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ASSESSING IMMIGRANT ASSIMILATION: New Empirical and Theoretical Challenges

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Key Words immigration, generation, incorporation, immigrant gateways

■ **Abstract** This review examines research on the assimilation of immigrant groups. We review research on four primary benchmarks of assimilation: socioeconomic status, spatial concentration, language assimilation, and intermarriage. The existing literature shows that today's immigrants are largely assimilating into American society along each of these dimensions. This review also considers directions for future research on the assimilation of immigrant groups in new southern and midwestern gateways and how sociologists measure immigrant assimilation. We document the changing geography of immigrant settlement and review the emerging body of research in this area. We argue that examining immigrant assimilation in these new immigrant gateways is crucial for the development of theories about immigrant assimilation. We also argue that we are likely to see a protracted period of immigrant replenishment that may change the nature of assimilation. Studying this change requires sociologists to use both birth cohort and generation as temporal markers of assimilation.

INTRODUCTION

American sociology owes its birth to the desire to understand the great changes that our society underwent at the beginning of the twentieth century—urbanization, industrialization, and perhaps most importantly, immigration. Between 1880 and 1920, the United States absorbed roughly 24 million immigrants, the great majority of them from southern and eastern Europe. The beginning of the twenty-first century is also marked by an era of massive immigration, and sociologists are once again trying to make sense of the impact of immigration on our society and on the immigrants themselves. By 2002, 23% of the U.S. population, or 34.2 million people, were foreign-born or second generation—the children of the foreign-born. The concept of assimilation, which played such a great role in understanding the experiences of European immigrants, is once again center stage.

The last comprehensive review of sociological research on immigration and assimilation outlined an increase in immigrants from Latin American and Asia and their prospects for assimilation (Massey 1981). This review pointed to significant evidence in sociological research that, on balance, these immigrants were well

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on their way to becoming fully integrated into American society. Although there was variation between groups, research on spatial concentration, intermarriage, and socioeconomic advancement from one generation to the next all suggested that these immigrant groups were becoming Americans in much the same way that European immigrant groups did before them. Twenty-four years after this last review, we find continued support for this position.

The core measurable aspects of assimilation formulated to study European immigrants are still the starting points for understanding immigrant assimilation today: How different or similar to other Americans are immigrants and their children in terms of socioeconomic standing, residential segregation, language use, and intermarriage? In this review we very briefly examine the current evidence on these benchmarks of immigrant assimilation. We then highlight two factors that are shaping the present day immigrant assimilation but hitherto have received little research attention—the geographic dispersal of immigrants to nontraditional receiving areas, and the continuing replenishment of immigrants through ongoing immigration. We argue here that these two factors have important implications both for the kinds of empirical research social scientists should undertake and for the theoretical tools and concepts they use to shape their research.

A number of scholars have noted that both popular and scholarly notions of what constitutes success for post-1965 immigrants to the United States are either implicitly or explicitly comparative with the experiences of immigrants who came in the last mass immigration between 1880 and 1920 (Alba & Nee 2003, Foner 2000, Gerstle & Mollenkopf 2001, Reider & Steinlight 2003). Yet we should also recognize that many of the methods and theories we use to assess immigrant assimilation are also derived from the study of these earlier immigrants. The Chicago school of sociology took as one of its main subjects understanding immigrant assimilation in that city. With the publication of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* by W.I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki in 1918, a new agenda for sociology was set, one that, in Martin Bulmer's words, shifted sociology "from abstract theory and library research toward a more intimate acquaintance with the empirical world, studied nevertheless in terms of a theoretical frame" (Bulmer 1984, p. 45). Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, and W.I. Thomas trained a cadre of graduate students to study the experience of immigrants in Chicago, and provided methodological and theoretical tools for making sense of the patterns they found.

The influence of these early sociologists is seen in the research that stressed the role of the city and spatial dynamics in the experience of European immigrants (Lieberson 1963, 1980). In addition, the theories of immigrant assimilation developed during the twentieth century and culminated in Gordon's influential 1964 book, *Assimilation in American Life*, which highlighted generational change as the yardstick to measure changes in immigrant groups. The first generation (the foreign-born) were less assimilated and less exposed to American life than were their American-born children (the second generation), and their grandchildren (the third generation) were in turn more like the core American mainstream than their parents.

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The shift in settlement patterns among immigrants to new destinations and the continuing replenishment of new immigrants through ongoing migration streams mean that the emerging literature on immigration will have to take a new empirical and theoretical focus. Empirically, it is time to move away from city-based studies in traditional gateways and look at the transformation of the South, the Midwest, and small cities, towns and rural areas, and suburban areas as sites of first settlement. In the 1990s, appreciable numbers of immigrants settled in the South and rural Midwest—regions that have had little experience with immigration. We describe the effect that region of settlement might have on immigrant assimilation, and we outline a research agenda for sociological study of this new phenomenon. Theoretically, we argue that the concept of "generation" and its centrality to immigration research must be rethought, given the ongoing replenishment of new immigrants likely to characterize immigration flows for the foreseeable future. The social, political, and economic forces that spur and perpetuate migration appear to be well entrenched, and we believe that there will be a resulting replenishment of immigrants that is likely to be a defining characteristic of American immigration for years to come. The experience of European immigrants in the twentieth century was sharply defined by the cutoff in immigration that occurred as a result of the Depression and the restrictive immigration laws of the 1920s. This restriction created conditions that made generation a powerful variable. Not only did one's generation define one's distance from immigrant ancestors, but it also served as a proxy for birth cohort and for distance from all first-generation immigrants. The power of generation as an independent variable predicting degree of assimilation was tied, in ways few social scientists recognized, to the specific history of the flows of immigration from Europe. In this review we examine some of the ways that immigrant assimilation itself is likely to be different under conditions of ongoing immigration, and we specifically argue that generation will become a much weaker predictive variable in studies of that experience.

