and the poor get children” is well-reflected in these data. At average age 24, only 6.5 percent of second-generation Chinese/Koreans and 10 percent of Cubans have had children. At the opposite end, about a quarter of second-generation Haitians, West Indians and Laotian/Cambodians had children; the figure climbs to a remarkable 48 percent among females of Mexican origin. This fertility rate exceeds that of black females, ages 18-30 in the 2000 U.S. Census (41 percent). Hence, the immigrant nationalities least equipped to move ahead because of school desertion and low family incomes are those most burdened, at an early age, by the responsibility of caring for children; a third generation likely to grow up in conditions of comparable disadvantage (Telles and Ortiz 2008).

Two final indicators of downward assimilation are incidents of arrests and incarceration. The latter are more serious as they imply the commission and sentencing for a crime. Males are significantly more likely to find themselves behind bars, either arrested or incarcerated. However, among second-generation Chinese and Koreans no one did; among Filipino-Americans the rate was just 6 percent and among Cuban-Americans, a slightly larger figure. Second-generation Mexicans and West Indians are most likely to be incarcerated, with male rates close to that of black men ages 18-30 in 2000, 20.7 percent (Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin 2004).

Table 1: Key Outcomes of Second Generation Adaptation in Early Adulthood

Nationality	Education		Family Income		Has at Least One Child		Arrested		Incarcerated <sup>c</sup>	
	Average Years	High School Graduate or Less %	Mean \$	Median <sup>a</sup> \$	Unemployed <sup>b</sup> %	Total %	Females %	Total %	Males %	Total %
Cambodian/Laotian	13.4	46.7	36,504	24,643	15.5	22.9	31.1	5.2	10.5	4.6
Chinese/Korean	15.5	6.8	47,723	31,136	14.8	6.5	—	6.9	10.3	—
Colombian	14.5	16.6	58,339	45,948	3.3	16.6	14.3	11.8	21.9	5.5
Cuban	14.5	19.4	67,087	50,698	6.8	10.1	20.9	10.3	9.1	4.8
Filipino	14.5	15.9	64,986	55,167	9.5	19.7	24.8	5.9	9.1	3.8
Haitian	14.4	14.4	33,471	26,000	18.8	24.7	30.8	11.1	20.6	7.7
Jamaican/ West Indian	14.6	17.6	39,565	29,423	9.5	24.5	25.4	13.1	30.4	7.3
Mexican	13.4	37.9	39,589	32,828	9.2	40.8	48.0	15.0	26.7	9.3
Nicaraguan	14.2	25.7	54,195	47,252	5.8	19.8	23.0	7.9	14.7	4.2
Vietnamese	14.9	13.4	44,512	35,000	7.8	8.7	5.1	7.9	14.7	6.8
Other (Asian)	14.6	21.3	51,875	33,088	2.5	20.0	29.3	—	5.4	—
Other (Latin American)	14.2	24.1	54,514	39,375	6.0	19.7	23.7	12.4	20.0	5.5
Total	14.3	22.3	55,625	41,668	8.7	20.4	24.9	9.6	16.5	5.3

Notes: <sup>a</sup>Median family income based on midpoints for grouped data.

<sup>b</sup>Respondents without jobs, whether looking or not looking for employment, except those still enrolled at school.

<sup>c</sup>CILS-3 arrest and incarceration figures are retrospective for the "past 5 years" until the time of the survey. Figures with less than four cases in a category are omitted from percentage estimates. Self-reports were supplemented by searches on incarcerated persons available, as public information, in the web pages of the California and Florida corrections departments.

These results provide tangible evidence of downward assimilation in the second generation. These outcomes are not random but concentrate in particular nationalities, specifically those that were expected to be at greatest disadvantage because of low levels of parental education and incomes and an insecure legal status (Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Telles and Ortiz 2008). Mexican Americans, Haitian Americans and second-generation Laotians and Cambodians—all groups excluded from the New York study sample (Kasinitz et al. 2008)—find themselves in this situation. These results contradict the predictions of assimilationist theories of a benign and uniform adaptation path followed, with minor exceptions, by all children of immigrants.<sup>3</sup>

The data presented in Table 1 are *not* adjusted for sample attrition. An analysis of determinants of attrition in the second CILS follow-up reveals that family composition and early high school grades are strong predictors: respondents growing up in single-parent families and with low GPAs in high school were significantly less likely to be included in the final sample. These predictors are also strong determinants of adult outcomes, leading to higher rates of school abandonment, lower occupational attainment, incarceration and childbearing. Findings presented in Table 1 are, therefore, conservative since attrition in the sample is nonrandom. An imputation routine that takes into account the nonrandom character of absent respondents would simply *increase* the number of cases estimated to undergo downward assimilation.

### Measuring Segmented Assimilation

We now turn to the determinants of three relevant objective outcomes pertaining to segmented assimilation: educational attainment, occupational status and 6 indicators of downward assimilation (from Table 1). These indicators were aggregated into a single summary index including: (1. abandoned school with less than a high school diploma, (2. annual income below the poverty level,<sup>4</sup> (3. unemployed and not in school, (4. early childbearing, (5. at least one incident of arrest (but not incarcerated), (6. at least one incident of incarceration. The Downward Assimilation Index, therefore, is a count variable representing a set of different negative outcomes in adolescence or early adulthood; it should not be confused with a standard attitudinal scale representing a single underlying dimension.<sup>5</sup> The analyses treat the DAI as a count variable; it is dichotomized into several probit models and re-scaled as a set of indicators reflecting two latent variables. Metric characteristics of DAI and other variables are available from the author upon request.

Table 2 presents the distribution of events representing downward assimilation, broken down by categories of the principal exogenous variables. The figures show the DAI to be a well-behaved measure, as the pattern of scores closely reflects theoretical expectations: First, there is a monotonic increase in the proportion of respondents experiencing *no* negative events with rising parental status and a corresponding decline in those experiencing many such events. Second, children who grew up with both natural parents are 12 percent less likely to experience a single negative outcome than those raised in less conventional types of households. Third, differences among nationalities

show that the highest proportions experiencing two or more negative life events are found among the most disadvantaged groups—young adults of Mexican, Haitian, Jamaican, West Indian, Laotian and Cambodian origin. Fourteen percent of Chinese/Koreans are also in this category, but the group also features one of the highest percentages of no incidents. This bi-modal pattern is mainly due to the high proportion of unemployed Chinese. Overall, results add confidence in the DAI as a good summary measure avoiding the clutter of analyzing each individual indicator separately.

In the following analysis, all predictors come from the CILS first and second waves where missing data was not a serious problem. The problem appears with the dependent variables that were measured in the third survey. We conducted several analyses to address the implications of “missingness,” including listwise deletion; FIML estimation, when possible, to adjust for missing values while retaining the original sample size; and sensitivity analyses to estimate the models after assigning all missing cases values that indicate negative outcomes. The first and second approaches assume that missing data are random, a common assumption that is often not met but tends to produce conservative results (Allison 2003). The third approach assumes that “missingness” is not random but instead is related to the outcome. Individuals who are missing in the outcomes tend to have covariate values that suggest that, were they observed, they would score high on downward assimilation. Therefore, this third approach provides an extreme upper bound of what results might have been if the missing had been observed.

The DAI was constructed to quantify and examine determinants of downward assimilation. However, as noted in the theoretical section and in Figure 1, this is just *one* of the possible paths taken by the process. To highlight this point and examine determinants of alternative outcomes, we include next regressions of educational and occupational achievement, in early adulthood.

## Nested Models

As predictors of all three dependent variables, we use the variables listed on the left-hand side of Figure 1 plus controls for age and sex. We then add indicators of early school context—average school SES (measured by the obverse of the proportion of students eligible for free or subsidized lunches) and whether respondents attended a mostly minority school (measured by the proportion of Hispanic, black and Asian students). Lastly, we add the effects of academic performance and ambition in early school years, as indexed by grade point averages and by respondents’ expectations of a college or post-graduate degree. An extensive literature on occupational and educational achievement has consistently shown school grades and early educational expectations to be strong predictors of these outcomes (Sewell et al. 1969; Haller and Portes 1973; Feliciano and Rumbaut 2005; Kao and Tienda 1998).

The successive models reflect the family-to-school transition, as experienced by our respondents. The first model focuses on the exogenous variables presented in Figure 1, parental characteristics and modes of incorporation. Table 3 presents OLS nested models of educational and occupational attainment; Table 4 presents the correspond-

**Table 2: Bivariate Associations of Downward Assimilation with Key Predictors**

<b>Predictor</b>	<b>Events Indicative of Downward Assimilation</b>				<b>Mean<sup>a</sup></b>
	<b>None %</b>	<b>One %</b>	<b>Two-Three %</b>	<b>Four or More %</b>	
<b>Family SES</b>					
Low	44.0	35.4	18.6	2.0	.86 (.99)
Medium-Low	53.7	30.7	13.4	2.3	.70 (.96)
Medium-High	61.6	26.1	11.6	.8	.55 (.83)
High	69.2	23.9	6.5	.4	.40 (.70)
<b>Family Structure</b>					
Two-parent families	62.3	26.8	10.2	.8	.53 (.82)
Others	49.1	32.2	16.2	2.5	.79 (.99)
<b>Nationality<sup>b</sup></b>					
Chinese/ Korean	67.3	16.4	16.4	0	.55 (.90)
Colombian	63.4	27.5	9.1	0	.48 (.72)
Cuban	65.2	25.4	8.6	.8	.49 (.80)
Filipino	61.2	29.0	9.0	.7	.52 (.79)
Haitian	47.1	31.0	19.5	2.3	.80 (.95)
Jamaican/ West Indian	50.3	33.3	13.6	2.7	.75 (.96)
Lao-Cambodian	48.6	28.1	21.9	1.4	.82 (1.01)
Mexican	37.0	39.0	21.5	2.5	.99 (1.02)
Nicaraguan	63.8	26.2	8.6	1.4	.50 (.81)
Vietnamese	56.6	29.1	13.0	2.1	.66 (.95)
Totals	58.2	28.5	12.0	1.3	.61 (.88)

Notes: <sup>a</sup>On 0-6 DAI scale; standard deviations in parentheses.

