

THE RISE OF THE NEW SECOND GENERATION

MIN ZHOU &
CARL L. BANKSTON III

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1

Introduction: The New Second Generation Coming of Age

A rapidly globalizing economy, ever-improving means of transportation and information and communications technology (ICT), and increasingly intertwined social networks have enabled unprecedented movements of people around the world, creating highly visible concentrations of new immigrant populations in traditional or new destinations and stimulating constant transnational flows. By the count of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 232 million people, or 3.2 percent of the world's population, were international migrants in 2013, compared with 154 million in 1990. The United States takes the lion's share, hosting the largest number of international migrants at 45.8 million (UNDESA, 2013). Consequently, more and more children in our world are growing up in immigrant or transnational households. In the United States, children of immigrants account for nearly the entire growth in the US child population in the 1990s and 2000s (Fortuny, Hernandez, and Chaudry 2010). One child in five is a child of immigrants (Hernandez and Cervantes, 2011; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova, 2008). Like their immigrant parents, these children are highly diverse in origins and socioeconomic backgrounds. Their economic situations, educational attainment, and health will shape their own futures while significantly influencing the futures of their host countries. In addition, new social media have impacted the lives of children in unprecedented ways, making them active participants in a global popular culture that

is constantly evolving as people move faster and farther physically and virtually.

In this book, we focus on the new second generation in the nation-state that takes the lion's share of international migrants (20 percent) in the world – the United States (UNDESA, 2013). We refer to the new second generation as the native-born or US-raised children with foreign-born parents who have arrived in the United States after the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (also known as the Hart-Celler Act). We describe and analyze the new second generation in this major migrant-receiving country and consider both country-specific and general implications of large-scale international migration for the children of immigrants coming of age in the twenty-first century.

The “old” and “new” second generation

In describing the children of immigrants as members of a “new” second generation, we make an implicit comparison to an “old” second generation growing up in the first half of the twentieth century. What was this old second generation? Does existing knowledge about the old second generation continue to be relevant for understanding the new second generation? How do the children of contemporary, or post-1965, immigrants differ from their predecessors? Do members of the new second generation follow the same pathways taken by the “old” second generation? What do these differences mean for the study of the new second generation? These are some of the primary questions we address at the outset of this book in order to situate the new second generation in American historical and comparative contexts. By placing the children of contemporary immigrants within their historical setting and identifying the different circumstances and experiences of the old and new second generations, we systematically interrogate established theories and alternative models about immigrant assimilation, integration, or incorporation.

A long tradition in US immigration studies has emphasized the question of assimilation – whether or not and how immigrants

and their offspring would become like “us” natives – as central issues of concern. The assimilation perspective was *the* dominant way of looking at and thinking about children of immigrants in the wake of a great wave of immigration around the turn of the twentieth century (Alba and Nee, 2003). The children of this earlier massive immigration, or the “old” second generation, were critical for the nation’s assimilation project because they were the ones who underwent the Americanization campaigns in the public schools and because they and their children grew up in a country in which large-scale immigration was a thing of the past rather than something in constant flux (Bankston and Caldas, 2009).

The experience of the old second generation appeared to be a success story of assimilation. Classical assimilation theories indeed provided plausible explanations for second-generation outcomes for much of the twentieth century. In the wake of the immigration policy reform in the 1960s, the children and grandchildren of the immigrants of Southern and Eastern European origins, who were initially perceived as unassimilable and threatening to the American nation, had eventually become indistinguishably “white,” despite bumpy paths along the way (see Alba, 1985; Covello, 1972; Gans, 1979; Greeley, 1976; Mueller, 1971; Perlmann, 1988; Sassler, 2006; Warner and Srole, 1945). The thoroughness of old second-generation assimilation of European ethnic groups into a single American mainstream and culture over the course of two or three generations led policymakers and scholars concerned with immigration and immigrant incorporation to take it as the norm (see Alba and Nee, 2003; Gordon, 1964).

However, this assimilation norm has met with challenges. The US immigration policy reform of the 1960s led to a massive influx of immigrants to the country, which has lasted for half a century without any sign of slowing down. This contemporary surge far exceeds the speed, scale, duration, and intensity of the great wave of immigration at the turn of the twentieth century. For example, the number of immigrants legally admitted to the United States in the last three decades (1970–1999) of the twentieth century was about 20.3 million, compared with 18.8 million in the first three decades (1900–1929); and the number remained very high, at

14.4 million (in just 13 years), between 2000 and 2013. The influx of newcomers, largely non-European, non-Protestant, culturally varied, and socioeconomically diverse, poses significant challenges to assimilation while changing the assimilation story.