IMMIGRANT ASSIMILATION: THE CURRENT STATE OF THE FIELD

After nearly 40 years of immigration from around the globe, a number of summary studies of immigrant assimilation paint a rather optimistic picture of their absorption into American society. Alba & Nee (2003) rehabilitate the sometimes controversial term assimilation to describe the experience of these immigrants. Bean & Stevens (2003) also summarize the economic, linguistic, social, and spatial incorporation of the foreign-born, and report in summary that there is great reason to hope for a positive outcome for most of these immigrants.

The standard measures of immigrant assimilation have been employed by social scientists to document this generally optimistic story. These include (*a*) socioeconomic status (SES), defined as educational attainment, occupational specialization, and parity in earnings; (*b*) spatial concentration, defined in terms of dissimilarity

in spatial distribution and of suburbanization; (*c*) language assimilation, defined in terms of English language ability and loss of mother tongue; and (*d*) intermarriage, defined by race or Hispanic origin, and only occasionally by ethnicity and generation. Quantitative studies use statistical data, primarily from the census but also from large sample surveys, to assess the gap between the American mainstream, sometimes defined as native whites of native parentage, sometimes defined as native-born Americans who share the same race or Hispanic origin as the foreign-born, and sometimes defined as all native-born Americans. Progress for immigrants is measured in time since arrival, and progress for groups overall is measured by generation. There is also a rich and ongoing tradition of qualitative research involving ethnographic fieldwork or in-depth interviewing, which also owes its roots to the Chicago school of sociology (some good examples include Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003, Kasinitz et al. 2004, Kibria 2003, Kurien 2003, Levitt 2001, Mahler 1995, Menjivar 1999, Waters 1999).

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Socioeconomic Status

Generalizations about immigrants gloss over huge class, race, ethnic, gender, and legal status differences. Yet when economists debate the socioeconomic outcomes of immigrants, they often commit this error. Economists Barry Chiswick (1978) and George Borjas (1994) represent two different positions on the experience of immigrants in the American labor market. Chiswick, using cross-sectional census data, compared immigrants who had been in the United States a long time with those who had been here less time and concluded that after a period of about 20 years immigrants caught up to native-born people with the same human capital characteristics. Borjas used successive censuses to look at synthetic cohorts of immigrants and argued that more recent immigrants were of lower "quality" and would not catch up to the native-born or see the same kind of earnings growth that Chiswick identified. [The National Institutes of Health has now funded a National Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants, but it will be a number of years before that survey will yield true cohorts of immigrants whose earnings can be followed over time (Jasso et al. 2000).] However, if one compares immigrants in the census data to native-born individuals of the same ethnic group (not all native-born Americans in the labor market), then immigrants do achieve economic parity in earnings. Yet, the low educational levels of Mexicans and other Central Americans remain a cause for concern because even if the immigrants earn as much as natives with such low educational profiles, they are still very much at risk of poverty in the American labor market, especially given the changes in the American economy marked by a rising premium on higher education, rising income inequality, and declining real wages at the bottom of the distribution (Ellwood 2000).

The educational attainment of the second generation has been an increasing object of study. Portes & Rumbaut's (2001) Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study in Miami and San Diego found that 1.5-generation (those who arrive before age 13) and second-generation children tend to do better than their native-born

schoolmates in grades, rates of school retention, and behavioral aspects such as homework. Using census data, Farley & Alba (2002) and Hirschman (2001) find the same outcomes. The New York Second Generation study finds that second-generation West Indians do better than native-born blacks in the city, and Dominicans, Colombians, Ecuadorans, and Peruvians do better than Puerto Ricans. Chinese do better in high school graduation rates and college attendance than all the other groups, including native whites of native parentage (Kasinitz et al. 2004). The one cause for concern once again in this large picture is Mexican Americans. Although the second generation is not doing too badly, especially compared with the very low levels of education of their parents, there is some evidence of third-generation decline among the grandchildren of Mexican immigrants (Bean et al. 1994, Livingston & Kahn 2002, Ortiz 1996, Perlmann & Waldinger 1997).

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Residential Patterns

Although we focus below on the experience of immigrants in the areas of new geographic settlement in the South and Midwest, the majority of immigrants still settle in the large gateway cities—Los Angeles, New York, Miami, San Francisco, Chicago, Dallas, and Houston. Sociologists Richard Alba and John Logan have explored patterns of segregation in large cities and their suburbs in the 1980s and 1990s, and sociologist William Frey examined patterns of distribution of the foreign-born and natives by city and region (Alba et al. 1999, 2000; Alba & Logan 1993; Frey 1996; Logan et al. 1996). These studies all find that Asian and Latino immigrants have moderate degrees of segregation from white Anglos—much lower than the segregation that blacks experience from whites. These studies also document a big difference between current immigrants and earlier European immigrants: Large numbers of current new immigrants settle in suburban areas upon initial arrival in the United States. Indeed, Alba & Nee (2003, p. 254) report that among immigrants who arrived in the 1990s, 48% of those living in metropolitan areas resided outside of central cities in suburban areas. Yet, overall these studies of residential concentration of immigrant groups uphold what Massey (1985) calls the spatial assimilation model. This model, based on the theories of Park (1950) and other sociologists in the Chicago school, posits that increasing socioeconomic attainment, longer residence in the United States, and higher generational status lead to decreasing residential concentration for a particular ethnic group.