<sup>b</sup>The reference category is the rest of the CILS-III sample comprising approximately 60 different nationalities, N = 1,538

ing models for downward assimilation. DAI is a count variable and, hence, OLS regression is inappropriate. Count variables can be modeled as Poisson processes except that Poisson regression makes the restrictive assumption of equidispersion ( $\mu = \sigma^2$ ). For that reason, we use negative binomial regression, which allows for overdispersion (Long 1997). Like Poisson, exponentiated NBR coefficients indicate the net increase/decrease in probabilities associated with a unit increase in each predictor.

The first column of Table 3 shows the significant tendency of males and older students to have lower levels of educational attainment. Recall that age was measured when respondents were in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades and, hence, this is the effect of falling behind the respective age cohort. Results confirm the expected strong effects of parental status and two-parent families in fostering educational attainment. To avoid clutter, we limit nationality effects to the three groups known to experience the most disadvantaged modes of incorporation, plus the two consistently most advantaged nationalities in our sample. The reference category for these national origins is the rest of the CILS sample composed of children from 70 nationalities. Average scores for this reference category in all predictors and in the dependent variables are similar to those of the full sample, making it a suitable base of comparison. Laotian/Cambodian respondents are not included because of their parents' favorable mode of incorporation as political refugees. Separate analyses (not shown) indicate that the poor outcomes for second generation Laotians and Cambodians are entirely due to very low parental socio-economic status and not to any contextual disadvantage. After parental SES is controlled, no ethnic effect is observable.<sup>6</sup>

The pattern of nationality effects generally corresponds to theoretical expectations, with second generation Chinese/Koreans displaying net positive effects on educational attainment. Second generation Mexicans are at the opposite end. On the other hand, there are no significant net effects associated with Cuban origin or with the two predominantly black nationalities—Haitians and Jamaican/West Indians—after other variables are controlled.

The second and third panels display the effects of early high school contexts and early academic outcomes, respectively. As anticipated, average school SES significantly improves final educational outcomes, while attending a minority school in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades has the opposite effect. Much stronger, as shown by the respective t-values, are the effects of early school grades and educational expectations. Each of these exceeds at least 15 times its standard error. Each additional grade point in early high school leads to a net increase of almost three-fourths of a year in final educational attainment. The influence of the two parental variables, although attenuated, remains significant. With other variables controlled, the effects of Chinese-Korean and Mexican origin disappear, while those of Cuban and Haitian origin become significant. The first effect corresponds to theoretical expectations, given the positive mode of incorporation of most first-generation Cubans, but the second does not.

The pattern of effects on occupational attainment is similar, albeit with some important differences. Contrary to expectations, two-parent families do not affect this outcome, while attending a minority school has a significant *positive* effect. This result



Table 3. OLS Nested Regressions of Educational and Occupational Attainment in the Second Generation

Predictor	Educational Attainment <sup>a</sup>						Occupational Attainment <sup>b</sup>					
	I		II		III		I		II		III	
	Coefficient	t	Coefficient	t	Coefficient	t	Coefficient	t	Coefficient	t	Coefficient	t
Age	-.166	-4.7***	-.214	-5.9***	-.120	-3.7***	.005	-0	-.118	-.04	-.061	-.2
Male	-.327	5.5***	-.350	-5.9***	-.032	-6	-3.089	-6.9***	-3.135	-7.0***	-1.564	-3.6***
Two-parent family	.392	6.0***	.357	5.5***	.184	3.2**	.760	1.6	.805	1.6	.024	.1
Family SES	.730	17.2***	.628	13.9***	.360	8.9***	2.550	7.8***	2.331	6.7***	1.282	3.6***
Nationality <sup>c</sup>												
Chinese/ Korean	.894	4.0***	.856	3.8***	.264	1.4	3.053	1.6	3.184	1.7#	1.059	.6
Cuban	.023	.3***	.061	.7	.186	2.4*	3.075	5.7***	2.183	3.4**	2.524	3.8**
Haitian	.218	1.2	.387	2.2*	.485	3.0**	-1.008	-.7	-1.108	-.8	-.620	-.4
Jamaican/ West Indian	.114	.8	.130	.9	.192	1.5	.971	.9	.780	.7	1.028	.9
Mexican	-.470	-4.8***	-.457	-4.6***	-.079	-.9	-3.891	-5.4***	-3.323	-4.5***	-1.954	-2.6**
School SES <sup>d</sup>			.008	6.2***	.005	4.4***			.023	2.2*	.015	1.4
Minority school <sup>d</sup>			-.127	-1.7#	.194	2.9**			1.422	2.6*	3.062	5.1***
High school GPA <sup>d</sup>					.736	22.5***					2.826	9.7***
Educational expectations <sup>d</sup>					.539	15.3***					1.730	5.6***
Constant	18.225	21.0***	18.986		12.440	15.7***	45.000	6.85***	46.197		29.474	
R <sup>2</sup>	.154		.166		.399		.088		.091		.158	
F	66.0***		58.9***		147.8***		27.7***		23.6***		33.2***	
N	3,263		3,263		2,913		2,590		2,590		2,306	

Notes: <sup>a</sup>Years completed.<sup>b</sup>Treiman Occupational Prestige Scores.<sup>c</sup>Reference category is the rest of the CILS-III sample.<sup>d</sup>Measured in the first CILS survey, 1992-1993

#p &lt; .10 \*\*p &lt; .05 \*\*\*p &lt; .001

reflects the presence in the CILS sample of almost 100 percent Hispanic private bilingual schools in South Florida. Graduates of these schools do quite well, on average, in the labor market.<sup>7</sup> The effect is also observable on educational attainment, although it only emerges when other variables are controlled. On the other hand, parental status, early school grades and educational ambition continue to have the expected positive influences. With other variables controlled, Cuban Americans display a significant advantage in occupational status, while Mexican Americans experience the opposite. Haitian Americans do not derive any occupational advantage from their higher-than-expected educational attainment.

Table 4 presents comparable results for the index of downward assimilation. As predicted, the pattern of effects runs parallel but opposite to those just examined. Negative coefficients, in this instance, indicate positive outcomes, as they reflect lesser incidents of downward assimilation. The first model, limited to the exogenous variables, shows the strong inhibiting effects of parental status and two-parent families. Higher incidence of downward assimilation is present among males and among members of all nationalities associated with a negative mode of incorporation. The Mexican-American coefficient is strong, exceeding five times its standard error and translating into a 47 percent greater likelihood of downward assimilation, controlling for other variables.

Introduction of school contextual variables and early academic outcomes attenuates these effects, but does not eliminate them. The Cuban effect remains marginally significant in the direction of inhibiting downward assimilation, but those associated with Haitian, Jamaican and Mexican origin run in the opposite direction. Despite experiencing no net disadvantage in educational or occupational attainment and a positive educational effect (for Haitians), the two predominantly black minorities continue to be significantly at risk. They join Mexican Americans in exemplifying the stubborn effect of a negative mode of incorporation: even after doing well in school, these Caribbean groups continue to experience negative outcomes in terms of unemployment, arrests, and incarceration. The significant contextual effect of minority schools in inhibiting downward assimilation is likely due to the presence in the CILS sample of 100 percent Hispanic bilingual (and typically private) schools in Miami. As with educational attainment, this effect emerges only with academic grades and expectations controlled. To test the robustness of these findings, we replicated the analysis with DAI as a dichotomy (zero downward assimilation events *vs.* one or more) using probit regression. The first set of models in Table 5 approaches missing data conservatively on the basis of listwise deletion; the second, in Table 6, answers the question of what would happen if missing cases had experienced one or more negative events, as the overlap between predictors of "missingness" and downward assimilation suggests. The first set of probit models in Table 5 replicates, in all its essentials, the results already described. As in the previous NBR regressions, the family SES coefficient is reduced by half after academic grades and educational expectations enter the equation, indicating that parental status influence is largely mediated by these intervening variables. Nationality effects follow the same patterns noted earlier with no

Table 4: Nested Negative Binomial Regressions of Downward assimilation in the Second Generation

Predictor	Model					
	I		II		III	
	Coefficient	Z	% Change <sup>a</sup>	Coefficient	Z	% Change <sup>a</sup>
Age	.065	2.20*	6.7	.086	2.84**	9.0
Male	.175	3.51***	19.2	.179	3.58***	19.6
Two-parent family	-.351	-6.75***	-29.6	-.342	-6.56***	-29.0
Family SES	-.284	-7.96***	-24.7	-.243	-6.41***	-21.6
Nationality <sup>b</sup>						
Chinese/ Korean	.030	.15	—	.033	.16	—
Cuban	-.136	-2.05*	-12.7	-.115	-1.51	—
Haitian	.283	2.06*	32.7	.227	1.63	—
Jamaican/ West Indian	.307	2.74**	36.0	.306	2.72**	35.8
Mexican	.384	5.49***	46.8	.357	4.92***	42.9
School SES				-.004	-3.12**	-.4
Minority school				-.015	-.24	—
High school GPA						
Educational expectations						
Constant	-1.995	-2.78**		-2.307	-3.19**	
Alpha		.269***			.263***	
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>		.035			.036	
N		3,148			3,148	
						2,819

Notes: <sup>a</sup>Computed for significant predictors only.<sup>b</sup>Reference category is the rest of the CILS-III sample.

\*p &lt; .05 \*\*p &lt; .01 \*\*\*p &lt; .001 #p &lt; .10

significant Cuban or Chinese/Korean net effects after controlling for school variables, but resilient coefficients indicating downward assimilation among second-generation Haitians, West Indians and Mexicans.

Under the assumption of missing cases experiencing at least one negative life event, the sample is restored to its original size and the effect of parental status becomes stronger (Table 6). Older respondents are at greater risk of downward assimilation, as are males until grades and expectations are introduced. The strongest factors inhibiting this path continue to be two-parent families and the school variables, particularly academic grades and educational ambition. The Haitian, West Indian and Mexican coefficients remain significant, running in the opposite direction. We interpret this result as confirming that the handicaps associated with a negative mode of incorporation for specific nationalities endure even after taking family variables, school contexts, and academic achievement and ambition into account.

