

Bad Jobs, Good Jobs, No Jobs? The Employment Experience of the Mexican American Second Generation

Roger Waldinger, Nelson Lim and David Cort

Concern with the prospects and experience of the ‘new’ second generation now stands at the top of the immigration research agenda in the United States. In contrast to the past, many immigrant offspring appear to be rapidly heading upward, exemplified by the large number of Chinese, Korean, Indian and other Asian-origin students enrolled in the nation’s leading universities, some the children of workers, others the descendants of immigrants who moved straight into the middle class. On the other hand, knowledgeable observers tell us that the offspring of today’s poorly educated immigrants are likely to experience a very different fate. In their view, post-industrial America is an inhospitable place for low-skilled immigrants and their offspring, as the latter are likely not to be integrated into the mainstream but acculturated into the ways and lifestyles of their underclass neighbours. We advance an alternative perspective, not captured by these two opposing views: namely, that the children of recent immigrants will follow in the footsteps of the offspring of Italian or Polish labour migrants of the turn of the last century, gaining incorporation into working-class America. Using samples of the Current Population Survey (CPS), we evaluate these hypotheses, comparing job holding and job quality patterns among the descendants of immigrants and their native counterparts.

Keywords: Second Generation; Assimilation; Mexican Americans; Children of Immigrants; Underclass

Roger Waldinger is Professor of Sociology at the University of California Los Angeles; Nelson Lim is Professor of Public Policy and Social Scientist, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California. David Cort is a Graduate student in Sociology, University of California, Los Angeles. Correspondence to: Prof. R. Waldinger, Dept of Sociology, UCLA, Haines Hall 264, Box 951551, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1551, USA. E-mail: waldinge@soc.ucla.edu

Introduction

Research on the ‘new’ second generation in the United States has begun on a note of inflected pessimism, and understandably so. While low-skilled immigrants are moving to the US in large numbers, they are entering an economy that provides little reward for workers of modest schooling, regardless of ethnic stripes. The liabilities associated with foreign birth exercise a further penalty, adding to the difficulties that derive from low schooling as such. Although the migration process connects immigrants to employers, the social ties that generate attachment seem less able to produce the skill acquisition needed for occupational mobility. Of the various US-bound migration streams, by far the largest, coming from Mexico, is also the most poorly schooled. Consequently, Mexican newcomers make up a working poor, with limited access to jobs beyond the low-wage sector. Given these circumstances, can we expect that their US-born and -raised children will find progress?

The sociological literature provides two answers to this question. Proponents of the hypothesis of ‘segmented assimilation’ contend that a sizeable portion of today’s Mexican American second generation may be a ‘rainbow underclass’ in the making, stumbling beneath the ranks of the lower working class in which their parents have established themselves. Alternatively, the more conventional perspective posits assimilation, defined as a ‘decline in an ethnic difference’, and characterised by steady movement into the social and economic ‘mainstream’. We advance an alternative perspective, not captured by these two opposing views. We suggest that the children of recent immigrants will follow the offspring of the Italian or Polish labour migrants of the turn of the last century, gaining incorporation into working-class America. In this paper we evaluate these three hypotheses, comparing employment profiles of descendants of immigrants with their native counterparts. Our key data source is the Current Population Survey.

Three Hypotheses

Segmented Assimilation

The hypothesis of segmented assimilation, coined by Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou in 1993 and codified by Portes and Rumbaut in their 2001 book, *Legacies*, contends that the children of low-skilled immigrants, visibly identifiable and entering a mainly white society still not cured of its racist afflictions, are likely to get stalled in their search for progress. While immigrant working-class parents arrive willing to do the jobs rejected by natives, the children want more; not clear is whether the children’s careers can live up to ‘their US-acquired aspirations’ (Portes and Zhou 1993: 85).

The conundrum of the contemporary second generation is heightened by the continuing transformation of the US economy. Though low-skilled jobs persist, occupational segmentation has ‘reduced the opportunities for incremental upward mobility through well-paid, blue-collar positions’ (Portes and Rumbaut 2001: 59). The advent of the ‘hourglass economy’—with opportunities bulging at high and low

levels, and a truncated tier of middle-range jobs—confronts the immigrant children with a cruel choice: either acquire the college and other advanced degrees needed to move into the professional/managerial elite, or else accept the same menial jobs to which the first generation was consigned. However, the children's experience of growing up as stigmatised strangers, exposed to the 'adversarial culture' of native-born minorities, may lead them to act in ways that imperil school success. Consequently, the children of working-class immigrants are at risk of 'downward assimilation', a path that would take them from their parents' modest starting position and drop them into 'a new rainbow underclass . . . at the bottom of society' (Portes and Rumbaut 2001: 45).

The children of today's working-class immigrants are exceedingly diverse in their national origins. But Portes and his associates tell us that there is one crucial case, at once standing out from all others and exemplifying the theoretical claims that the hypothesis of segmented assimilation seeks to advance: the Mexicans. As noted in the concluding chapter of *Legacies*, 'Mexican immigrants represent *the* textbook example of theoretically anticipated effects of low immigrant human capital combined with a negative context of reception' (Portes and Rumbaut 2001: 277; emphasis in the original).

Reviewing the book's findings on the offspring of Mexican immigrants, Portes and Rumbaut write that the 'cumulative results clearly point to a difficult process of adaptation and to the likelihood of downward assimilation . . .' and insist that these results warrant special attention, 'given the size of the Mexican immigrant population and its all but certain continuing growth in future years' (2001: 279). As further pointed out by Lopez and Stanton-Salazar, the authors of a chapter on Mexican Americans in *Ethnicities*, a companion volume to *Legacies*, the Mexican case is of 'unique importance', especially in California and the South-West, where Mexicans are 'by far the largest minority and are rapidly becoming the single-largest ethnic group . . .' (Lopez and Stanton-Salazar 2001: 58–9).