Linguistic Patterns

Despite the sometimes fevered pitch of public debates about language use by immigrants and their children, and the related debate about bilingual education, the evidence on language assimilation is quite optimistic. Although the absolute number of people who speak a language other than English in their homes is quite high (47 million people), the documented changes over time in language use point to high levels of language assimilation. Bean & Stevens (2003), using data from the 2000 U.S. Census, point out that among immigrants from non-English

speaking countries, only 10% did not speak English at all at the time of the census. Bean & Stevens (2003) find a strong positive association between a foreign-born person's time in the United States and his or her ability to speak English well. Using 1990 U.S. Census data, Alba et al. (2002) find that even among Mexicans and Cubans, two thirds to three quarters, respectively, of the third generation do not speak any Spanish. Thus, the three-generation model of language assimilation appears to hold for most of today's immigrants: The immigrant generation makes some progress but remains dominant in their native tongue, the second generation is bilingual, and the third generation speaks English only.

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Intermarriage

Intermarriage is often seen as the litmus test of assimilation. Gordon (1964) certainly posited that it would be the ultimate proof of assimilation. Most studies of intermarriage in the United States tend to focus on broad racial groups—Asians, Latinos, African Americans, American Indians, and whites—but not on specific national-origin groups. For instance, Lee & Bean (2004) assess the relationship between rising immigration, high rates of intermarriage, and the increasing number of multiracial individuals. Studies that focus on race find much higher intermarriage rates with whites among Asians and Latinos than among blacks with whites. Gilbertson et al. (1991) differentiates between the native- and foreign-born, and finds that the native-born have higher intermarriage rates than the foreign-born. Yet, there is evidence that there is significant intermarriage among the subgroups that make up the broad racial categories. Rosenfeld (2002) uses 1970–1980 U.S. Census data to show that Mexican Americans experience no significant barriers to intermarriage with non-Hispanic whites. Despite the growth of the Mexican population and the related increase in the number of eligible Mexican marriage partners, Mexican American–non-Hispanic white intermarriage rates suggest that where marriage is concerned, social barriers between Mexican Americans and whites are thin. Perlmann & Waters (2004) compare patterns of intermarriage among Italian Americans between 1920 and 1960 with patterns among Mexican Americans in 1998–2001. They find that Italians in the first half of the twentieth century out-married at about the same rate that Mexicans of the same generation did at the end of the twentieth century, despite the fact that Mexicans are a much larger group and thus have far more chances to in-marry than did the Italians. They conclude that the constraints other than group size that operated against out-marriage were actually greater for Italian women living at that time than for Mexicans now (Perlmann & Waters 2004, p. 271). There is also significant intermarriage among the groups that make up broad racial groups, yielding pan-ethnic unions. Rosenfeld (2001) finds that Hispanics and Asians display strong marital affinity for individuals from the same broad racial category, even if marriage partners are not from the same ethnic group (i.e., Puerto Ricans marrying Mexicans or Chinese marrying Koreans). The high rates of marriage within the broad racial categories suggest that these categories are meaningful in how individuals select their mates.

This brief review of national-level data using standard sociological measures of assimilation, and using generation to track changes over time within groups, tells us much about immigrant assimilation and shows some great continuities between the experiences of earlier European immigrants and current, predominantly non-European immigrants. We turn now to a discussion of two less-documented phenomena, which mark a potentially sharp difference between the two waves of immigration: settlement in nontraditional areas and the ongoing replenishment of immigrants through continuing immigration.

NEW IMMIGRANT GATEWAYS

The 1990s ushered in a new period of American immigration characterized by a change in the destinations of immigrants. Although the overwhelming majority of immigrants still concentrate in traditional gateway states, such as New York, Massachusetts, Florida, Illinois, Texas, and California, the southern and midwestern states have seen unprecedented gains in their foreign-born populations. To be sure, these states were home to a number of immigrant groups during previous periods of American immigration (Pozzetta 1991), but the recent growth is unparalleled by any other period.

To illustrate the changes in the geographic distribution and rates of growth of immigration in the United States, Table 1 shows the number of foreign-born individuals in states where the foreign-born population grew by a factor of two or more between 1990 and 2000. The largest percentage growth in the foreign-born population took place in the midwestern and southern states, with North Carolina experiencing the greatest increase at 273.7%. Of the 19 states in the table, 16 are located either in the Midwest or the South, and the Table includes none of the traditional gateway states. Table 1 also shows the top three sending countries for each state as a percentage of the total 2000 foreign-born population in that state. Mexican immigrants make up the largest share of immigrants in each state, accounting for as much as 49.1% (Colorado) and as little as 10.6% (Minnesota) of the total immigrant population in a state. Whereas Mexicans make up at least a tenth of immigrants in each state, no other country contributes a tenth of all immigrants in any state, except for Laos, which barely contributes 10% of immigrants in Minnesota. Traditional gateway states did not increase at the same rate as new gateway states, partly because new gateways had a much smaller absolute number of immigrants to begin with. Yet, the rate of growth of the immigrant population in new immigrant gateways represents a significant shift in the settlement patterns of immigrants.