Like the immigrants who arrived earlier, many contemporary immigrants are struggling at the host society's bottom. Even though they hope that with hard work and determination they can move up in society, they still find not only their own pathways to upward social mobility blocked but also those of their children who have been thoroughly acculturated. But the classic picture of the "huddled masses" is less characteristic of contemporary immigration. In fact, many contemporary immigrants are able to obtain well-paying jobs in the mainstream labor market, open their own businesses beyond the scale of mom-and-pop stores, and purchase homes in affluent urban neighborhoods or middle-class suburbs upon arrival, while still speaking little or heavily accented English and maintaining their ethnic distinctiveness. The diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and initial resettlement patterns of the immigrant generation, or the first generation, shape the prospects of mobility in the new second generation, which renders classical assimilation theories inadequate.

A changing receiving context further complicates the process of assimilation. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the American economy that the children of immigrants face is quite different from the one that confronted the children of earlier immigration. Instead of an industrializing, factory-based economy, the American economy is approaching the shape of an hourglass, with labor-intensive, low-skilled jobs at one end and knowledge-intensive, high-skilled professions at the other. The manufacturing sector, consisting of solid blue-collar work which used to assist the mobility of low-skilled immigrants, has either shrunk or moved offshore, leaving a very large gap in the middle of the social mobility ladder and leading to more diverse pathways to different segments of American society. Those aspiring to attain middle-class status may have to work much harder than their predecessors because they would need at least a college education to enter their desired professions. Those fully acculturated may

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lack the necessary credentials and job skills to take up professional employment and may thus seek alternative channels, which can lead in vastly different directions, including one ending up nowhere (Portes and Zhou, 1993).

American society, moreover, has become more open than ever before; Americanization has given way to multiculturalism. Assimilation is often regarded as politically incorrect. In the past thirty-some years, in particular, "assimilation" has become a highly controversial and politically charged term in public discourse and scholarly work. This change is partly due to the word's association with the ideal of Anglo-conformity, or "the melting pot," and forced Americanization, partly due to the daunting reality of assimilation failure and increased racial/ethnic inequality, and partly due to the effects of ethnic consciousness movements that promote multiculturalism. However, the debate about assimilation has its historical roots. It is largely derived from the negative views of the melting pot and forced Americanization experienced by the old second generation and rejuvenated in the post-civil rights movement environment surrounding the great wave of immigration that produced the new second generation.

Thus the questions relevant to the new second generation, such as what does it mean to assimilate, when does assimilation occur, what kinds of assimilation promote the educational achievement and economic success, and whether the concept of assimilation ever captures the multivariate experiences of contemporary immigrants, are never far from any of the issues facing the old second generation. Behind all of these questions, we can see implicit comparisons with earlier children of immigrants and reactions, shaped by the preoccupations of contemporary society, to the experiences of that earlier generation.

Central issues of concern

The lives and destinies of members of the new second generation are too complex and varied to be explained by a single linear process of gradually dissolving into the cultural and

socioeconomic mainstream of the host society. Studies of this new second generation have flourished since the early 1990s, culminating in numerous publications on the subject, including such seminal works as: *The New Second Generation* (Portes, 1996), *Made in America* (Olsen, 1997), *Growing Up American* (Zhou and Bankston, 1998), *Black Identities* (Waters, 1999), *Legacies* (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001), *Children of Immigration* (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001), *The Second Generation* (Min, 2002), *Italians Then, Mexicans Now: Immigrant Origins and the Second-Generation Progress, 1890 to 2000* (Perlmann, 2005), *Inheriting the City* (Kasinitz et al., 2008), *Learning a New Land* (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova, 2008), *Generations of Exclusion* (Telles and Ortiz, 2009), *Divided by Borders* (Dreby, 2010), *The Children of Immigrants at School* (Alba and Holdaway, 2013), and *The Asian American Achievement Paradox* (Lee and Zhou, 2015), to name just a few. Most of the prior studies have focused on a specific immigrant group or on a few specific groups in one or several major migrant-receiving metropolises, such as New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, and Miami, and tackled major issues of urgency and significance concerning the assimilation, or incorporation, process in depth and breadth. These empirical studies have yielded fruitful results to enhance understanding and offer important lessons for theory and policy.