Conventional Assimilation

By contrast, researchers beginning from the standpoint of conventional assimilation theory frame the matter in far more optimistic terms. Alba and Nee's instantly influential book, *Remaking the American Mainstream* (2003), highlights the changes that facilitate progress, even for those immigrants and immigrant descendants who begin with substantial disadvantages. On the one hand, racism, and its associated ways of thinking and feeling, has lost legitimacy; on the other hand, discrimination on the basis of racial or ethnic origins has been prohibited, to very significant effect. Most significant is the change in the '*formal rules of state organizations*' (Alba and Nee 2003: 53; italics in the original), 'the institutional mechanisms extending civil rights to minorities and women have increased the cost of discrimination . . . in non-trivial ways' (2003: 57). This new perspective does not imply that all groups will move ahead in lockstep fashion and at the same rate. But it does suggest that downward mobility

is *not* the likely fate for the offspring of immigrant garment workers and dishwashers, or at least in the great majority.

As so many immigrant offspring grow up in families where the parents possess high levels of human capital and have attained middle-class jobs and lifestyles, proponents of conventional and segmented assimilation converge on at least one point: ‘the real issue . . . concerns the US-born generations from groups dominated by traditional labor migrants, such as Mexicans and Dominicans’ (Alba and Nee 2003: 246). However, the advocates of the conventional approach go on to frame the matter in optimistic terms. According to Alba, Farley and Nee (Alba and Nee 2003; Farley and Alba 2002), the fact that the parents begin at the very bottom of the occupational ladder makes upward—*not* downward—mobility the more probable outcome. Analysing data from the Current Population Survey, Farley and Alba (2002) show that second-generation persons originating in labour migrant groups do not possess the educational attainment of native-born whites; however, their schooling performance represents significant advance as compared to the first generation. The same holds for occupational attainment, where sizeable growth in white-collar employment among the offspring of labour migrants points to a major departure from the parental pattern, even though progress pales when compared to the offspring of Asian immigrants. Writing about Mexican and other less-advantaged second-generation groups, Alba and Nee contend that ‘a summary index of labor market position given by mean occupational score would show that the distance from the labor market situation of the immigrant generation is greater than that from the white majority’ (2003: 245). While Alba and Nee do worry about the prospects for the children of undocumented Mexican immigrants and note that ‘*some* of the children of labor migrants *may* stall in terms of their socioeconomic attainment’ (2003: 275; emphasis added), they conclude that ‘the socioeconomic advance in the second generation is quite broad for the children of low-wage laborers . . .’ (2003: 277).

Thus, the experience of second-generation Mexicans provides the crucial benchmark for assessing the competing claims of conventional and segmented assimilation theory. However, the contrast between these two perspectives may not be fully helpful, yielding too polarised and simplistic an opposition, especially as the scenarios of downward assimilation into ‘the underclass’ or steady advance into ‘the mainstream’ hardly exhaust the possibilities.

Working-Class Incorporation

As argued in earlier research (Perlmann and Waldinger 1997), the Mexican American second generation is likely to bear at least a passing resemblance to the Italian or Polish offspring of the labour migrants of the turn of the last century. In that case, a third hypothesis seems worthy of consideration. We propose that, while a working-class (and not an underclass) future represents the more likely outcome for today’s Mexican American second generation, the historical incorporation of Mexican immigrants as stigmatised labour migrants yields a distinctive legacy, namely the

funnelling of the second generation to jobs of lower quality than would be obtained on the basis of skills and experience alone.

This alternative hypothesis of 'working-class incorporation' builds on two literatures, one bearing on the specific group in question, the second on the intersection of ethnicity and labour-market structure. On the one hand, the historical research on Mexican Americans shows that the 'second generation' of interest to turn-of-the-twenty-first-century researchers represents nothing new. By the early 1930s, Emory Bogardus, based at the University of Southern California, had identified 'delinquency' as a phenomenon particularly common to immigrant children of Mexican descent (Bogardus 1929; 1934). Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Bogardus launched his students on a set of projects focusing on consumption patterns, parent-child relations and Americanisation among the offspring of Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles. Though largely unpublished, these studies have recently been analysed by historians (Monroy 1999): their portrait, of a second generation transformed by the lure of mass consumption, chafing at the restrictions imposed by their hierarchical parents, and bitterly resentful of the experience of discrimination, proves strikingly similar to the picture drawn by the contemporary advocates of segmented assimilation.

While conflict with authorities has been an enduring feature of Mexican American life, starting with the zoot suiters of the 1940s and continuing on to the present, earlier research chose not to frame the issue in the terms emphasised by the contemporary proponents of segmented assimilation. In their pioneering volume, *The Mexican-American People* (1970), for example, Grebler, Moore and Guzman sought to explain the sources of the barriers that kept the descendants of Mexican immigrants from moving ahead as did their Italian American counterparts, whom they resembled in so many ways. While emphasising the inadequacies of the conventional assimilation approach, Grebler *et al.* argued that the difficulties encountered by Mexican Americans involved their much greater confinement to the ranks of the working class, *not* 'downward assimilation' into some other class at yet a lower level. Similar themes were sounded by subsequent scholars: Moore and Pinderhughes' (1993) effort to assess the relevance of the underclass hypothesis for Latinos concluded that the sources of Latino poverty had far more to do with the problems of the working poor, as opposed to the difficulties experienced by those for whom 'work has disappeared'. Likewise, Vilma Ortiz' (1996) study of the Mexican experience in Los Angeles underscored the persistent disadvantage endured by the region's Mexican Americans, all the while pointing out that the native-born population had evolved into a group that was of distinctly working-class character.