The changing geography of this new immigration is especially vivid in select locales within these states, some of which had virtually no immigrant population prior to the 1990s. For example, census data show that the foreign-born population in Dawson County, Nebraska, rose from 138 in 1990 to 3866 in 2000, a 2701.4% increase. Similarly, Whitfield County, Georgia, saw its foreign-born population

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TABLE 1 States in which the foreign-born population doubled between 1990 and 2000 and the top three sending regions

State	Foreign-born pop. 1990[a]	Foreign-born pop. 2000[a]	% Growth 1990–2000	Top three sending countries for each state by % of 2000 total[b]		
				1	2	3
North Carolina	115,077	430,000	273.7	Mexico 40.0%	India 3.8%	Germany 3.8%
Georgia	173,126	577,273	233.4	Mexico 33.0%	India 4.8%	Vietnam 4.4%
Nevada	104,828	316,593	202.0	Mexico 48.6%	Philippines 9.9%	El Salvador 3.8%
Arkansas	24,867	73,690	196.3	Mexico 45.7%	El Salvador 6.1%	Germany 4.5%
Utah	58,600	158,664	170.8	Mexico 41.9%	Canada 4.9%	Germany 3.2%
Tennessee	59,114	159,004	169.0	Mexico 28.1%	Germany 5.2%	India 4.8%
Nebraska	28,198	74,638	164.7	Mexico 40.8%	Vietnam 7.2%	Guatemala 4.7%
Colorado	142,434	369,903	159.7	Mexico 49.1%	Germany 4.5%	Canada 3.7%
Arizona	278,205	656,183	135.9	Mexico 66.4%	Canada 4.0%	Germany 2.4%
Kentucky	34,119	80,271	135.3	Mexico 19.3%	Germany 8.3%	India 6.2%
South Carolina	49,964	115,978	132.1	Mexico 27.3%	Germany 6.8%	United Kingdom 5.9%
Minnesota	113,039	260,463	130.4	Mexico 10.6%	Laos 10.0%	Vietnam 6.0%
Idaho	28,905	64,080	121.7	Mexico 55.3%	Canada 7.1%	United Kingdom 3.5%
Kansas	62,840	134,735	114.4	Mexico 47.0%	Vietnam 6.8%	India 3.7%
Iowa	43,316	91,085	110.3	Mexico 27.7%	Vietnam 7.0%	Bosnia & Herzegovina 6.3%
Oregon	139,307	289,702	108.8	Mexico 39.0%	Canada 5.9%	Vietnam 5.7%
Alabama	43,533	87,772	101.6	Mexico 26.5%	Germany 8.4%	India 4.9%
Delaware	22,275	44,898	101.6	Mexico 17.5%	India 8.3%	United Kingdom 5.6%
Oklahoma	65,489	131,747	101.2	Mexico 42.5%	Vietnam 7.6%	Germany 4.7%

[a]Source: 1990 and 2000 United States Census.

[b]Source: Migration Policy Institute.

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grow by 652.7%, from 1846 in 1990 to 13,895 in 2000. These demographic changes are especially pronounced in these locales because of their small total population. Whereas the 1990 foreign-born population made up only 0.7% and 2.5% in Dawson County and Whitfield County, respectively, by 2000 the foreign-born populations swelled to 15.9% of Dawson County's and 16.6% of Whitfield County's total populations.

While the impact of immigration is especially pronounced in rural areas, urban centers with very little or no previous history of immigration have seen a recent and dramatic increase in their foreign-born population. As Singer (2004) points out, many of these urban immigrant gateways have virtually no significant history of immigration (Austin, Charlotte, and Raleigh-Durham, for example), while others are re-emerging gateways that have seen a resurgence of immigration after a long hiatus (Denver, San Jose, and Oakland).

A small but growing body of sociological literature examines the immigrant experience in these new gateways. The bulk of this research documents the changing geography of immigrant settlement and explains why there has been a change in immigrant settlement during the 1990s (Camarota & Keeley 2001, Durand et al. 2000, Gouveia & Saenz 2000, Gozdziak & Martin 2005, Johnson et al. 1999, Kandel & Cromartie 2004, Kandel & Parrado 2005a, Massey et al. 2002, Singer 2004). In the following sections, we identify and summarize two main lines of research on the immigrant experience in new gateways. The first explains why there has been a proliferation of immigration to areas that have been historically unpopular destinations for immigrants. The second line of research describes how the influx of immigrants to new gateways transforms the communities to which they migrate. We follow our summary of this research by suggesting how research on immigrants in new gateways can be strengthened and point out areas of research that have yet to be explored.