### Latent Variable Models

For a different look at these data, we divided the six indicators composing DAI into those indicative of deviant events (incidents of arrests and incarceration) and those reflecting other negative events (early school abandonment, poverty, unemployment and early parenthood). For convenience, these components are labeled "Deviant DA" and "Other DA." We estimate multiple indicator/multiple cause models with these two latent variables (Bollen 1989). As shown in Figure 2, all covariates are allowed to influence both dependent variables. We treat all DA indicators as categorical (ordinal) and estimate the model using Mplus version 4.2. Models are non-nested and all predictors in tables 4, 5 and 6 are included. In these models, we employ listwise deletion and the Mplus FIML estimator that retains observations missing on individual indicators, but restructures the likelihood function to adjust for the missing. Results are presented in Table 7.

Specification of two latent dependent variables allows us to understand more clearly patterns of causation in the data. It is evident, under both model specifications, that males are far more prone to experience incidents of deviant downward assimilation. The corresponding gender effect actually changes sign for other DA, reflecting the greater incidence of teenage childbearing among girls. The protective effect of two-parent families is stronger in preventing deviance than in preventing other negative events, such as poverty, unemployment or child-bearing; the opposite is the case for the effect of family SES. The two school contextual variables also prove less effective in preventing deviance than other negative events. Grades and educational expectations in early high school are strong inhibitors of both types of downward assimilation although, as with the effect of intact families, their preventative influence is stronger on Deviant DA.

Nationality effects are similar to those noted previously, except that the Mexican effect is much stronger on deviance than on other forms of downward assimilation. This result reflects the high incidence of arrests and incarceration among Mexican Americans, especially males. West Indian youths are next to Mexicans in displaying the resilient influences of a negative mode of incorporation on both forms of downward

**Table 5: Nested Probit Regressions of Downward Assimilation with Listwise Deletion of Missing Cases**

Predictor	Model		
	I	II	III
Age	.056* (2.10)	.073** (2.66)	.028 (.95)
Male	.038 (.85)	.045 (1.01)	-.077 (-1.56)
Two-parent family	-.273*** (-5.61)	-.266*** (-5.45)	-.199*** (-3.73)
Family SES	-.226*** (-7.08)	-.193*** (-5.66)	-.119** (-3.19)
Nationality			
Chinese/ Korean	-.004 (-.02)	.000 (.00)	.151 (.85)
Cuban	-.104# (-1.89)	-.074 (-1.15)	-.127# (-1.78)
Haitian	.302* (2.27)	.267* (1.98)	.277# (1.83)
Jamaican/ West Indian	.285** (2.70)	.289** (2.73)	.345 (2.87)
Mexican	.431*** (5.92)	.405*** (5.40)	.252** (3.16)
School SES		-.003** (-2.85)	-.002* (-2.12)
Minority school		-.032 (-.58)	-.119# (-1.88)
High school GPA			-.221*** (-7.15)
Educational expectations			-.222*** (-6.71)
Constant	-1.354* (-2.08)	-1.588* (-2.42)	1.002 (1.35)
LR $\chi^2$	204.8***	212.8***	332.7***
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.045	.046	.082
N	3,343	3,343	2,970

Notes: Z-values in parentheses.

#p &lt; .10    \*p &lt; .05    \*\*p &lt; .01    \*\*\*p &lt; .001

assimilation. On the other hand, the effect of a positive reception for Cuban refugees ceases to be significant when other variables are controlled.

### *Interaction Effects*

We have seen the main effects of school context, as measured by average school SES and the indicator of minority school. Both turn out to have positive and significant effects on the dependent variables. In order to examine interaction effects between school contexts and other predictors, we dichotomize the CILS school sample into high *vs.* low SES schools at the mean of the school SES distribution (54.54). Given the unique

**Table 6: Nested Probit Regressions of Downward Assimilation with Missing Cases Set to 1**

Predictor	Model		
	I	II	III
Age	.105*** (4.81)	.123*** (5.50)	.075** (2.95)
Male	.154*** (4.19)	.161*** (4.35)	.040 (.96)
Two-parent family	-.370*** (-9.37)	-.363*** (-9.13)	-.226*** (-4.98)
Family SES	-.267*** (-10.16)	-.229*** (-8.18)	-.155*** (-4.88)
Nationality			
Chinese/ Korean	.050 (.37)	.052 (.38)	.292* (1.99)
Cuban	-.069 (-1.54)	-.024 (-.47)	-.108# (-1.79)
Haitian	.302** (2.76)	.267* (2.41)	.274* (2.13)
Jamaican/ West Indian	.288** (3.29)	.288** (3.28)	.334** (3.22)
Mexican	.365*** (5.97)	.332*** (5.28)	.168* (2.43)
School SES		-.003*** (-4.02)	-.002* (-2.38)
Minority school		-.052 (-1.14)	-.144** (-2.71)
High school GPA			-.271*** (-10.40)
Educational expectations			-.200*** (-7.24)
Constant	-2.051*** (-3.84)	-2.286*** (-4.24)	.294 (.47)
LR $\chi^2$	417.6***	433.9***	553.0***
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.061	.064	.098
N	5,261	5,261	4,216

Notes: Z-values in parentheses.

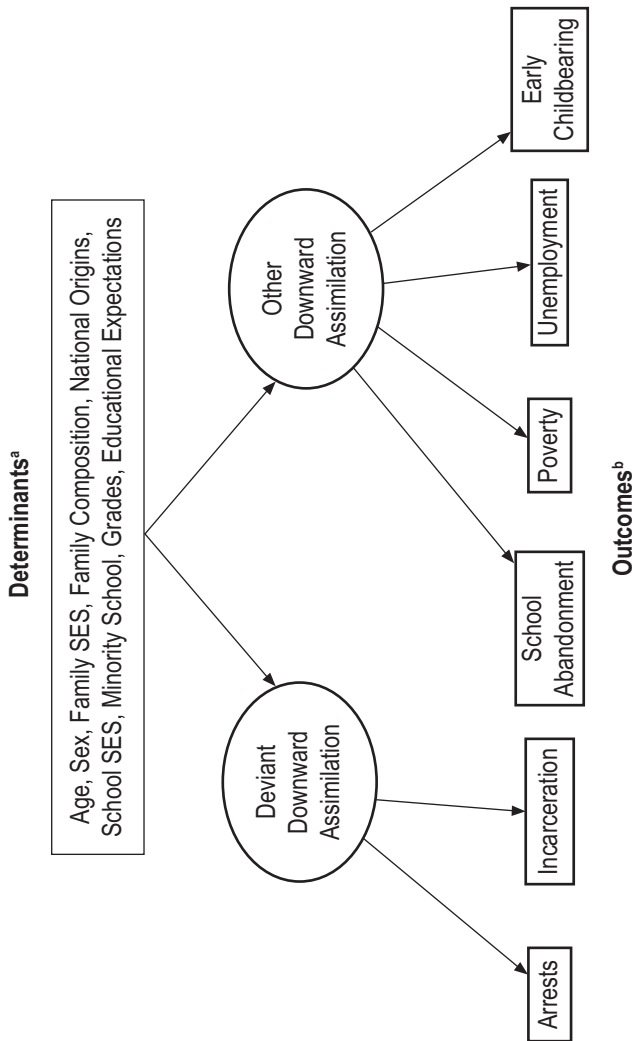
#p < .10   \*p < .05   \*\*p < .01   \*\*\*p < .001

character of our indicator of minority schools, influenced by the presence of private Hispanic schools in Miami, we shift this analysis to the percentage of black students, dichotomizing the corresponding school distribution at its mean (15%).

To avoid clutter, we limit the analysis to determinants of DAI. As seen previously, determinants of educational and occupational achievement mirror, in reverse, those of downward assimilation. Table 8 presents results of regressing DAI on the full set of predictors for each type of school. The focus of the analysis is on differences across schools. To assess them, we rely on a simple t-test:  $t = (b_1 - b_2) / \sqrt{\sigma_{b_1}^2 + \sigma_{b_2}^2}$ ; this is justified under the assumption that the sampling distribution of all coefficients is asymptotically normal.

There are no major differences in the pattern of causation across different types of schools, indicating the basic robustness of the previous model. The only significant difference between high- and low-SES schools is the effect of parental status that is much stronger in the poorer schools. This suggests that family background is more important in preventing downward assimilation when the outside context is less favorable; in more favorable environments, the key role devolves into the school achievement variables, as shown by the stronger influences of academic grades and ambition. The pattern of nationality effects is the same although, with samples reduced by half, only two remain significant: Cuban origin continues to inhibit downward assimilation, while Mexican origin promotes it. To be noted, in particular, is that higher-status schools do not attenuate these differences.

Figure 2. A Latent Variable Model of Downward Assimilation



Notes: <sup>a</sup>All determinants are allowed to influence both latent variables.

<sup>b</sup>Arrows indicate measured outcomes of both latent variables.