On the other hand, the large literature on labour market segmentation (Doeringer and Piore 1971) and ethnic networks (Massey *et al.* 1987), enclaves (Portes and Bach 1985) and niches (Waldinger 1996) suggests that the labour market may not be the seamless 'mainstream' in which ethnicity plays little or no structuring role, as suggested by assimilation theory. While the contemporary literature provides little support for the earlier view of sharp demarcation between labour market segments,

there is ample evidence that job characteristics co-vary. As Tilly and Tilly argue (1998; see also Jencks *et al.* 1988), well-paying jobs offer opportunities for on-the-job training and less onerous supervision, whereas low pay is correlated with frequent supervision, work repetitiveness and perceived risk of job loss. Similarly, Kalleberg *et al.* (2000) have recently suggested that 'bad' jobs can be distinguished from 'good' jobs precisely because the different components contributing to job quality cluster together.

Likewise, one need not insist on insuperable barriers between labour market sectors to note that easy movement from one cluster of jobs to another is likely to be impeded. Different segments develop their own institutional practices: as Tilly (1998) has argued, categories interior to organisations get connected to such exterior categories as race, ethnicity and nativity; these linkages are particularly durable at the lower end of the labour market, where workers rely heavily on personal networks to find jobs (Holzer 1996). They are also common to the jobs on which migrants converge, leading newcomers to concentrate in jobs where others of their kind have already become established. While the first generation may start at the bottom, long-standing migrations extend their reach and penetration. Consequently, veteran immigrants may enjoy greater influence over hiring decisions, and greater access to supervisory and skilled jobs, generating resources that can in turn affect second-generation job options (Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Moreover, as persons sharing common traits often respond to a similar situation in like ways, the second generation is likely to seek or select a common set of jobs where their resources are best rewarded. Insofar as the second generation is embedded in a cluster of interlocking organisations, networks and activities, all of which link them to in-group associates, commonalities of this sort will shape their aspirations and careers (for a historical example, see Morawska 1985).

If connections to co-ethnics channel second-generation options, the decisions and views of outsiders might also circumscribe those possibilities. Employers may view the descendants of labour migrants through a particularly negative lens. Whereas the parents are preferred as the right workers for the wrong jobs (see Moss and Tilly 2001: 116–19), the offspring may be perceived as too Americanised, and therefore no longer appropriate for the undesirable tasks on which the foreign-born converge. At the same time, the immigrants' children may suffer from the shadow cast by the stigma associated with their parents' jobs: as labour migrants are often viewed as 'hard-working, *but dumb*' or 'dependable, *but unambitious*', that stereotype might impede the immigrants' offspring in their search for jobs where ambition and non-manual skills are more highly valued. Finally, Tilly's (1998) concept of 'opportunity hoarding' reminds us that ethnic networks have a dual effect, serving as sources of opportunity for insiders, but causes of closure for outsiders; consequently, second-generation Mexicans may find access to jobs dominated by other groups (for example, African Americans deeply embedded in the public sector) to be impeded.

While the children of Mexican-born immigrants are therefore unlikely to be stuck at the very bottom, progress beyond the status experienced by the parental generation

may falter well short of parity relative to dominant groups. From this perspective, therefore, the likely scenario entails continuity with the past, namely movement into the ranks of the working and lower-middle class. To the extent that Mexican immigrants continue to occupy the bottom-most rung, moreover, that presence will yield a persistent shadow effect, yielding a negative influence on the ways in which the children of immigrants are seen.

In sum, the literature points to three competing hypotheses regarding the labour market experience of second-generation Mexican American workers:

- Hypothesis 1: Segmented assimilation predicts downward assimilation into an underclass.
- Hypothesis 2: Conventional assimilation forecasts a process of individualistic mobility into the mainstream.
- Hypothesis 3: Working-class incorporation projects second-generation progress beyond the first generation, combined with continued, structured inequality relative to dominants.

The three-way comparison, however, yields two analytical focal points: job holding and job quality. *Job holding* provides the litmus test of the relevant claims made by the hypothesis of segmented assimilation: the prediction that the children of working-class immigrants will undergo downward assimilation into the underclass entails detachment from the world of work, whereas the two alternative hypotheses both assume that the high job-holding rates characteristic of the first generation persist to the second. By contrast, *job quality* among employed workers provides the key to adjudicating the contrast between the hypotheses of conventional assimilation and working-class incorporation. We now systematically pursue these contrasts, first discussing indicators, variables and data, and then moving on to the analysis.

Data, Variables and Method

Data

This paper uses data collected as part of the March demographic files of the Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly survey of a national probability sample of approximately 60,000 households, conducted by the US Bureau of the Census. Since 1994, questions about place of birth and parents' place of birth are a permanent feature of each month's survey, making the CPS the only large-scale dataset capable of identifying foreign-born, US-born of foreign parentage, and US-born of US-born parentage subgroups within the larger population.¹ As compared to the Census, the CPS has the further advantage of collecting information on aspects of non-monetary compensation relevant to assessing job quality, as well as attributes of the work environment (such as organisational size) likely to affect compensation, whether of the monetary or the non-monetary sort.