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Accounting for the Changing Geography of American Immigration

Much of the research on immigration and new gateways focuses on why new immigrant gateways have emerged, providing both macro and micro explanations. The few existing explanations focus primarily on Mexican immigration. At the macro level, Massey et al. (2002) used demographic data from the Mexican Migration Project to show how a convergence of factors led to the diversification of U.S. destinations for Mexican immigrants. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which legalized 2.3 million formerly undocumented Mexican immigrants, freed newly legalized immigrants from fear of apprehension, and many traveled beyond states nearest to the U.S.-Mexican border. Several pieces of legislation militarized popular crossing areas for Mexican immigrants, driving them to cross at more remote points in the border and into new destinations outside of California. Conditions in California, the most popular destination for Mexican immigrants, became less tenable for Mexican immigrants in the 1990s, both

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socially and economically. The rise of ardent anti-immigrant sentiment, culminating in the passage of Proposition 187, which barred undocumented immigrants from accessing many publicly funded services,[1] made California a more hostile context for Mexican immigrants. An unusually deep recession in California and a more rapid economic recovery elsewhere meant that Mexican immigrants could find better economic opportunities in other regions of the country. These factors—the freedom to become mobile that IRCA allowed, militarization of the Tijuana/San Diego border region, growing anti-immigrant sentiment, and an economic recession in California—led many Mexican immigrants to flee California and settle in regions of the country that had not previously been popular destinations. As Durand et al. (2000) show, mass migration out of California resulted in a decline in the percentage of Mexican immigrants in California from 57.8% to 46.6% between 1990 and 1996 and an increase in the percentage of Mexican immigrants in nongateway states from 10.3% to 21.0% during that same period.

Hernández-León & Zúñiga's (2000) study of Carpet City, Georgia, illustrates how microlevel processes explain the emergence of new gateways. They use ethnographic and survey data to show that the emergence and growth of the Mexican populations in Carpet City is a result of networks established through secondary migrations of male pioneering immigrants legalized by IRCA. Initially, a few Mexican immigrants who received amnesty under IRCA migrated to Carpet City from the western United States. These pioneering migrants established networks with sending regions in Mexico, allowing post-IRCA immigrants (often women and children) to come directly to Carpet City from Mexico.

Yet, the movement of immigrants, especially Latinos, away from traditional gateways is rooted in factors beyond individual and familial decision of migrants who are "pushed" out of traditional gateways. Immigrants are drawn to new gateways by economic opportunities in industries where there is a high demand for low-wage labor. Gouveia & Saenz (2000) cite international, national, and local forces that work to attract Latino immigrants to the Midwest. At the international level, stiffening global competition has spurred firms in agriculture and agroindustry to reduce costs and increase production. To accomplish these goals, firms increase profit margins by speeding up production and using advances in technologies and biotechnologies to increase yields that turn seasonal work into year-round work. According to Gouveia & Saenz, these strategies have created a demand for an abundant low-wage labor force. U.S. immigration policies help create a supply of low-wage labor though IRCA's Seasonal Agricultural Work Proviso, which allows a large number of immigrants to remain in the United States, and through more direct recruitment with H2 visas programs, which provide a year-round supply of workers.

Production strategies in specific industries also play a key role in attracting immigrants to new gateways. Griffith's (1995) research on poultry plants shows that increased line-speeds and other production changes have created an increased

[1]Proposition 187 was later found to be unconstitutional in a U.S. District Court.

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demand for low-skill labor and a need for firms to control workers. Poultry plants increase their Latino workforce through network recruiting, wherein employees are asked to refer potential new employees, often family and friends, to work in the plants. Griffith finds that 80% to 85% of new workers in Georgia's and North Carolina's plants are recruited through personal networks, and many plants give workers cash bonuses for bringing in new workers as long as the recruits remain on the job for a designated period. Similarly, Johnson-Webb (2003) shows that employers in North Carolina have a strong preference for immigrant labor over all native-born workers (black or white), and these employers invoke a number of methods, both informal and formal, actively and in some cases aggressively, to recruit Latino immigrant workers. Word-of-mouth is the most popular form of recruitment, but employers also use ads in local Spanish-language newspapers, recruitment at job fares, and employment intermediaries, such as the Mexican consulates and temporary agencies. In some cases, employers even attempt to "steal" employees from other firms, partly because of competition for workers in a tight labor market.

As shown in Table 1, immigration from Mexico accounts for much of the immigrant population in new gateway states, but Vietnamese immigration is prominent as well. The presence of Vietnamese immigrants in these gateways is not a matter of choice as much as it is a function of federal settlement policies. Zhou & Bankston's (1998) examination of the Vietnamese second generation notes that the dispersal of Vietnamese refugees to a range of communities was orchestrated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), which hoped to help Vietnamese refugees gain economic independence. ORR resettled Vietnamese refugees in places where there was very virtually no recent or significant history of immigration, including New Orleans (the site of Zhou & Bankston's study), Kansas City, Oklahoma City, and Biloxi. Rumbaut's (1995) overview of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian Americans similarly points out that the dispersal of these refugee groups in new gateways is a function of governmental resettlement programs. Although refugees were initially dispersed across the United States, many refugees have made secondary migrations to join larger communities of coethnics in California. However, many Asian refugee groups remain concentrated in new gateways. For example, Rumbaut (1995) points out that the Hmong remain heavily concentrated in Minnesota and Wisconsin and that Vietnamese make up the largest Asian group in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Kansas, and Oklahoma.

Immigrants in the New Gateways

In addition to documenting the demographic changes in new gateways, research has also focused on the influence that new immigrants have on the communities to which they migrate. This body of literature primarily employs ethnographic methods to explore how immigrants influence the social and economic landscape of communities that are largely unaccustomed to an immigrant presence.