Table 7: Latent Variable Models of Downward Assimilation under Two Missing Data Specifications

Predictor	Listwise Deletion			FIML Estimation <sup>a</sup>		
	Deviant DA	Other DA	Deviant DA	Other DA	Deviant DA	Other DA
Age	.01 (.11)	.03 (2.3)*	.012 (.298)	.05 (3.8)***	.012 (.298)	.05 (3.8)***
Male	.74 (9.5)***	-.13 (3.33)***	.77 (10.25)***	-.08 (3.7)***	.77 (10.25)***	-.08 (3.7)***
Two-parent family	-.26 (3.5)***	-.08 (2.9)**	-.25 (3.5)***	-.14 (5.3)***	-.25 (3.5)***	-.14 (5.3)***
Family SES	.05 (.96)	-.06 (3.03)**	.034 (.63)	-.08 (4.9)***	.034 (.63)	-.08 (4.9)***
Nationality						
Chinese/ Korean	.20 (.67)	.06 (.75)	.14 (.47)	.16 (2.06)*	.14 (.47)	.16 (2.06)*
Cuban	-.34 (1.64)	.09 (.02)	-.32 (1.6)	-.06 (.03)	-.32 (1.6)	-.06 (.03)
Jamaican/ West Indian	.19 (.76)	.12 (1.85)#	.40 (1.88)#	.15 (2.49)*	.40 (1.88)#	.15 (2.49)*
Haitian	.16 (.76)	.07 (1.4)	.24 (1.22)	.12 (2.17)*	.24 (1.22)	.12 (2.17)*
Mexican	.42 (3.9)***	.07 (2.09)*	.36 (3.4)***	.05 (1.8)#	.36 (3.4)***	.05 (1.8)#
School SES	-.002 (2.8)**	-.002 (2.80)**	-.003 (1.57)	-.002 (3.9)***	-.003 (1.57)	-.002 (3.9)***
Minority school	-.10 (3.07)**	-.10 (3.08)**	-.11 (1.31)	-.15 (5.2)***	-.11 (1.31)	-.15 (5.2)***
High school GPA	-.12 (3.49)***	-.12 (3.49)***	-.24 (5.8)***	-.15 (6.4)***	-.24 (5.8)***	-.15 (6.4)***
High school educational expectations	-.10 (3.3)***	-.10 (3.3)***	-.13 (3.2)***	-.10 (5.8)***	-.13 (3.2)***	-.10 (5.8)***
Error covariance	.066 (2.78)**		.088 (4.6)***		.088 (4.6)***	
R-squared	.23	.59	.25	.88	.25	.88
<b>Factor Loadings (R-Squared)</b>						
Unemployed	—	1.0 (.08)	—	1.0 (.08)	—	1.0 (.08)
School dropout	—	2.95 (.49)	—	1.55 (.17)	—	1.55 (.17)
Poor	—	.98 (.07)	—	1.32 (.13)	—	1.32 (.13)
Teenage parent	—	2.53 (.39)	—	2.01 (.26)	—	2.01 (.26)
Arrested	1.0 (.98)	—	1.0 (.98)	—	1.0 (.98)	—
Incarcerated	1.0 (1.0)	—	1.02 (1.0)	—	1.02 (1.0)	—
TLI		.76		.60		.60
RMSEA		.030		.035		.035
N		3,115		5,144		5,144

Notes: Z-values in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup>Residual variance of Deviant and Other DA fixed at .01.

#p < .10    \*p < .05    \*\*p < .01    \*\*\*p < .001

Results between schools with different black/white compositions are similar, except that Mexican-origin students who attended majority white schools did significantly worse later in life. The handicap associated with their national origin concentrates in this type of school, as no significant effect is apparent among Mexican Americans who went to schools with a higher number of black students. These results do not imply that there is less downward assimilation in the latter schools. In fact, on average, there is more. However, second generation groups from disadvantaged nationalities do not differ significantly from others in these environments. Handicaps associated with a negative mode of incorporation become much more visible and, hence, statistically significant in majority white schools.

The overall conclusion is that the pattern of effects observed for the sample as a whole tends to hold across schools with different class and racial compositions. The single exception is the greater relative effect of national disadvantage in the more privileged institutions. Mexican and other parents from similar backgrounds who strive to place their children in high-SES, majority white schools may not be helping their children as much as they think. Higher-status schools do not mitigate the handicaps of a negative mode of incorporation and those where white students predominate tend to make them ever more salient. By themselves, more privileged school environments appear to do nothing to protect children from the more at-risk groups from downward assimilation.

## Discussion

Results from this analysis demonstrate that the assimilation of the second generation in America is neither uniform nor always benign. Distinct paths exist, some of which lead to successful integration into the mainstream, but others lead downward. These contrasting outcomes are not random, but are patterned by a set of causal forces that cumulate over time—from immigrant parents' traits and experiences to what happens to their children in schools. Results from CILS show significant differences in education, occupation and other defining life events across major immigrant nationalities. The analysis demonstrates that these differences are resilient and do not disappear after taking other relevant predictors, including parental human capital and family composition into account.

We believe that the most plausible explanation for these enduring national differences lies in the distinct modes of incorporation encountered by various groups in the United States. Unless one wishes to resort to theories of racial or cultural inferiority, the consistent handicaps observed among Mexican Americans and black Caribbeans—even after controlling for individual, family and school characteristics—must be linked to the unfavorable context encountered by first-generation immigrants in the United States. Cultural theories are further weakened by the fact that Cubans, a group culturally close to Mexicans, exhibit a very different profile in indicators of achievement and adaptation.

The distinct adaptation paths uncovered by CILS would have been blurred, had it been based on a cross-section of second-generation adults. By then, the near 20 percent of second-generation Mexican and West Indian males in prison would have

disappeared from view, as would probably many unemployed school dropouts and teen mothers. The bias created by their omission would inevitably lead to an over-optimistic assessment of adaptation outcomes in the second generation. This is, regretfully, what has happened with other studies that, based on cross-sectional data, proclaimed findings of second-generation advantage and, by implication, the absence of any serious handicap among members of this population.

Table 8: Predictors of Downward Assimilation Between Types of Schools in Early Adolescence

Predictor	School Type					t-ratio of Difference
	a) Low SES	High SES	t-ratio of Difference	b) % Black High	% Black Low	
Age	.083# (.042)	.009 (.041)	1.261	.055 (.045)	.004 (.038)	.866
Sex (Male)	.072 (.071)	-.010 (.072)	.811	.023 (.078)	.038 (.066)	-.147
Two-parent family	-.285*** (.069)	-.256** (.076)	-.283	-.266** (.079)	-.284*** (.067)	.174
Parental SES	-.259*** (.052)	-.097# (.057)	-2.100*	-.240*** (.054)	-.180*** (.050)	-.815
Nationality						
Chinese/ Korean	.438 (.272)	.034 (.279)	1.037	-.001 (.354)	.345 (.233)	-.816
Cuban	-.139 (.096)	-.331** (.096)	1.414	.028 (.150)	-.225** (.078)	1.496
Haitian	.196 (.151)	.393 (.309)	-.573	.165 (.145)	.590 (.614)	-.674
Jamaican/ West Indian	.258# (.153)	.238 (.162)	.090	.186 (.128)	.135 (.283)	.164
Mexican	.243** (.088)	.272* (.108)	-.208	.055 (.104)	.427*** (.090)	-2.705**
High school GPA	-.294*** (.044)	-.356*** (.042)	1.019	-.383*** (.048)	-.290*** (.038)	-1.519
Educational expectations	-.080* (.035)	-.159*** (.041)	1.465	-.113** (.042)	-.118** (.035)	.091
Constant	-1.290 (1.047)	.931 (1.055)	-1.494	-.212 (1.136)	.672 (.945)	-.598
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.059	.058	—	.065	.062	—

The importance of what is at stake requires additional discussion. Fortunately, other recent evidence bears on the issue in ways that address the implications of our findings. Telles and Ortiz' (2008) recent longitudinal study of Mexican Americans, for example, documents a similar pattern of segmented assimilation in the second generation, followed by educational and occupational stagnation in subsequent ones. Paralleling earlier results by Hirschman and Falcon (1985), Telles and Ortiz conclude that there

is no evidence of an inevitable linear progression across generations. Instead, descendants of immigrants who failed to reach the middle class in the first or second generations remain pretty much where their ancestors were. That is why, Telles and Ortiz conclude, the Mexican American population as a whole continues to occupy a subordinate position in the American hierarchies of wealth and power, despite multiple generations in the country.

The growing literature on second-generation youth gangs or *maras* offers additional evidence bearing on the same point. The proliferation of Mexican and Central American gangs, including the much feared *mara Salvatrucha*, is a direct outgrowth of downward assimilation in the second generation. The "Salvatrucha," the "Dieciocho," and similar gangs were created by disaffected children of Mexican, Salvadoran and Guatemalan migrants who grew up in poverty in California (Allegro 2006; Grascia 2004). Parents commonly lacked documentation; they found employment only in the humblest jobs and settled in the worst sections of the city. In these settings, their children were confronted daily with the realities of the drug trade and experienced repeated attacks by gangs of domestic youths (Vigil 2002). To defend themselves, they created their own gangs. When foreign-born, but U.S.-raised members of these gangs were deported to their native countries, they proceeded to recreate there the same criminal practices that they had learned in American streets and to recruit local youths in the process (Grascia 2004; Boermann 2007).

The "maras" and other second-generation gangs have grown exponentially, thriving among other concentrations of poor immigrants in the United States (Allegro 2006; Boermann 2007). It is thus disconcerting how some researchers could proclaim a uniform assimilation path reflecting "advantage." While today's second generation is moving ahead educationally and occupationally relative to their parents, that result obscures two other important points. First, the very low educational and occupational backgrounds of many immigrant parents implies that their children could scarcely go lower. Second, the substantial rates of arrest, incarceration, ado-

Alpha	.053	.253***	.162**	.110*	—
LR $\chi^2$	171.15***	206.71***	180.65***	232.05***	—
N	1,264	1,821	1,266	1,819	—

Notes: <sup>a</sup>Sample dichotomized at the mean of the school SES distribution measured as the obverse of the percent of students eligible for federally subsidized school lunches in schools attended by respondents in junior high school. ( $\bar{x}$  = 54.54)

<sup>b</sup>Sample dichotomized at the mean of percent black students in schools attended by respondents in junior high school. ( $\bar{x}$  = .15)

lescent childbearing and other negative outcomes are concentrated among members of the same groups. When the proportion of Mexican- and Caribbean-origin young males in prison almost matches that of black Americans, and when the rates of adolescent childbearing and school abandonment among major second-generation nationalities exceed those of domestic minorities, the ground for celebratory statements becomes much shakier.