Though the CPS universe is far smaller than the Census, one can combine surveys from subsequent years to build up a sample of very respectable size; this paper makes particular use of a combined sample concatenating observations from the 2001 and 2003 Current Population Surveys. The CPS retains respondents for just under a 20-month period, interviewing individuals for four consecutive months, dropping them from the sample for the next eight months, and then re-interviewing them for another four consecutive months, after which time they are dropped from the sample completely. Consequently, surveys separated by a two-year interval contain no overlapping cases. As the CPS is a household survey, it is limited to the non-institutional population, excluding prisoners, students in dormitories, and the military.

In this paper, we restrict our purview to men aged 25–64. The literature is focused on differences *across* generations. However, as we have earlier shown (see Waldinger and Feliciano 2004), there are significant differences *within* generations *by* gender; further, these differences change from one generation to the next. In addition, factors affecting the employment and wages of women systematically vary from those impinging on men, requiring different models. As the discussion necessarily involves numerous inter-ethnic comparisons as well as contrasts across a series of dependent variables, consideration of gender adds layers of complication that extend beyond the confines of a single paper; we plan to address this matter in separate work.

Considerations related to both substance and the specifics of the case in hand lead us to restrict the discussion to adults. Working-class men typically experience a protracted transition from school to work (see Osterman 1980), with a greater tendency toward punctuated spells of work and non-work than undergone by more educated men at comparably early stages of adulthood. Consequently, the differences of interest are those that remain after the ‘settling down’ process has been completed. While concern with the contemporary second generation would often lead one to focus on younger adults—as many of the migrations are of such recent vintage that the population of second-generation adults is relatively small and very youthful—the distinctive nature and history of Mexican migration to the United States makes adults the appropriate category for analysis. Though migration from Mexico has swelled over the past 50 years, it is of long-standing nature, originating well before mid-century, not in the 1960s or later, as is true for most other groups. Moreover, the process of change, at least up until recently, has been continuous: the migrations have mainly emanated from central Mexico; they have converged on the US South-West; and the reception context has been consistently unfriendly. The large size and continuous nature of Mexican migration also produce reasonably large sample sizes, with 791 second-generation Mexican men and 1,583 third-generation-plus Mexican men represented among the 74,832 prime-aged men found when combining the 2001 and 2003 Current Population Surveys.

Inter-Group Comparisons

The article focuses on contrasts across the following groups:

- *First generation*: foreign-born Mexicans. As widely noted, time in the United States exercises a strong impact on immigrant attainment. Consequently, foreign-born Mexicans are disaggregated into three categories based on period of arrival:
 - 1970s or earlier;
 - 1980s;
 - 1990s or later.
- *Second generation*: native-born Mexicans of foreign parentage.
- *Third generation-plus*:
 - native-born Mexicans of native parentage;
 - native-born, non-hispanic whites of native parentage;
 - native-born, non-hispanic blacks of native-born parentage.

As denoted by its label, the ‘third-generation-plus’ grouping is heterogeneous, including persons whose ancestry in the United States may date back three or more generations. Although we identify three generations of Mexican origin, all references to whites or blacks *only* extend to third-generation-plus members of those populations. All other persons are retained in all analyses, but grouped into a residual category (‘all others’), as they are not the focus of interest. First- and second-generation whites and blacks have been grouped into this ‘all other’ category. Sample sizes for each group, in unweighted and weighted form, can be found in Table 1.

As with other similar studies (Farley and Alba 2002; Grogger and Trejo 2002), the contrasts between Mexican-origin generations developed in this paper are cross-sectional: neither directly nor indirectly do they match parents with children who may have entered the labour market at an earlier period of time. The disadvantages of this approach are well known, principally pertaining to any impact of changes in migrant selectivity or to inter-generational shifts in ethnic persistence.² On the other hand, as argued by Grogger and Trejo (2002), the cross-sectional approach holds the social and economic environment constant. By contrast, a longitudinal approach might conflate those shifts due to changed conditions—affecting all generations (whether positively, such as a decline in discrimination against Mexican Americans, or negatively, such as an increase in inequality)—with those that are due to strictly generational factors. Potential biases affecting second-/third-generation contrasts are mitigated by the long-term stability in the social images and social structure of Mexican Americans (as argued by Lopez and Stanton-Salazar 2001), which implies that the standing of the self-identified, third-plus generation will affect the options available to the second generation. Controlling for year of migration and focusing on outcomes among the more settled migrants provide a reasonable proxy for the Mexican immigrants from whom today’s second generation are likely to be descended. Last, and most importantly, the substantive questions pursued emphasise

the contrasts, in job-holding and job-quality patterns, between second-generation Mexicans and third-generation-plus blacks and whites.

Dependent Variables

In assessing the hypothesis that the Mexican American second generation might experience ‘downward assimilation’, we need to remember that the Mexican first generation is concentrated in jobs that lie at the very bottom of the labour market. From that standpoint, ‘downward’ really means *out* of the labour market, a statement consistent with the view that an ‘underclass’ emerges ‘when work disappears’ (Wilson 1996).

Job Holding

Following Jencks (1992), we focus on three indicators of labour force attachment as measures of *job holding*. The numbering of these, and the subsequent two indicators of job quality, will be followed in the paper’s analysis and findings.