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The ethnographic analysis of Garden City, Kansas, by Stull et al. (1992) highlights how new immigrants influence community relations vis-à-vis beef packing plants. Interaction between the main groups in Garden City—Latinos (almost entirely Mexican), Asians (Vietnamese and Cambodians), and whites—is stymied by conditions within the plants and in the larger community. Inside the beef plants, the loud noise and the undivided concentration required to keep up with the high speed of the processing line (or "the chain") limit interaction between groups. In the larger community, Stull et al. (1992) find that the high turnover rate of plant workers, due in part to high injury rates in the beef plants, make the immigrant workforce transient. The transient nature of the immigrant population means that native-born residents have few interactions with immigrants and that schools strain to meet the needs of an immigrant student population that cycles in and out during the school year.

Cravey's (1997) study of the rise of the Latino population in Siler City, North Carolina, highlights tensions surrounding relations in this new, primarily Latino immigrant population and the established community. One such tension is over residential segregation. There are few options for low-income housing, and Latinos have moved into neighborhoods that were once dominated by African Americans. The shortage of low-income housing has sparked competition between Latinos and African Americans.

Immigrant populations in new gateways impact nearly every facet of life. Hackenberg & Kukulka's (1995) ethnographic study of Garden City, Kansas, highlights the strains new immigrant populations place on primary health care. In this small beef packing town, beef plants have impacted health care by attracting many poor immigrants to work in an industry in which injury rates are very high. The large number of poor immigrants strains primary health care services, especially because most doctors do not accept Medicaid.

Schools also face significant challenges in new, rural immigrant gateways. Kandel & Parrado (2005b) show that growth in the school-aged Hispanic population far outpaces the growth of school-aged non-Hispanic whites in both metro and nonmetro areas. The rapid increase of school-aged Hispanics in schools in new gateways leaves some schools scrambling to meet the needs of this large student population. Using case studies from rural Mississippi and urban North Carolina, Kandel & Parrado (2005a) find that these challenges come from the language barriers and the transience of some students who leave schools when their parents find work in other locales.

Although much of the research on new gateways examines how immigrants influence the context they encounter, recent research also looks at the dynamics of change in new gateways. Millard & Chapa's (2004) ethnographic and demographic analysis of several rural midwestern villages and towns explores the social, political, economic, and religious dynamics resulting from the influx of Latino immigrants. Millard, Chapa, and several coauthors find that relations between Anglos and Latino immigrants are a mixed bag. Latinos report blatant forms of discrimination in nearly all aspects of life, but the authors also site significant

efforts on the part of the communities to improve relations between Anglos and Latino immigrants. They also describe a growing second generation that is often caught between the immigrant experience of their parents and the Anglo experience of their peers. Where religious life is concerned, Latino Protestants form their own congregations, providing both religious services in Spanish and crucial social services. The staff within these congregations connects Latino immigrants to services, including food stamps, Medicaid, emergency food, and clothing. Where Latino congregations aid immigrants, other institutions are often ill-equipped to meet the needs of the growing Latino immigrant population. Bilingual workers are in short supply making accessing necessary services more difficult for Latino immigrants.

The strength of the existing literature on the immigrant experience in new gateways is its ability to account for why immigrants have settled in these new gateways, to describe the work that immigrants do, and, to some extent, to describe how immigrants have influenced the places to which they have migrated. However, most of the existing literature is largely divorced from broader theoretical debates on immigration and assimilation. One notable exception is Hernández-León & Zúñiga's (2005) study of social capital among Mexican immigrants in Dalton, Georgia. Using descriptive statistics and ethnographic data, they find that immigrants who previously lived in established gateways mobilize "funds of knowledge" and social capital gained in established gateways to expedite their settlement and integration in new gateways. Leaders of these new immigrant communities draw on these "funds of knowledge" in establishing soccer leagues, running for local office, and starting community associations. Individual immigrants also benefit from social capital accumulated while living in newly established gateways to start small businesses.

Uniqueness of New Immigrant Gateways

As Hernández-León & Zúñiga (2005) begin to show, there is good reason to believe that immigrant assimilation in these new gateways may differ in fundamental ways from the experiences of immigrants in more established gateways. One potential difference is in intergroup relations. The long history of immigration in more established gateways means that notions about the place of immigrants in the class, racial, and ethnic hierarchies of these established gateways are well-entrenched. In contrast, the lack of immigration history in new gateways means that the place of immigrants in the class, racial, and ethnic hierarchies is less crystallized, and immigrants may thus have more freedom to define their position.

The size of new gateways may also influence immigrant assimilation. Many of the new immigrant gateways are rural towns, where social isolation does not exist as it does in larger urban centers. Unlike larger locales, where immigrants often live in enclaves and children attend schools that have large immigrant and minority populations, immigrants and native-born residents in smaller gateways frequently interact. Although, as Kandel & Cromartie (2004) point out, residential

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separation between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites increased in the 1990s, there is reason to believe that this residential separation may not result in complete social isolation. Jiménez's (2005) research in Garden City, Kansas, a town with a total population of about 30,000, shows that the large Latino immigrant population frequently interacts with the native-born population in part because of the small size of the town. There is one high school, one public swimming pool, two large grocery stores, one YMCA, and one junior college. Immigrants and native-born residents alike must share these few resources, impeding social isolation and facilitating intergroup interactions.