From a policy standpoint, the implications of segmented assimilation are clear. A sizeable proportion of legal immigrants with high levels of human capital is poised to follow a smooth adaptation path, with the majority of their offspring achieving high levels of education and moving solidly into the middle class. At the other extreme, there is the mass of poor and unskilled immigrants coming to fill the labor needs of the American economy. These immigrants face the challenges posed by the poor areas where they settle with few individual resources or external assistance.

Downward assimilation may be regarded as the consequence of the clash between the benefits of unauthorized labor, that are privatized, and its costs, that are socialized. If manual workers are needed in agriculture, construction and other sectors of the economy, they should be brought legally and encouraged to return home after a period of time (Massey 1998; Portes 2007). However, those who settle and create families on this side of the border should be vigorously assisted, to minimize the realities documented by this research. Additional results show that a proactive stance by teachers and counselors and external voluntary support programs can make a significant difference helping children of immigrants overcome the handicaps of a negative mode of incorporation (Fernández-Kelly 2008; Konczal and Haller 2008). Active external intervention in support of these families and their aspirations is needed, lest the country's hunger for cheap labor devolves over time in the emergence of a new underclass. The proven effectiveness of external voluntary programs targeting these youths offers a blueprint and a ray of hope in an otherwise troubling landscape.

## Notes

1. Although there are individual differences in this variable, the governmental, public, and co-ethnic context receiving members of the same national group tends to be fairly uniform, especially if they arrive in the same area. For example, Mexican immigrants settling in Southern California—many of them undocumented—confront the same unreceptive governmental and public attitudes and have recourse to the same frail and generally poor co-ethnic communities. Rather different is the reception accorded to Chinese and Koreans—legal immigrants for the most part, who settle in close proximity to the economically strong enclaves created by their co-ethnics. For this reason, we use national origin as a suitable empirical proxy for modes of incorporation, relying on past research to identify the tripartite contexts of reception for each immigrant group. We examine below the extent to which nationality effects, reflecting the known modes of incorporation of each group, remain after controlling for other predictors.
2. The large Cuban sample is composed of children from families who arrived prior to the Mariel exodus of 1980 and those who came during and after Mariel. Pre-Mariel Cuban exiles generally came from the upper and middle strata of pre-revolutionary Cuba and they were well received by the American public and Federal government, which accorded them generous resettlement assistance. This stance changed with the Mariel exodus of 1980, during

and after which new Cuban arrivals came to be perceived as another group of impoverished Third World refugees, not too different from Haitians arriving at the same time. (Portes and Stepick 1993). This shift in modes of incorporation, plus the declining human capital of post-Mariel Cubans, lead us to expect significant differences in second generation outcomes between children of pre-and post-Mariel parents. To preserve comparability with the rest of the nationalities, we do not split the Cuban sample in the following analysis. However, using year of arrival of father and mother, as reported by our respondents, it is possible to demonstrate significant differences in adaptation outcomes between the two components of the Cuban second generation. These differences consistently favor the offspring of pre-1980 Cuban exiles. These results are available from the authors upon request.

3. Rumbaut (2005) conducted a parallel analysis of second generation outcomes based on pooled data from various years of the Current Population Survey. Unlike the decennial census which lacks a question on parental nativity, making it impossible to identify second generation nationalities, the CPS does, although samples from individual years are too small to yield reliable results. The pooled sample by Rumbaut does, and his figures, although not the same as those from CILS, parallel its main results. Rumbaut's analysis demonstrates the same basic bifurcation in education, early childbearing, and rates of incarceration among the offspring of high human capital immigrants coming from Asia and among those of poorly-educated migrants coming from Mexico and Central America.
4. The income indicator is based on annualized monthly earnings for respondents living independently at the time of the CILS-III survey or family income for respondents living at home with one or both parents or married. These figures were then compared with the 2003 poverty threshold for unrelated individuals and for families, respectively. Poverty is coded 1 when individual or family income falls below the threshold. In 2003, approximately half of the sample (53%) were still living in their parents' homes and most of the rest (38.4%) were living in their own place. The remainder (8.6%) were either institutionalized or had no fixed residence.
5. Unlike scales built to represent a single latent dimension, count variables aggregate different events that are not necessarily correlated, although they reflect a common trend. For example, Kalleberg, Reskin and Hudson (2001) aggregated different indicators of what they took to represent "bad jobs" that did not necessarily correlate with one another. Similarly, in our case, having a child in adolescence is not highly related to being incarcerated, although the two events can be defined as negative adaptation outcomes.
6. Rumbaut (2005) reports similar results for this immigrant group.
7. These schools are mostly attended by children of middle-class Cuban families plus a sprinkling of other Latin Americans. They were created by Cuban exiles arriving in the 1960s and 1970s to provide their children with an education comparable to that formerly offered by private schools in Havana. The inclusion of these schools in the "minority" category is a peculiarity of the CILS sample and likely accounts for the contrary-to-expected effects of this predictor. For additional details, see Portes and Stepick 1993, Ch. 6.

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## **The Kids Are (Mostly) Alright: Second-Generation Assimilation: Comments on Haller, Portes and Lynch**

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# The Kids Are (Mostly) Alright: Second-Generation Assimilation

*Comments on Haller, Portes and Lynch*

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The overall well-being and integration of second-generation immigrant youth constitute an important topic for researchers and policy makers, one that has generated a great deal of empirical research. While the article by Haller, Portes and Lynch organizes that research into two competing camps—segmented assimilation vs. other theories of assimilation—we think that these theories are better seen as complementary rather than antagonistic. We also believe that empirical findings on the second generation from various studies are not far apart, but in our view they do not show that “downward” assimilation is as widespread as Portes and his colleagues assert.

Researchers using different theoretical lenses reach quite similar conclusions about today’s children of immigrants. In general, the second generation is doing much better than its parents in educational attainment and is less concentrated in immigrant jobs (Kasinitz et al. 2008; Park and Myers 2010; Smith 2003; Telles and Ortiz 2008). The overwhelming majority of the second generation is completely fluent in English and integrated in many ways in American society (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Bean and Stevens 2003). Yet most of its members have not reached parity with native whites, and many experience racial discrimination. A minority of the second generation does not make a successful transition to adulthood, dropping out of high school and/or failing to find employment, and some members of the second generation become involved in criminal activity including gangs and drugs (Rumbaut 2005). This was also, we must point out, the experience of an earlier second generation of European origins, during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Foner 2000).

## Where Our Perspectives Are Complementary

We believe that segmented-assimilation and mainstream-assimilation theories are complementary in that both approaches have overlapping explanations for the varying levels of success of the second generation, but contribute insights that are distinct. We have argued that the second generation should be seen as generally successful in its integration into American society, but we also have been very clear that some individuals experience lateral, and sometimes downward, mobility, and that this is more prevalent in some groups than others. The context of reception facing different national origin groups most definitely influences outcomes for the second generation, which vary among individuals and among groups. In part, the seeming disagreements reflect matters of emphasis, rather than different empirical findings. *Inheriting the City* stresses the overall mobility of the second generation, compared to its parents and to native groups of the same racial/ethnic

background. Yet Kasinitz et al. (2008) conclude that there is much cause for concern about the future trajectory of Dominican second-generation men, and they find much downward mobility among Puerto Ricans (Kasinitz et al. 2008). Portes and associates, while stressing the dangers of downward assimilation and finding that most of the second generation do not do as well as native whites, nevertheless have done much to document and explain the success of the second generation, which has overcome difficult odds at times (Fernández-Kelly 2008; Portes and Fernández-Kelly 2008; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut 2008; Smith 2008).

The mechanisms explaining outcomes are also quite similar across the different theoretical perspectives. The Haller, Portes and Lynch article identifies three important factors influencing outcomes among the second generation—parents' socio-economic status, modes of incorporation among different groups and family structure. These three factors are also the main ones identified in the New York Second Generation Study (Waters et al. 2010). To these three, Kasinitz et al. (2008) added cultural creativity—the ability to combine norms and scripts from parents as well as American society. They point to the advantage the second generation has over natives in being able to draw from multiple frames of reference and cultural traditions to fashion strategies to deal with issues that confront young adults. While segmented-assimilation theory also notes that young people can gain strength from their parents' strong ethnic communities, the New York Second Generation Study specified a path by which a specific ethnic heritage and integration into American society can combine to create advantageous outcomes.

Segmented assimilation stresses the advantages and disadvantages stemming from the immigrant community and the context of reception, and the disadvantages that the second generation faces from being identified as and sharing institutions with racial minorities. The New York Second Generation Study also argues that there are sometimes advantages to the second generation from being classified as racial minorities (Kasinitz et al. 2008). The immigrant optimism identified by many researchers (Kao and Tienda 1998) as well as the selectivity of the parental generation in terms of ambition and other hard-to-measure characteristics position black and Hispanic second-generation youth to take advantage of programs and institutions developed in post-civil rights America, such as diversity outreach programs and affirmative action. While segmented assimilation is right to stress the barriers to inclusion in mainstream American society that race continues to impose, the mainstream assimilation model is also right to stress the growing presence of racial minorities in the middle and upper class and the ways in which this provides role models, institutional support and mobility for new immigrants and their children. The claim that the second generation may experience downward assimilation when mainstream American society characterizes them as nonwhite underestimates the extent to which the civil rights movement has changed the meaning of race since the 1960s. The use of blanket categories such as black or Hispanic to enforce the Voting Rights Act and other civil rights-era legislation means that immigrants and their children have access to institutions facilitating social mobility precisely because they are considered non-white. Assimilating into "black America" or "Latino America,"

while creating many negative encounters with North American racism, thus does not have universally negative consequences for the contemporary second generation (see also Neckerman, Carter and Lee 1999).

A mainstream-assimilation perspective adds something missing in segmented-assimilation theory when it comes to the possibilities for future change to ethno-racial boundaries. The main thrust of segmented assimilation theory is about the integration of the second generation into an existing ethno-racial socioeconomic hierarchy. As Portes and Zhou (1993:82) state concisely, “the question is into what sector of American society a particular immigrant group assimilates.” Because the sectors conceptually come prior to the assimilation, segmented assimilation cannot easily address the potential changes in the American ethno-racial hierarchy and their consequences for the second generation. In effect, segmented assimilation takes race as an exogenous constraint on assimilation trajectories. It cannot readily consider changes to the larger society such as those that occurred in middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century during the mass assimilation of second- and third-generation Catholic and Jewish ethnics.