1. *Employment*—a dichotomous category separating those people with a job from those who are either out of work or looking for a job as well as those who are out of the labour force altogether during the survey week. This indicator alone, however, is likely to be too restrictive. If low-skilled workers experience high levels of frictional unemployment, a snapshot taken at any one point in time is likely to miss a recent, previous experience of employment.
2. *Weeks worked*—average weeks of work employed in the previous year for all those with at least one week of employment during that period, a continuous variable ranging from 1 to 52. As opposed to workers caught in the secondary labour market, where they churn from one job to another with a high frequency, persons in an ‘underclass’ would experience long-term joblessness. Thus, to capture the population with the weakest attachment to the labour market, we examine differences in:
3. *Chronic unemployment*—a dichotomous variable distinguishing men with no employment record during the previous year from those with one week of work or more during the previous year. This variable is coded one if the person is chronically unemployed, otherwise zero.

When predicting labour force attachment on each of these three indicators, the universe includes all men in the sample.

Job Quality

In assessing the hypothesis that Mexican American second-generation workers either move into a seamless ‘mainstream’ or experience persistent ethnic inequality, we build on work by Kalleberg *et al.* (2000) to identify two indicators of *job quality*:

4. *Low wages*—as Kalleberg and his collaborators note, ‘wages are a fundamental dimension of job quality’. We define low-wage jobs as those at the bottom fifth of the earnings distribution. The earnings distribution is based on the earnings for men. Employed men with wages in the bottom quintile are coded as one; all other employed men are coded zero. When predicting low wages, the universe includes men with non-zero wage or salary earnings in the prior year (2000 or 2002). The self-employed are excluded because the CPS only collects data on wages and salaries for the incorporated self-employed only, whereas most self-employed are unincorporated.
5. *Receipt of benefits*—a dichotomous variable, distinguishing employed men without benefits from those with at least one benefit. As noted by Kalleberg *et al.* (2000) as well as other researchers (e.g. Farber 1997; Tilly 1997), fringe benefits—most notably pensions and health insurance—comprise a crucial dimension of job quality. In the United States, health and pension benefits are largely provided by employers. From the 1940s to the 1970s, the proportion of the workforce covered by employment-based fringe benefits expanded; as the growth was circumscribed, often limited to larger organisations and collectivities, the distinction between ‘bad’ and ‘good’ jobs closely mapped to the availability of benefits, as argued by the earlier segmentationist scholars. Over the past 25 years, trends have moved in the opposite direction, as rising healthcare costs and the prospect of expanded liabilities for long-lived retired workers have led firms to cut back on the provision of fringes. Notwithstanding, larger organisations as well as public employers continue to be the most likely to provide fringe benefits. As Alba and Nee’s revised account of assimilation places so much emphasis on institutional factors, a focus on access to benefits could shed light on the potential role of ethnicity in structuring what Alba and Nee (2003) describe as ‘the mainstream’.

Information on both health benefits and pension provision is collected in the Current Population Survey. Respondents are asked whether the employer provides a pension plan for any of the employers; those answering yes are then asked whether they are covered in the plan. Respondents are also asked whether they received health insurance, and if so, whether coverage extended to other family members and to what extent payments were made by the employer.

When predicting benefits, the universe includes employed men, in either public or private sectors. The self-employed are again excluded, because they are much less likely than the employed to enjoy any form of fringe benefit. As whites are also much more likely to be found in self-employment than any of the other groups, the confounding effects of self-employment on benefits yield a downward effect on any estimate of the ‘white effect’ among the employed.

Independent Variables

In estimating the factors affecting job holding, we work with a simple model, implying that outcome disparities reflect differences in background characteristics. Based on this model, we use a standard set of independent variables, including group membership; potential work experience (age minus years of schooling minus 6); education; married; children present in the household; veteran status; disability status; and metropolitan status. The group memberships are coded as a set of dummy variables (1 = in a specific group, 0 = other); native whites of native parentage comprise the reference category in all of the analyses. Education is represented by the five dummy variables of elementary; some high school; some college; college; graduate degree; high school completion is the reference category. The remaining variables are all dummies, coded so that 1 equals yes (e.g. married).

Benefits are affected by organisational characteristics: larger employers, and especially those in the public sector, are at once more likely to employ a formalised personnel system that diminishes the impact of discrimination and to provide both pension and health benefits. Following Kalleberg *et al.* (2000), our models estimating wages and benefits add a set of variables pertaining to organisational characteristics: we include a dummy variable for sector (coded 1 if the job is found in the public sector, 0 if in the private sector) and then five dummy variables identifying employer size (fewer than 10; 10–24; 25–99; 100–499; 500–999; 1000 or more represents the omitted category).

Groups' Differences

The patterns of groups' differences in independent variables are displayed in Tables 1–3 and can be described in the following summary. Though whites have the highest levels of education, the difference between the foreign-born and *all* the native-born groups is the most salient contrast: primary schooling is the modal category among the immigrants, as opposed to high school completion among all other groups. The disparity between the foreign-born and native-born Mexican-origin groups deserves underscoring: while the hypothesis of segmented assimilation predicts 'downward assimilation', the educational advantage displayed by the immigrant offspring should imply a corresponding advantage in the labour market, not slippage into a 'world without work'. Note, however, that the comparison between second-generation and third-generation-plus Mexican Americans shows no comparable upgrading, with the former more likely to have achieved some college education or more.