An additional difference between new gateways and more established ones is in the institutional arrangements that influence immigrant assimilation. Established gateways have numerous institutions set up to aid immigrants, including legal-aid bureaus, health clinics, social organizations, and bilingual services. Previous waves of immigrants have necessitated the establishment of these institutions, and immigrants who arrive today continue to benefit from them. For instance, ethnographies conducted for the New York Second Generation Project found that West Indian workers stepped in easily to a union founded by Jewish immigrants and recently run by African Americans (Foerster 2004). Ecuadoran, Peruvian, Colombian, and Dominican immigrants and their children took advantage of educational programs originally devised for New York City's Puerto Rican population (Trillo 2004). And the city's large Russian immigrant community benefited greatly from the organizations founded by the Jewish immigrants who arrived in New York a century earlier (Zeltzer-Zubida 2004). Indeed, Kasinitz et al. (2004) argue that the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement, along with the legacy of New York City's history as an immigrant-absorbing community, have significantly positively affected the ability of current immigrants to feel almost immediately included and to consider themselves New Yorkers.

New gateways, in contrast, may lack the institutional arrangements designed to serve the immigrant population precisely because there has been no need for such arrangements until recently. As some of the research cited above shows, many new gateways lack arrangements, such as bilingual services, necessary to accommodate the new immigrant population. Thus, immigrants may not have access to institutions and the services in new gateways that immigrants in more established gateways have. We can only speculate how these differences influence immigrant assimilation, but we believe that comparing new gateways to more established gateways will yield greater theoretical insight into immigrant assimilation. We also believe that comparing the experience of immigrants in these two types of gateways along the dimensions that we highlight here—development of racial and ethnic hierarchies, level of segregation, and types of institutional arrangements—holds great promise for furthering our understanding of immigrant assimilation more generally. To this end, Zúñiga & Hernández-León's (2005) new edited collection of research on Mexican immigrants in new immigrant destinations will further what we know theoretically and empirically, and sociologists will do well to follow this line of research.

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IMMIGRANT REPLENISHMENT

A second factor important for the study of assimilation is the extent to which immigration from a particular sending country is replenished. Sociologists only began to study European immigrant assimilation as this wave of immigration was coming to an end. Restrictive laws passed in 1924 and the Great Depression largely ensured the halt of large-scale immigration from Europe to the United States. Thus, major studies examined the experience of immigrants and their descendants as they became Americans in a society absent of any significant immigrant replenishment. Each successive generation and cohort born in the United States had less contact with immigrants, attenuating the salience of ethnicity in their lives (Alba 1990, Waters 1990).

To be sure, immigrant replenishment was part of the Great European Migration. Continuous German and Irish immigration was a feature of American immigration throughout much of the nineteenth century. Yet, the absence of sociological research on immigrant assimilation during this period leaves sociologists with no starting point from which to understand how immigrant replenishment shapes assimilation today. Much like the German and Irish experience in the nineteenth century, today's immigration appears to be continuous, and each wave of immigrants is replenished by another. The forces that initiate immigration (economic integration, growing economic development) and that sustain immigration flows (embeddedness of social capital, social networks) appear to be permanent features of the social, political, and economic global context (see Massey 1995, Massey 1999). As a result, the replenishment of immigrants is likely to define the immigrant experience in the United States well into the foreseeable future. As Massey (1995) points out, "In all likelihood, therefore, the United States has already become a country of perpetual immigration, one characterized by the continuous arrival of large cohorts of immigrants from particular regions" (p. 664). We believe that immigrant replenishment has significant implications for immigrant assimilation itself and for how sociologists study it.

Consider the case of the Mexican origin population in the United States. Unlike any other current immigrant group, Mexican immigration has been a permanent feature of American immigration for well over 100 years. Mexicans are the only immigrant group to span the Great European Migration, the post-1965 era of immigration, and the period in between. Mexican immigration has been particularly heavy in the last two decades, and they make up nearly one third of the total immigrant population.

The implications of Mexican immigrant replenishment are perhaps best seen by focusing on the descendents of the earliest Mexican immigrants. The descendents of these early Mexican immigrants, "Mexican Americans," are generationally distant from their immigrant ancestors, and many of them have assimilated, both socially and structurally, into American society (Alba et al. 2002, Perlmann & Waters 2004, Smith 2003). Yet, this generational distance does not mean that they have no meaningful contact with immigrants. In fact, because of the heavy

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replenishment of Mexican immigration, even later-generation Mexican Americans interact with their immigrant coethnics (Ochoa 2004).