Recently, Alba (2009) working within a neo-assimilation framework, has developed a theory of large-scale, ethno-racial boundary change, founded on a re-analysis of this critical period. A key factor is the condition of “non zero-sum mobility,” a situation that obtains when many members of disadvantaged minorities can ascend socially without appearing to threaten the position of the established majority. Alba argues that non-zero-sum mobility is likely to arise over the next quarter century because of the exodus from the labor market of post-World War II baby-boom birth cohorts, disproportionately composed of highly educated, occupationally well-placed, native-born whites. Because there will not be as many whites entering the labor market during this period as are leaving it, minorities, including the second generation, should enjoy enhanced mobility prospects. There are important contingencies that will affect how many minorities are able to take advantage of these opportunities, but almost certainly, there will be much more ethno-racial diversity in the middle, and even the upper, levels of American society. This diversity will affect the boundaries between groups, probably blurring them to a significant extent and furthering socially intimate, cross-ethnic ties, such as intermarriage, which continues to rise (Lee and Bean 2007; Passel et al. 2010).

## Where Our Perspectives Differ

### *The Empirical Significance of Downward Assimilation*

We disagree with Haller, Portes and Lynch over the empirical extent of downward assimilation. Understanding our disagreement requires some conceptual preliminaries. We want to be clear that we see the downward-assimilation concept as a significant theoretical contribution, designating a phenomenon that must be considered in any analytical inventory of second-generation outcomes. To define it, Portes and Zhou (1993:82) equated downward assimilation with “permanent poverty and assimilation into the underclass.” According to Portes, Fernandez-Kelly and Haller (2009), a downward trajectory is especially likely to befall those immigrant youth who reject “the prospect of toiling

at low-wage, dead-end jobs all their lives” – in other words, who face economic prospects not much different than their parents.

Although the concept has theoretical appeal, the question is: how common is downward assimilation? We find that the empirical measurement of downward assimilation, in the current article as elsewhere, has been exaggerated by a decidedly upper-middle-class bias. Portes and his collaborators suggest that, in the current “hourglass”-shaped U.S. labor market, anything short of a leap into the university-trained, upper-middle class in a single generation risks downward mobility or at least stagnation, which could potentially consign the second generation to an “underclass” outside the economic and social mainstream. As Portes, Fernández Kelly and Haller (2009:1080-81) write:

“For new entrants into the labour force, including the children of immigrants, this stark bifurcation means that they must acquire in the course of a single generation the advanced educational credentials that took descendants of Europeans several generations to achieve. Otherwise, their chances of fulfilling their aspirations would be compromised as few opportunities exist between the low-paid manual occupations that most immigrant parents occupy and the lofty, highly paid jobs in business, health, the law and the academy that these parents earnestly wish for their offspring. Without the costly and time-consuming achievement of a university degree, such dreams are likely to remain beyond reach.”

One problem with this formulation is that if graduation from a four-year university and admission into the professions or other “lofty” positions are needed to enter the mainstream, then *most* Americans, including most *white* Americans, are not part of it. Obviously, income and wealth inequality has increased in the United States in recent decades, and the gap between the middle and the top (particularly the very top) of the class structure has grown markedly. But the starkly dualistic depiction of the labor market in the quotation is not realistic. In fact, the distribution of jobs (according to, say, income) does not have an hour-glass shape, but bulges in the lower middle (see Alba 2009). Even if the changes in the labor market are pushing it gradually in the direction of an hour-glass shape (i.e., generating growth at the top and bottom, along with some shrinkage in the middle), the distribution of existing jobs still matters a lot because most of the hiring in coming decades is going to take place as new workers replace exiting ones (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010).

Most of the children of non-white immigrants, like most of the children of white natives, are not bound for elite universities and professional careers, although a significant minority is (see Portes and Fernández-Kelly 2008). Yet neither are they mired in lives of poverty and despair. Most have made significant progress relative to their parents, as happens when the children of, say, janitors become automobile mechanics, electricians or medical technicians. On average they occupy a social and economic space somewhere between that of native minorities and native whites. That might not be everything their parents wished for (but then again sometimes it is). But it does not suggest the social and economic isolation implied by the notion of downward assimilation, nor does it indicate the formation of an underclass.



Most of the indicators Haller, Portes and Lynch use in their DAI measure of downward assimilation seem to reflect this upper-middle-class bias. We agree that incarceration and not finishing high school are strong indicators of trouble in adulthood. But the other measures are more ambiguous, especially for a sample with the youth of CILS respondents, whose average age is 24. It is not clear that unemployment or low income is very predictive for individuals in their early 20s, who may be just starting out in the labor market or still in school and combining part-time work with school work (Newman 2006). Mixing part-time education and training with part-time work is increasingly common among working-class Americans in their 20s, and the evidence suggests that this pattern often leads to an upward trajectory (see Attewell and Lavin 2007). The indicator of early child bearing is also ambiguous, but for another reason. Among Mexicans and Central Americans, higher fertility can be seen as an ethnic pattern, an adherence to the norm. Because Portes has argued elsewhere that the maintenance of ethnic patterns by the second generation can be protective against the risk of downward assimilation, it is difficult to accept early child bearing as a valid component of the DAI index (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Perlmann 2011).

Having been arrested—as opposed to incarcerated—is also not very telling. Getting arrested is actually a fairly common experience for young American males and not one universally associated with downward mobility, if former President George W. Bush is an example. CILS does not include a native comparison group, so it is not possible to make a direct contrast to the experience of natives. However, in the New York data the number of native white males who were arrested was actually higher than that of most second-generation groups (Kasinitz et al. 2008).

Even with respect to incarceration, we urge caution about conclusions from CILS. Without wishing to downplay the significance of gang involvement and incarceration for Mexican-American and other Hispanic communities (such as Puerto Ricans and Dominicans), we are skeptical about the conclusion of Haller, Portes and Lynch that the Mexican-American rate of incarceration almost matches that of blacks. There are risks in drawing such a conclusion from the kinds of data that Portes and his colleagues can marshal, where the third wave of CILS blends survey data (with a substantial dropout rate) and computer-based “retrieval methods” to locate respondents “who had died, were in prison, were fugitive from justice” and whose incomplete data were then included in the analysis (Portes and Rumbaut 2005:993-94). The two data sources undoubtedly are associated with different rates of inclusion of the target individuals, and this can distort percentages.

In any event, the apparent parity of incarceration between Mexicans and blacks is not supported by other data sources. For example, Rumbaut (2005:1052-53), using 2000 U.S. Census data, finds that 6 percent of U.S.-born Mexican-American men ages 18-39 are incarcerated, worrisome to be sure but clearly lower than the 12 percent rate for black men (see also Perlmann 2005). A recent Pew Hispanic Center report (Lopez and Light 2009) on sentences handed down in federal courts, where record keeping about citizenship and ethno-racial background is probably optimal (for a criminal



justice system), also suggests a similar disparity. That report found for 2007 that the number of black Americans sentenced was roughly twice the number of U.S.-citizen Hispanics. Yet, in the age groups most prone to drug offenses (20-34), one of the major categories of crimes prosecuted in federal courts, these two groups are roughly equal.

In sum, we argue that the modest but significant upward mobility of most of the children of immigrants found in all of the major studies of the second generation represents important progress. Even the current deep recession does not appear to modify this conclusion, to judge from the data reported by the Pew Hispanic Center (2009) for young-adult Hispanics for the second half of 2009. The move out of poverty and the low-status manual positions filled by so many of the immigrants into the working- and lower-middle-class jobs held by most of their children is an achievement and is seen that way by many in the second generation. This modest mobility, quite consistent with the experiences of many of the southern and eastern European immigrant groups of a century ago, contradicts the hysterical predictions of many contemporary opponents of immigration (e.g., Huntington 2004).

### *On Methods*

Portes, Lynch and Haller argue for the superiority of the longitudinal CILS sample design over the cross-sectional approaches used in the New York and Los Angeles surveys. In general, survey and sampling methods have their strengths and weaknesses. None—certainly none that we have ever been involved with—is perfect. We agree that there is much to admire in CILS. It is a well designed and executed survey and a valuable basis for assessing second-generation situations, and we have learned a great deal from it. We also agree that because the processes involved in second-generation incorporation unfold over time, in an ideal world they should be studied longitudinally. We also find the decision to locate the original sample in schools during the 8<sup>th</sup> grade—the last point at which we can assume school attendance is fairly close to universal—to be ingenious.

However, in the real world there can be disadvantages to a longitudinal design as well. Portes, Lynch and Haller correctly point to the substantial, non-random sample attrition that CILS had experienced by the third wave. Further, a study that starts with 14 year olds, but intends to be about how young adults are incorporated into U.S. society, requires a lot of waiting time. Unfortunately the requirements of careers and funders make it impossible to wait that long. In the case of the CILS study, the major empirical report, as well as the conceptual framing including the notion of downward assimilation, came in *Legacies* (Portes and Rumbaut 2001), which was based on only the first two waves of CILS, at which time the respondents were still only 18. That was a very early point at which to try to discern adult outcomes, and it required basing conclusions on such imperfect indicators as high-school grades.

CILS is further limited by the lack of native comparison groups. This strikes us as a serious matter when it comes to evaluating the extent of downward assimilation, which requires a comparison to direct measures of native performance on the same variables

in the same cities. The example of arrest frequency indicates how the absence of native comparison groups can muddy inferences.