Levels of experience are lowest among the most recently arrived immigrants and among second-generation Mexicans. Marital rates are highest among the longest-settled immigrants and lowest among African Americans. The proportion with children under 18 is highest among the immigrants of the 1980s and lowest among African Americans. Veterans of military service comprise just over a fifth of the whites and blacks and a slightly smaller proportion among the native-born Mexican-origin

Table 1. Means, working-age males, 2001 and 2003 March CPS (N =74,832)

Variables	Whites	Blacks	Mexicans: early arrivals	Mexicans: 80s arrivals	Mexicans: 90s arrivals	Second-generation Mexicans	Third-generation Mexicans	All others
Weeks worked (mean)	44.22	37.87	43.23	46.51	43.85	42.77	43.70	42.94
% employed	84.31	70.95	82.05	88.23	87.10	81.14	83.23	82.44
% jobless	4.43	7.48	4.66	1.35	3.38	5.78	4.04	4.47
Education								
Primary	1.80	3.11	45.27	41.45	42.10	6.57	7.36	6.31
Some HS	6.37	12.71	15.49	22.29	23.92	13.91	15.55	7.84
Completed HS	32.03	40.53	19.78	21.93	20.10	34.96	36.71	25.41
Some college	27.33	27.90	11.45	9.93	7.38	30.75	28.32	22.32
College degree	21.60	12.04	5.84	2.99	4.68	11.29	9.48	23.12
Graduate training	10.86	3.72	2.16	1.40	1.81	2.51	2.59	15.00
Labour force experience								
Experience (mean years)	24.02	23.77	31.31	22.55	19.16	20.38	22.39	22.67
Family context								
% married	70.46	47.79	75.92	72.22	56.01	57.46	63.77	64.04
% with children 18 +	46.39	41.25	65.24	78.31	68.29	53.79	57.72	48.15
Work characteristics								
% veterans	21.40	22.42	3.32	0.40	0.03	15.94	17.01	10.94
% disabled	7.64	14.68	8.17	3.61	2.27	7.98	8.17	5.94
City context								
% metropolitan residents	77.22	86.45	89.87	92.41	91.39	92.49	86.01	93.10
Weighted sample sizes	46,595	7,581	1,016	1,180	1,609	791	1,583	14,576

Table 2. Means, employed males in public and private sector, 2001 and 2003 March CPS (N = 52,303)

Variables	Whites	Blacks	Mexicans: early arrivals	Mexicans: 80s arrivals	Mexicans: 90s arrivals	Second-generation Mexicans	Third-generation Mexicans	All others
% with pension plan provided at work	72.85	64.56	45.25	33.00	18.64	58.50	61.19	58.31
% included in pension plan	64.76	53.93	37.56	25.31	10.67	48.12	49.70	48.73
% with health insurance	77.29	67.67	57.62	43.21	28.94	65.25	68.29	67.05
% with employer-paid pension plan	74.47	64.38	55.92	40.83	27.55	62.25	64.43	64.79
% with no benefits	15.34	23.50	37.40	51.06	68.45	28.99	24.74	26.18
Number of benefits (mean)	2.66	2.20	1.90	1.36	0.82	2.14	2.27	2.20
Education								
Primary	0.91	1.51	42.10	41.29	41.23	3.57	4.94	5.35
Some HS	5.29	9.18	15.43	21.54	23.71	11.38	13.69	7.20
Completed HS	30.97	40.33	22.30	23.09	21.30	35.44	37.24	24.92
Some college	27.93	30.40	13.15	9.65	7.58	35.13	30.50	22.49
College degree	23.93	14.36	4.99	3.08	4.79	11.92	10.96	23.99
Graduate training	11.40	4.22	2.04	1.34	1.40	2.57	2.67	16.05
Labour force experience								
Experience (mean years)	22.26	22.12	29.77	22.17	18.80	18.44	21.24	21.13
Family context								
% married	72.02	53.68	77.87	71.44	57.33	60.37	66.03	65.24
% with children 18 +	50.13	45.78	67.72	79.22	68.58	55.71	59.75	50.65
Work characteristics								
% veterans	20.02	21.83	4.45	0.50	0.03	15.58	16.67	9.92
% disabled	1.86	2.48	1.04	0.41	0.52	1.60	1.63	1.36
City context								
% resident metropolitan area	79.28	86.90	90.44	92.46	91.33	91.42	87.20	93.52

Table 2 (Continued)

Variables	Whites	Blacks	Mexicans: early arrivals	Mexicans: 80s arrivals	Mexicans: 90s arrivals	Second-generation Mexicans	Third-generation Mexicans	All others
Employment characteristics								
% employed public sector	15.17	20.65	7.13	1.93	1.49	15.24	17.49	12.97
Corporation size								
Fewer than 10	11.19	8.21	14.56	18.42	23.11	12.90	11.21	13.01
10–24	8.86	7.59	11.18	16.48	21.21	9.40	10.89	10.30
25–99	14.54	10.98	23.57	23.75	22.43	13.36	13.81	14.15
100–499	15.73	14.67	19.26	17.33	11.68	15.58	15.07	14.96
500–999	5.74	7.15	3.61	4.75	3.72	5.40	5.22	5.29
1000+	43.95	51.40	27.82	19.27	17.85	43.36	43.80	42.29
Weighted sample sizes	32,639	4,906	719	939	1,280	574	1,197	10,049

Table 3. Means, employed males with non-zero earnings in public and private sector, 2001 and 2003 March CPS (N = 56,764)