In this book, we take an empirical approach to the century-old issues of assimilation – the extent to which members of the second generation are moving up in society comparable to or beyond their parents' and host society's expectations, and the extent to which they are losing or retaining identification with their ancestral backgrounds – as the most fundamental problems regarding who they are and how they fit into American society. By synthesizing the empirical findings and theoretical models developed in prior research, we present a broader picture of the realities of the new second generation and of the families, ethnic communities, and gateway institutions with which members of this generation intimately interact. We also examine the mechanisms leading to success, or failure, of assimilation that entails segmented outcomes.

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In the chapters that follow, we first compare and contrast major immigration waves to the United States and different patterns of second-generation assimilation from a historic-comparative perspective. Second, we critically review and assess the theories that explain the processes and outcomes of assimilation, paying special attention to how classical assimilation theories explain the processes and outcomes of assimilation and how alternative theories have been developed to modify or challenge classical theories. Third, we address assimilation's discontents by synthesizing empirical findings in the existing literature and presenting our own data analysis on social mobility, identity formation, and "America becoming."

Organization of the book

Treating immigration as an intergenerational phenomenon, and following the view that contemporary approaches to the new second generation have been conditioned by the historical experiences of the old second generation, we begin by considering the two great immigration waves that produced two distinctive generations of the children of immigrants. In chapter 2, we make explicit the comparisons and draw portraits of children in immigrant families at the turn of the twentieth century and at the turn of the twenty-first century, based primarily on immigration data and US Censuses. We first briefly describe why people migrate. We then offer a clear and concise account of how today's second generation differs from that of the past, focusing on context of reception, race, countries of origin, family socioeconomic status (SES), home language use, school attendance, and places of settlement. We emphasize the diversity of contemporary children of immigrants. We show that this diversity is socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic and that the children grow up in families and communities produced by the arrival of labor migrants, refugees, entrepreneurial migrants, and professional migrants with vastly different ethno-cultural and religious backgrounds. We conclude by describing the challenges faced by the new second generation.

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Chapter 3 follows this introductory contrast of the old and new second generations by laying out major theoretical perspectives on intergenerational incorporation. We examine the contemporary relevance and problems of classical theories of assimilation and neo-classical responses to revisions of these classical theories. We show how the ideas of assimilation that were developed during the period of the old second generation continue to shape how we think about the new second generation.

Chapter 4 presents an alternative approach to understanding the new second-generation phenomenon. This approach, namely segmented assimilation, suggests that the benefits of assimilation for children of immigrants may depend on whether those children assimilate into relatively advantaged or relatively disadvantaged segments of society. This approach highlights the most significant influences on how members of the new second generation fit into American society: ethnic communities, state policy, and the intersection between race and class. We discuss some of the problems with the concept of segmented assimilation and identify some of the empirical challenges that critics of segmented assimilation have raised. We acknowledge the concerns of those critics and suggest that one of the greatest values of the segmented assimilation approach may be that it raises key questions about how children of immigrants fit into a host society, not that it provides the final answers to those questions. We end this chapter by discussing how the segmented assimilation approach can comprehend, and to some extent reconcile, diverse views derived from the assimilation canon. As we did in the previous two chapters, we illustrate how histories and the experiences of the earlier waves of immigrants continue to be relevant to the understanding of the *new* second generation.

Chapters 5 and 6 investigate what is happening with contemporary children of immigrants. Chapter 5 takes a fresh look at an old issue in the incorporation of children of immigrant groups: the issue of social mobility. We begin by looking in more detail at how the changing class structure, and the intersection of this class structure with race and ethnicity, redefine America as the land of opportunity. We stress the diversity of the contemporary

second generation described in the contrast presented in chapter 2 between the old and new second generation. We point out that, because of this diversity, today's children of immigrants occupy different positions in the modern class structure and experience wide variations in access to opportunities, both because of advantages and disadvantages due to social class and because of the support made available to and limitations imposed on young people by specific immigrant communities. On this basis, we explore the major questions regarding social mobility for members of the new second generation: How are they affected by the possibility of generational decline? How do their economic contexts influence their opportunities for social mobility? How do schools fit into their chances of upward mobility? How may gender affect social mobility and other life trajectories among members of the new second generation? How have economic downturns, current and past, affected immigrant families and children? Finally, we ask, what does success mean for members of this generation?