### *On What We Have Said*

In making the case that segmented assimilation is the superior theoretical approach, Portes and his colleagues significantly misrepresent our work. Emblematic of this tack is the claim in the current article (and elsewhere) that Alba and Nee's (2003) conception of the mainstream allows it to "be practically anything—from the upper-class to the minority poor." This claim is false. It rests on a misreading that Portes, Fernández-Kelly and Haller (2005:1003) give to one phrase in *Remaking the American Mainstream*, detaching it in the process from the larger context of the argument. In the midst of a discussion of their conception of the mainstream, Alba and Nee (2003:12) state, "it [the mainstream] contains a working class and even some who are poor." The claim by Portes and his co-authors involves an unwarranted extrapolation from the last five words, which perhaps in retrospect deserved more explication at the time: the phrase was intended to accommodate the findings of Massey and others that many poor whites are residentially (and undoubtedly socially) integrated into middle-class communities, but poor blacks tend to be spatially concentrated (see Massey 1990). In the event, Portes et al. (2005) recognize that the operational conception of the mainstream in the remainder of the book does not accord with their reading of this phrase, so it is unclear why the claim is restated in the current article. Nothing in *Remaking the American Mainstream* or other writings by Alba and/or Nee supports the notion that they think of the *minority poor* as members of the mainstream, and much speaks against such an idea (e.g., the concluding chapter of Alba and Nee 2003 or of Alba 2009).

In recent essays, Alba (2008) has attempted to give more empirical precision to the mainstream conception by defining its social spaces as encompassing those settings where the presence of whites (with the appropriate demographic and socio-economic characteristics) is unproblematic or taken for granted. The cultural spaces of the mainstream can be defined in an analogous way. The idea is that, in an ethno-racially stratified society, the mainstream (a term that could be put in the plural to acknowledge the heterogeneity in the mainstream society) is defined by where the members of the majority group, including its working class, are "at home." Members of minority groups can enter the mainstream, as they do for example when they participate as parents in the sports and school groups that loom so large in white-dominated suburbs. From the perspective of an assimilation theory appropriate to the multi-racial United States of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a key advantage of such a definition is that assimilation does not then require individuals to become members of the majority group itself—in other words, to become white—as did the canonical assimilation theory of Gordon (1964).

Moreover, we do not "dismiss the possibility of downward assimilation to posit a uniform path embraced by all or most children of immigrants" as Haller, Portes and Lynch assert. When we (Kasinitz and Waters) began the New York Second Generation Study, we were very much expecting to find downward mobility among the second

generation for many of the reasons outlined by Gans (1992) and Portes and Zhou (1993). We were surprised at what we found. Because we compared the second generation to natives and found that Russians and Chinese were doing better than native whites, Dominicans were doing better than Puerto Ricans, and West Indians were doing better than blacks, and all of the second-generation groups were doing better than their parents, we discerned a pattern of second-generation advantage, which we tried to unpack and explain. At the same time, we were troubled by the downward mobility we did find among some Puerto Ricans and blacks. We described the high arrest rates of Dominican men and their lower high school completion rates. While they are doing better in terms of educational achievement than their immigrant parents, we pointed out that Dominican immigrants had very low educational levels and that their children were clearly at risk going forward.

We should also note that *Inheriting the City* did not “exclude” Mexican Americans, Haitian Americans, and second-generation Laotians and Cambodians, any more than the analysis of the CILS data excludes Dominicans and Russians. These groups were either simply not present in New York in sufficient numbers or, in the case of Mexicans, were too recently arrived in New York to yield a sample of *second-generation* respondents.

*Inheriting the City* is indeed a study of New York, and there are aspects of the study that may not be generalizable to the rest of the nation. The lack of Mexicans—by far the largest immigrant group in the United States—is clearly one of these aspects. Nevertheless, CILS is a study of San Diego and Miami. All of these locales have their distinct histories and specific attributes, and none of them generalizes facily to the nation as a whole. In stressing the local particularities more in our book than had been done in the other studies, we hoped to highlight the specific elements of the local context of reception that were important in shaping outcomes. That is a limitation perhaps, but we do not see it as a flaw.

### In Conclusion: The Social Science of the Second Generation in Public Discourse

The final section of the article by Haller, Portes and Lynch suggests that research using a mainstream-assimilation perspective is masking the dire situation of a substantial portion of the contemporary second generation, which is at risk of gang membership, incarceration and membership in the underclass. This discussion implies that the assimilation-related research is giving false reassurance to the majority of Americans that all is well, when in fact a clarion call for urgently needed policy interventions should go out.

We caution however that overstated or overemphasized claims about downward assimilation present an equal if not greater risk. While Haller, Portes and Lynch seem to think that most Americans will react to news of second-generation downward assimilation by advocating vigorous assistance to disadvantaged immigrant families, we believe that reaction is highly unlikely. The opposite response seems more likely. Portes and his co-authors cite *Generations of Exclusion* by Edward Telles and Vilma Ortiz (2008) as research strengthening their case about downward assimilation. However, when this book appeared, the main reaction in the public domain came from conservative com-

mentators, who took it as a demonstration that Mexican Americans, in the main, are not assimilating, even after their families have lived three and four generations on this side of the border. In his commentary in *The Washington Post* and *Newsweek*, Robert Samuelson concluded that we could address this problem by refashioning “immigration policy to favor skilled over unskilled immigrants, because they contribute more to the economy and assimilate faster.” Rich Lowry (of *The National Review* and *The New York Post*) was blunter: “If we have a population of Americans of Mexican origin who are having trouble getting a firm grasp on the rungs of upward mobility, the last thing we should be doing is importing poorly educated Mexicans...”

No social scientist is responsible for every use of his or her work made in the public sphere, and Telles and Ortiz are not to blame for the uses to which their work has been put. There are no easy formulas when it comes to successfully making the public case for progressive policies, other than doing the best one can to get the story right. When presenting work on topics of public controversy, however, it is particularly important to put the emphasis in the right place, to get the “headline” right. While acknowledging that downward assimilation is an important part of the story for some children of today’s immigrants, our research and the other studies of the second generation including CILS consistently show that it is a minority experience and that real, if often modest, upward mobility is much more common. That is an important message for Americans to hear.

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## On the Dangers of Rosy Lenses: Reply to Alba, Kasinitz and Waters

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# On the Dangers of Rosy Lenses

*Reply to Alba, Kasinitz and Waters*

William Haller, *Clemson University*

Alejandro Portes, *Princeton University*

Scott M. Lynch, *Princeton University*

We commend the measured tone and clearly stated arguments in Alba, Kasinitz and Waters' commentary on our article. It is particularly welcome because, in combination with our own conclusions, it lays out before the relevant audiences the substance of the debate in this field. Based on the commentary's opening statement, it would appear that there are many points of agreement and that the remaining differences are mostly a matter of emphasis, a case of the glass being half full or half empty. If this were the case, there would be little justification for our original article or for this reply. On the contrary, our results and those of other researchers cited in the article's conclusion indicate that the attempt to normalize the situation by celebrating the progress achieved by the second generation is an instance of misplaced optimism. Not all kids are doing "all right," and the substantial number at risk of social and economic stagnation or downward mobility looms as a significant social problem. It is true that right-wing commentators may pick on these findings for their own purposes, but this is certainly no reason to obscure the facts. Laying a rosy veil over them is a dangerous strategy.

## Cultural and Structural Perspectives on Immigrant Assimilation

A good part of the divergence in this field has to do with an emphasis on different aspects of the process of assimilation. Many scholars privilege a culturalist perspective where the emphasis is on immigrants, and especially their descendants, becoming indistinct from the natives. After they learn unaccented English, give up loyalties and concerns in their old country, and become fully involved in things American, the process is essentially complete. It matters little, from this perspective, where they end up in the hierarchies of wealth, status and power of American society. Alba's (2008:39-40) recent elaboration of the concept of mainstream, cited in AKW's comment, lines up closely with this emphasis; the concept is defined as "those spaces where the members of the majority group, including its working-class, feel at home." Presumably, when children of migrants come to feel at home in the same spaces, they can be regarded as properly assimilated.

Contrary to the dire warnings of Samuel Huntington (2004) and in agreement with Alba and Nee (2003), we are certain that this process is indeed taking place. As reported in earlier work (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes, Fernandez-Kelly and Haller 2005), knowledge of English is nearly universal in the second generation, and their aspirations and cultural orientations have become thoroughly American. What is remarkable in our findings is how fast foreign languages are abandoned and how quickly children internalize the goals, practices and concerns of the host culture. The question we thus pose is



not whether second-generation youths are assimilating, but *to what sector* of American society they are assimilating to. This ushers in the second perspective.

The structuralist perspective defines assimilation less by whether children of immigrants lose their languages and distinct cultural ways and more by whether they are able to ascend the educational and economic ladders into the American middle class. In that respect, this perspective is closer to the aspirations of immigrant parents themselves—much less concerned with cultural assimilation than with the socio-economic progress of their offspring (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). It is evident that, under present circumstances in the United States, the fulfillment of these aspirations is increasingly difficult. AKW reject the metaphor of a labor market “hourglass,” only to recognize immediately afterward the increasing inequality in occupational opportunities and incomes, which is essentially the same point: the progressive bifurcation between occupations paying near-poverty wages and those that effectively allow their occupants to lead a middle- or upper-class style of life (Massey 2007; Freeman 2007). In the present American context, dropping out of high school is almost equivalent to a life sentence of poverty.

AKW stress that there has been progress across generations and we agree, albeit with several caveats. First, “progress” is measured from the usually very low education and income levels of immigrant parents. Among many of the largest immigrant nationalities, such as Mexicans and Central Americans, the second generation could scarcely go lower, and its advancement leaves it still far from native white levels. Second, the progress registered so far—modest as our critics recognize—is predicated on *averages*. This means that the conclusion of second-generation “advantage” depends on figures that lump together quite disparate performances. Our own analysis has been driven less by a concern with averages than by a preoccupation with dispersion—that is, the yawning gap in the educational and occupational performance of different second-generation nationalities. Focusing on the distribution of educational and income outcomes across these nationalities leaves us quite skeptical about celebratory conclusions of second-generation mobility.

The New York study (Kasinitz et al. 2008) makes much of the superior educational and occupational levels of certain immigrant nationalities over native-born minorities, such as blacks and Puerto Ricans. These advantages are probably real, but two caveats are in order. First, this is a rather low bar, given the precarious situation in which native minorities find themselves. Certainly, this is not a standard that would satisfy immigrant parents whose sights are set on joining the true middle class. It is also not the standard by which a structuralist perspective would evaluate successful assimilation.