Variables	Whites	Blacks	Mexicans: early arrivals	Mexicans: 80s arrivals	Mexicans: 90s arrivals	Second-generation Mexicans	Third-generation Mexicans	All others
% with poverty job	1.95	4.63	7.24	9.99	14.60	4.07	3.92	3.96
% lowest quintile earnings	15.28	29.67	31.87	47.32	59.89	24.03	27.56	24.92
Education								
Primary	1.02	1.61	43.88	42.37	42.17	4.79	5.77	5.64
Some HS	5.57	9.82	15.53	21.26	23.98	12.45	14.51	7.41
Completed HS	31.58	40.53	21.37	23.26	20.49	34.24	36.74	25.28
Some college	27.99	30.45	12.41	9.04	7.23	33.76	30.14	22.64
College degree	22.77	13.59	4.93	2.83	4.71	11.70	10.35	23.54
Graduate training	11.07	4.01	1.88	1.23	1.42	3.07	2.49	15.48
Labour force experience								
Experience (mean years)	22.49	22.12	30.06	22.33	18.92	18.99	21.24	21.32
Family context								
% married	71.05	52.02	76.88	71.55	57.27	59.36	65.12	64.38
% with children 18+	49.12	45.74	68.76	78.82	68.94	55.42	60.23	49.87
Work characteristics								
% veterans	20.46	22.51	4.02	0.46	0.03	15.80	16.77	10.17
% disabled	2.78	4.08	2.97	1.43	0.70	2.19	2.29	2.08
City context								
% resident metropolitan area	78.89	86.80	89.70	92.54	91.52	91.70	86.75	93.31
Employment characteristics								
% employed public sector	14.29	18.88	6.38	1.77	1.38	14.15	16.30	12.16

Table 3 (Continued)

Variables	Whites	Blacks	Mexicans: early arrivals	Mexicans: 80s arrivals	Mexicans: 90s arrivals	Second-generation Mexicans	Third-generation Mexicans	All others
Corporation size								
Fewer than 10	11.54	8.74	13.83	18.42	23.53	13.42	12.23	13.33
10–24	8.99	8.01	12.37	16.17	21.09	9.37	11.01	10.47
25–99	14.62	11.40	23.20	24.06	22.09	13.04	13.28	14.23
100–499	15.70	14.77	20.03	17.04	12.37	14.88	14.94	15.21
500–999	5.73	7.00	3.64	4.97	3.71	5.39	5.02	5.29
1000+	43.43	50.09	26.91	19.34	17.21	43.89	43.53	41.47
Weighted sample sizes	35,142	5,529	796	1,023	1,385	634	1,308	10,947

groups; among the immigrants, only a tiny fraction of the most settled group reports prior military service, with virtually no veterans to be found among those who arrived in the 1980s or after. Roughly 15 per cent of all African American men report that they are disabled, a fraction twice as high as that found among any other group. By contrast, fewer than 3 per cent of employed African Americans report that they are disabled, a proportion still higher (though only slightly) than among the other groups. Among the employed, differences in public sector employment largely fall out around the foreign/native divide, with all three immigrant cohorts enjoying little if any access to government jobs. Blacks are the most likely to work in the public sector, though over-representation is quite slight relative to the other native-born groups. Similarly, variations in distribution across employer size-classes principally reflect foreign/native differences, with the newest arrivals the most likely to work for small and the least likely to work for large organisations. In this respect, the comparison between the foreign-born and the native-born Mexican-origin groups suggests that the latter have moved out of immigrant enclaves and niches, and into the economic mainstream. Table 1 presents means and standard deviations for all men, by group; Table 2 presents means and standard deviations for all men with non-zero wage and salary earnings in the year prior to the survey, again by group; and Table 3 presents means and standard deviations for all employed men in public or private sectors, by group.

Method

The primary purpose of the multivariate analyses is to estimate the net differences in job holding and job quality among the groups, while controlling for group differences in the independent variables we just described. For all dependent variables, we start with a simple regression estimating the group differences in an outcome variable j without any control variable, except group memberships:

$$\text{outcome}_j = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Black}) + \beta_2(\text{1st Gen.}) + \beta_3(\text{2nd Gen.}) + \beta_4(\text{3rd + Gen.}) \quad (1)$$

In equation (1), β_0 represents the average value of the outcome variable j for native-born whites, who are the reference group in the analysis. Other β s represent specific groups' averages as deviations from whites'.

Then, we estimate the second regression model with a set of complete independent variables (X_i):

$$\begin{aligned} \text{outcome}_j = & \beta_0^C + \beta_1^C(\text{Black}) + \beta_2^C(\text{1st Gen.}) + \beta_3^C(\text{2nd Gen.}) \\ & + \beta_4^C(\text{3rd + Gen.}) + \sum_{i=1}^k \beta_i X_i \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

The main difference between a group-specific coefficient, β , in equation (1) and a corresponding β^C in equation (2) is that the β^C indicates the group-specific deviation from the average for whites while holding constant all the other

independent variables. In both equations, the intercept (β_0, β_0^C) reflects the average level of the outcome for whites.

We determined whether the additional control variables (X_i) contribute to the overall fit of the regression model using the likelihood-ratio test (Stata 2003) and the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) statistics (for a recent review of BIC and other similar statistics, see Weakliem 2004). In addition, we also tested whether each group-specific coefficient (β, β^C) is statistically different as compared to any of the other groups using the Wald statistics (Stata 2003). Results are reported along with regression results.

Since the CPS employs multi-stage clustered sampling, we use regression procedures specifically designed for complex survey data available from Stata (2003). These regression procedures use pseudo-maximum-likelihood methods that compute proper standard errors for estimated coefficients. We use survey regression analogues of ordinary least-square regression for continuous outcomes and logistic regression for binary outcomes.

In addition to the regressions, we conduct a series of decomposition analyses, following the conventions established in the literature (see Blinder 1973; Cotton 1988). The decomposition analyses seek to isolate the impact of groups' differences in independent variables from groups' differences in regression coefficients on groups' differences in outcome variables. Theoretically, one can view the regression coefficients as 'returns' that respondents receive for their characteristics.