Chapter 6 examines the issue of "fitting in" in terms of racial and ethnic identity, rather than in an economic sense. We start with the classical idea of the "marginal man." We argue that "marginality," being between identities, has become much more complex for contemporary children of immigrants because of the highly changeable and varied nature of current ethnic and racial identities and more complex contexts of emigration from countries or places of origin and host-society reception. We then look at the most important influences on second-generation identities: family structures and dynamics, communities, language, peer groups, intermarriage, and transnationalism. Next, we discuss the ways in which concepts of race and ethnicity are changing. In particular, we address the question of whether second-generation identities remain instrumental or are becoming symbolic. Since the United States historically has been a nation divided along black/white lines, and most contemporary immigrants are of Latin American and Asian origin, we end this chapter by looking at whether (and to what extent) the children of those immigrants are becoming "black," "white," or changing categorization altogether by becoming "something else."

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The final chapter sheds light on the prospects of the new second generation. We explore where the new second generation is headed in this still-new century by looking at three big changes: the shift in immigrant destinations; the development of more decentralized places of settlement for immigrants; and the growth of transnationalism. We argue that changing structural circumstances in contexts of emigration and reception and processes of adaptation have profound influences on how individual and family socioeconomic characteristics affect divergent pathways and outcomes. We conclude by looking at how the new second generation is both adapting to its land of birth and building a new America.

2

Immigration: Past and Present Trends

This chapter examines past and present trends of immigration to the United States. Using statistical data from the federal immigration agencies and US censuses, we contrast the main characteristics of different waves of immigrants and the changing contexts of emigration and immigration in historical perspective. We focus on describing how today's second generation differs from that of the past.

Converging on the Promised Land

The United States is a nation of immigrants. Since the *Mayflower* pilgrims reached American shores in the early seventeenth century, this land has been viewed by many international migrants as the "Promised Land" in which they can start lives anew and rebuild homes. Hundreds and thousands of people have entered the country year by year. The majority has stayed on and settled. The waves of immigration ebb and flow, but the nation has grown even at low tide, thanks to the self-selected, innovative, persistent, and resilient stream of newcomers.

Trends

Figure 2.1 gives an image of US immigration history and presents a clear picture of the immigration waves that have produced

Immigration

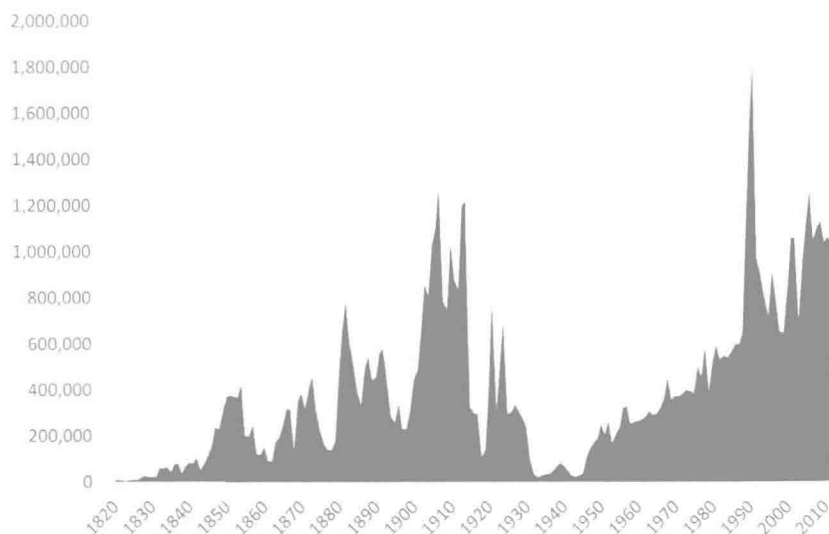


Figure 2.1 Numbers of Legal Permanent Residents Admitted to the United States, 1820–2013

Source: Compiled with data from the Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, Legal Permanent Residents, Table 1. (United States Department of Homeland Security)

generations of native-born offspring of foreign-born parentage. By plotting the numbers of immigrants arriving in the United States each year between 1820 and 2013, we can see that migration has not been a steady stream throughout American history but that it has been marked by many ups and downs. It increased from the late 1840s until the American Civil War and then dropped during the war years. After the war, immigration continued to rise and fall, but in general it rose to a crest toward the end of the nineteenth century. A more massive wave hit American shores in the first two decades of the twentieth century, which is often referred to as “the first great wave.” The children of those arriving during this wave made up the “old” second generation.

Immigration plummeted in the 1930s and 1940s but gradually began to rise again after World War II, gaining momentum in the 1970s, in large part due to policy reforms in US immigration law,