Second, the rather dismal situation of native minorities, which the New York study emphasizes, provides indirect evidence for downward assimilation and its consequences. It is certainly not the case that these minorities have been part of the New York population forever. They are instead descendants of earlier labor migrants who, for various reasons, failed to move up the socio-economic ladder, being confined to occupations and economic conditions not too different from those of the original migrant generations. The host of social problems that native minorities confront today—despite the

numerous official programs that AKW celebrate—reflects the reality of failed structural assimilation and its aftermath. The key question thus becomes: what is the likelihood of a repeat performance among members of the second generation disadvantaged by low parental human capital and a negative mode of incorporation? As noted in our article, that possibility has more than academic interest because it would entail repetition and extension of the trauma of poverty and marginalization affecting the nation's inner cities. It is at this point where the available evidence on segmented assimilation becomes relevant.

### Segmented Assimilations on the Ground

AKW criticize some of the components of the Downward Assimilation Index, remarking that unemployment, poverty-level incomes and incidents of arrest are not unusual in early adulthood and may be overcome later in life. This argument is reasonable, although such conditions are certainly undesirable; groups experiencing them are also among the most likely to show higher rates in the other indicators of downward assimilation—high school abandonment, incarceration and teenage parenthood. Our critics' observation that teenage parenthood is a cultural trait inherited by certain immigrant groups (and hence not a serious problem) is beyond the pale. All empirical evidence indicates that adolescent childbearing is not only associated with poverty and early school abandonment, but represents a turning point in the life course, "knifing off" the youth's past from the present and seriously handicapping future educational and occupational progress (Elder 1974, 1998; Rumbaut 2005). This is as true of black teenagers in the inner city as of Mexican girls in the *barrio*. As Fernandez-Kelly (1995) has noted, motherhood is often seen as an empowering strategy by disadvantaged minority girls, ushering their entrance into adulthood. Pursuing this strategy, however, entails starkly negative chances for the future.

The work of Perlmann (2005), another critic of segmented assimilation, furnishes ironically strong evidence in support of the theory. As reported in our article, Perlmann finds that the rate of high school abandonment among Mexican-Americans is twice that of blacks of comparable age, and three times that of native whites. This happens when returns to education have spiked, creating a double handicap for the Mexican second generation. The dropout rate reported by Perlmann for Mexican Americans—33 percent—is very close to the figure in Table 2 of our article for the same group: Mexican Americans have the lowest level of educational attainment among all nationalities in the sample, with the exception of Laotian/Cambodians—another group severely handicapped by poverty and very low parental human capital.

CILS is not, however, the only source of relevant data on the three indicators of downward assimilation mentioned previously. Rumbaut (2005) assembled data from the 2000 U.S. Census, combining them with Current Population Survey data for 1998-2001. The merged data set allows him to estimate the size and relevant characteristics of the foreign-born first generation and the U.S.-born second generation, and to compare them with native whites and blacks. Rumbaut reports that while

high school dropout rates decline from the first to the second generation among all immigrant nationalities, close to a fourth of U.S.-born Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Salvadorans leave school without a high school diploma. Their dropout rate is about three times higher than among native whites and more than five times that of second-generation Chinese and Koreans.

Rumbaut is also able to estimate rates of incarceration for young males, ages 18-39. While his figures differ from those found by CILS, the overall pattern is the same. He finds that rates of incarceration increase significantly from the first to the second generation for every nationality, but that the increase is greatest among groups at risk of downward assimilation. The percent of incarcerated second-generation males is more than five times the figure for the corresponding foreign-born generation among Mexicans, Laotians and Cambodians. The incarceration rates for these second-generation groups more than triples the figure for native whites and more than quintuples that for the children of Chinese, Indian and Korean parents (Rumbaut 2005). For the second generation as a whole, the incarceration rate among those without a high school diploma triples, increasing from 3.5 to 9.75 percent. This result highlights the interrelated character of assimilation outcomes in early adulthood, with school abandonment ushering in other negative results.

The same data set also provides information on adolescent and early adulthood fertility rates among females of different national origins. Fertility rates move in the opposite direction of incarceration figures, declining from the first to the second generations. However, the decline is steeper among some groups than others. Highest fertility rates are found among Mexican-American women, followed by U.S.-born Puerto Ricans. By age 24, about 30 percent of both groups have had a child, a figure comparable to that among blacks and double that among native white women. Female fertility rates for adolescent and young adult second-generation Asians—Chinese, Indian, Korean and Vietnamese—are negligibly low, representing less than a tenth of the figure among adolescent and young Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Central Americans. Thus, the earnings of second-generation Asian families are higher and provide more stability for raising their third generations compared to Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Central Americans.

These census figures essentially support the conclusions advanced on the basis of CILS data. Youths without a basic education, in jail or burdened by premature childbearing are certainly not doing “all right.” Instead, they are at risk of reproducing the story of permanent subordination and disadvantage among native minorities. It bears repeating that these minorities are, overwhelmingly, descendants of earlier labor migrants whose structural assimilation was blocked by barriers similar to those confronted by many children of immigrants today. It is certainly not the case that all children of immigrants are at risk of downward assimilation; those blessed with high parental resources and a positive, or at least neutral, mode of incorporation are well placed to move ahead educationally and economically. But their success also brings into stark relief the reality of those left behind, lacking the most basic means to compete in an increasingly challenging society.

## A Note on Method

The two studies upon which is based much of the present knowledge, as well as the controversies concerning second-generation assimilation, are CILS and the New York survey reported in Kasinitz et al. (2008). Our critics note several limitations of CILS, including a sample restricted to two metropolitan areas and a substantial rate of attrition in the final survey. We agree, but with the caveat that regressions modeling sample attrition in this survey point to low parental SES and single-parent families in early adolescence as the primary determinants. As shown in our article, these are also significant determinants of downward assimilation such that, if the missing fraction of the sample had been retrieved, it is likely that rates of school abandonment, incarceration and adolescent childbearing would have been significantly higher.

We are less impressed by the claim that CILS lacks a native-parentage component, because wealth of data exists on native parentage youths—and is readily available elsewhere. We had little difficulty finding figures with which to compare our own results. Given the availability of such data, it appears unnecessary to spend scarce time and resources collecting redundant information from yet another native parentage sample. We opted instead for increasing the size and diversity of CILS' second-generation sample.

*Inheriting the City* is a wonderfully-written book that has received many accolades. As the authors themselves recognize, it is primarily a book about New York City: "We learned about the struggle and joys experienced by young adults coming of age in a tough town, a place of ever-present danger... but also extraordinary possibilities." (Kasinitz et al. 2008:3) We believe, however, that the proclamation of a blanket "second-generation advantage" in the conclusion is not warranted. This is so because of three methodological limitations in the design of the study. First, it is based on a telephone survey using random-digit dialing. This choice necessarily biases results upwards by excluding individuals and families without regular access to phones, a group that does not represent an insignificant part of the immigrant population (Rumbaut 2010).

Second, the response rate is just 53.3 percent, which means that almost half of the target sample refused or otherwise did not take part in the survey. The extent to which this refusal rate biases the study's results is not known and no systematic effort was made to compare respondents with refusals. We are told that response rates ranged from 67 percent among the Chinese to a low of 41 percent among native blacks, but this observation does not take us far. Most of the subsequent analysis proceeds as if the sample was representative of all second-generation young adults in New York when, in fact, it is not. Third, and most critical, this is a cross-sectional survey of the non-institutionalized population. This choice again biases results upward by excluding those individuals who, for one reason or another, fell out of this "normal" universe: those who were in jail or running from the law, living in the streets, returned to their home countries, were hospitalized, etc.

As noted in the conclusion of our article, if CILS had adopted the same design, the almost 20 percent of second-generation Mexicans and Jamaicans/West Indians and the 15 percent of Haitians incarcerated by the time of the final survey would have disappeared

from view, as well as a high proportion of those unemployed and living in poverty. Those who died or were wounded in street confrontations or who left the country also would have been excluded. Knowledge of these cases, illustrating poignantly the existence of downward assimilation among children of immigrants lead us to conclude that results of the New York study are upwardly biased and, hence, overly optimistic.

### On "Headlines"

AKW find no apparent fault with Telles and Ortiz (2008), a study that documents like no other the pattern of inter-generational, socio-economic stagnation among Mexican-Americans. Remarkably, however, they criticize indirectly this study for providing ammunition to right-wing pundits who have used its results to buttress their anti-immigrant rhetoric. Taken to its logical conclusion, AKW's stand means that social scientists should suppress problematic findings, lest they fall into the wrong hands. This is surely a dead end. Telles and Ortiz were correct in reporting their findings on racialization and "generations of exclusion" because knowing these facts is the necessary first step to setting them right. Pundits and politicians will always exist and will always try to use scientific results to their own ends, but this is no reason to veil the truth.

In the case of today's second generation, the "headline" is double: on average, members are making steady, albeit modest progress, but there is also a sizable minority at risk of downward assimilation. If acknowledged, however, this fate is *preventable* through concerted external intervention. Results of the final phase of CILS (Fernandez-Kelly and Portes 2008) indicate how a minority of the most disadvantaged respondents were able to overcome multiple obstacles to graduate from four-year colleges and move into professional careers or post-graduate schools. In *every* such case, we identified the decisive presence of other actors—external volunteer programs and committed teachers and counselors who took a real interest in a child and steered him or her toward high educational achievement. Taking into account the size and rapid growth of the immigrant second generation and the obstacles toward structural assimilation in its path, benign neglect—fostered by headlines of blanket "advantage"—is not an option. We advocate instead vigorous intervention by government agencies and private volunteer programs in support of immigrant families, helping them overcome the multiple hazards of low human capital, poverty and mainstream discrimination and their children attain a modicum of education. Otherwise, the past risks repeating itself—as the condition of native minorities used as reference points in the New York study clearly shows.

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