Jiménez's (2005) research on Mexican Americans in Garden City, Kansas, and Santa Maria, California, illustrates in concrete terms how immigrant replenishment affects one dimension of assimilation, ethnic identity. Using in-depth interviews with 123 Mexican Americans and participant observations, Jiménez (2005) finds that within families, the salience of ethnic identity attenuates from one generation to the next. The passage to subsequent generations of the traits, customs, traditions, and language of the immigrant generation weakens within families. Much of this attenuation of ethnic identity is owed to an ideology of forced Americanization that was prevalent when many second- and third-generation individuals came of age. Yet, the replenishment of Mexican immigrants helps to refresh the ethnic identity of Mexican Americans through both everyday contact with immigrants, in which many Mexican Americans have ample opportunity to speak Spanish, and more meaningful friendships and romantic relationships that develop between immigrants and Mexican Americans. In some cases, Mexican Americans marry Mexican immigrants and second-generation individuals, and their children are a mix of generations—third or fourth on their father's side and second on their mother's, for example. The replenishment of immigrants also gives Mexican Americans access to a supply of ethnic "raw materials" that, without immigrant replenishment, would cease to exist. Mexican festivals, restaurants, ethnic-specific food stores, and Spanish-language media are all now part of a Mexican American's ethnic repertoire that the large immigrant population makes possible. Indeed, Massey's (1995) prediction that immigrant replenishment would mean that "the character of ethnicity will be determined relatively more by immigrants and relatively less by later generations, shifting the balance of ethnic identity toward the language, culture, and ways of life of the sending society" (p. 645) appears to be an empirical reality for the Mexican-origin population and will likely be true for other immigrant groups in the future.

The case of the Mexican-origin population speaks to a need for social scientists to reconceptualize how to gauge immigrant assimilation. Heretofore, students of immigration have privileged "generation" as a temporal gauge of immigrant group assimilation, where "generation" is the ancestral distance from the point of arrival in a society (Alba 1988, p. 213). Theories of assimilation have been structured around the principle that the more generations removed an individual is from the immigrant generation, the more integrated into American society an individual would be. Early theories of assimilation posited a three-generation model, wherein by the third-generation individuals would be well integrated into Americans society both structurally and culturally (Fishman 1965, Gordon 1964, Warner & Srole 1945). Using generation as a temporal gauge makes sense when examining the experiences of groups for which there is no protracted immigrant replenishment, as in research done on the immigrants and descendents of the Great European Migration. Each successive generation born in the United States had less contact with an immigrant generation, both within and outside of the family, precisely

because there was no significant replenishment from European countries when those groups were studied.

An additional reason for using generation is that there is a high correlation between the generation from which European-origin individuals come and the birth cohort from which they come. Because many European groups immigrated during a compressed period of time, older individuals tended to be of earlier generation (i.e., first and second), whereas younger people were from later generations (i.e., third and fourth). Thus, each generation of European-origin individuals also experienced American society as a birth cohort, i.e., a group of people who experience fluctuations in life chances and constraints at roughly the same point in their life cycle.

When looking at today's immigrant groups and the fact that each wave of immigration is likely to be succeeded by another, using generation as a temporal gauge does not mean what it used to. Assumptions about generation are invalid when there is immigrant replenishment because at any point in time each generation is a mix of cohorts and each cohort has a mix of generations. Individuals from different generations but of the same birth cohort, then, may experience similar shifts in life chances that society offers (because they are in the same birth cohort), even if they experience a different dynamic internal to the ethnic group (because they are from different generations). As Alba (1988) notes, "[T]he generational perspective tends to deflect attention from the structural basis of ethnicity, the linkage between ethnic group and the economy and the polity of the larger society, and to focus instead on the internal dynamic of change" (p. 214).

We do not argue that generation is an entirely invalid temporal gauge but rather that it must be considered alongside birth cohort. By using birth cohort in conjunction with generation, sociologists will better capture processes of ethnic change internal to the group that generation captures as well as the historical fluctuations in opportunities and constraints external to groups that birth cohort captures.

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CONCLUSION

After nearly 40 years of high levels of immigration, primarily from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia, most careful sociological research supports the notion that immigrants are being successfully incorporated into American society. This research does not lead to the kinds of alarmist, unsupported claims made by writers such as the political scientist Samuel Huntington (2004, p. 30), who argued that, "Unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture." Quite the contrary, the United States continues to show remarkable progress in absorbing new immigrants. It may be that continual immigrant replenishment makes this assimilation less visible than it was for European immigrants and their descendants, but that makes it all the more important that these findings on immigrant incorporation be prominent in public and scholarly debates on this topic.

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At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, the United States saw the influx of massive numbers of immigrants from European nations such as Ireland, Italy, Germany, Russia, Poland, Hungary, and Slovenia. It was during this same time that sociology gained recognition as an academic field, and the settlement of immigrants in urban centers provided opportunities for sociologists to develop theories about group interaction, ethnic inequality, and assimilation.

Understanding the differences between these earlier waves of immigration and today's reveals a need to rethink the theoretical and empirical assumptions used to study these two groups. We have argued that the immigrant experience has changed recently with respect to the range of settlement regions and the persistence of immigrant flows. More than ever immigrants are settling in areas that have received virtually no immigration in recent history. Much like today, an earlier time period saw the settlement of immigrants in rural areas, particularly in the South and Midwest. However, most of what we know about the experiences of immigrants who settled away from the centers comes from historical accounts (Pozzetta 1991), and the immigrant experience in these places passed under the sociological radar. Early students of immigration and assimilation provided a strong foundation for current theories, and today's sociologists have a golden opportunity to build our empirical and theoretical understanding of immigrant assimilation by researching these new gateways.

We have also argued that the United States is likely to see a protracted period of immigration in which the immigrant population is continually replenished. Generation is still a useful temporal measures of immigrant assimilation. However, we argue that sociologists must also consider birth cohort as a temporal gauge of assimilation in order to tease out the effects of protracted immigrant replenishment on assimilation.

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