To be more concrete, the procedure goes as follows. First we run a regression model for each group (note that group-specific indicators are not in the model, as we are including only one specific group of interest at a time):

$$\text{outcome}_j = \beta_0 + \sum_{i=1}^k \beta_i X_i \tag{3}$$

We then predict outcomes with white coefficients (β_i^W) and the group means for the independent variables (\bar{X}_i^G):

$$\widehat{\text{outcome}}_j = \hat{\beta}_0^W + \sum_{i=1}^k \hat{\beta}_i^W \bar{X}_i^G \tag{4}$$

Finally, we predict outcomes with group coefficients β_i^G and white means \bar{X}_i^W :

$$\widehat{\text{outcome}}_j = \hat{\beta}_0^G + \sum_{i=1}^k \hat{\beta}_i^G \bar{X}_i^W \tag{5}$$

Equation (4) simulates a scenario in which minority groups receive whites' returns for their characteristics, while equation (5) simulates a scenario in which minority groups have improved their work-related characteristics at par with whites'. Comparison of these predicted values gives us clues to the source of the observed group differences in outcome variables.

Unfortunately we could not extend this procedure to the foreign-born groups, as the many dummy variables in the regressions, combined with the characteristics of the foreign-born respondents, produced too many empty cells; on the other hand, the crucial comparisons involve the four native-born categories, for which we could appropriately implement a decomposition.

Findings

Labour Force Attachment

To reiterate, the hypothesis of segmented assimilation forecasts that levels of labour force attachment among Mexican-origin men will diminish as generational status increases, leading to convergence with the patterns for native-born minorities. We examine in turn each of the five independent variables specified earlier.

1. *Employment*—as shown by Model 1 in Table 4, employment probabilities are highest among the very recent immigrants, significantly exceeding those of third-generation-plus whites (the omitted category). Relative to the most recent immigrants, second- as well as third-generation-plus Mexican Americans are much less likely to be employed. When compared to third-generation-plus whites, however, these latter groups have employment probabilities that are only modestly lower; furthermore, the difference is not statistically significant. By contrast, as shown by the Wald statistics at the bottom of the table, job-holding probabilities among both second- and third-generation-plus Mexican Americans are much higher than among third-generation-plus blacks.

The independent variables yield the expected impact on employment probabilities, with higher levels of education, marital status and children increasing the odds of job holding, whereas low levels of schooling, veteran status and, most notably, disability, yield effects in the opposite direction. As similar patterns are observed in the regressions on weeks of work and chronic joblessness, there is no further discussion.

In general, the application of controls has only a modest effect on inter-group differences. The advantages held by the more recently arrived immigrants do fade, relative to whites; the shift is largely due to the impact of veteran status (which exercises a modestly negative influence) and disability (which exercises a severely downward influence). As both are found at much lower levels among the foreign-born than among any of the native-born groups, controlling for these characteristics reduces the foreign-born advantage. By comparison, application of controls does little to reduce the gaps between whites and the native-born Mexican-origin groups, though the remaining differentials are not statistically significant. As regards the contrast to blacks, controls leave the pattern observed at the zero-order level unchanged: employment probabilities among both second- and third-generation-plus Mexican Americans significantly exceed those found among blacks.

Table 4. Effect parameters for logit model predicting likelihood of employment for working-age males, 2001 and 2003 March CPS (N = 74,832)

Variables	Baseline model		Full model	
	Odds ratio	Standard error	Odds ratio	Standard error
Ethnic generational status¹				
Third-generation Blacks	.454**	.015	.568**	.024
Mexican early arrivals	.850	.090	1.47**	.200
Mexican 1980s arrivals	1.39**	.161	1.14	.151
Mexican 1990s arrivals	1.25**	.122	.965	.110
Second-generation Mexicans	.800	.096	.827	.118
Third-generation Mexicans	.924	.080	.989	.105
All others	.874**	.025	.756**	.026
Education²				
Primary	–		.918	.067
Some HS	–		.749**	.035
Some college	–		1.20**	.041
College degree	–		1.42**	.059
Graduate training	–		1.44**	.077
Labour force experience				
Experience (mean years)	–		1.10**	.005
Experience squared	–		.99**	.00009
Family context				
Married	–		1.83**	.056
Have children 18+ years	–		1.16**	.036
Work characteristics				
% veterans	–		.835**	.028
% disabled	–		.047**	.002
City context				
Resident metropolitan area	–		1.13**	.037
Third-gen. Blacks as reference				
Second-generation Mexicans	1.761**	.218	1.453**	.123
Third-generation Mexicans	2.032**	.184	1.739**	.194
Third-gen. Mexicans as reference				
Second-generation Mexicans	.866	.127	.835	.147
Model fit				
Log Likelihood	–34,165		–25,902 ⁺⁺	
BIC	–771,419		–787,810 ⁺⁺	
Weighted sample size	74,832		74,832	

Notes: ¹Whites excluded; ²Completed High School excluded; *p < .05; **p < .01; ⁺⁺ significant decrement in BIC and increment in Log Likelihood relative to baseline model.

2. *Weeks of work*—as Table 5 shows, weeks of work are either greater or the same among the foreign-born, as well as third-generation-plus Mexican Americans, as among native whites. Second-generation Mexican Americans work roughly one and a half fewer weeks than do whites; third-generation-plus blacks, however, work almost six and a half fewer weeks than do whites, a level significantly lower than that achieved by either of the two native-born Mexican-origin groups.

After application of controls, the immigrants who arrived prior to the 1990s show longer weeks of work than third-generation-plus whites. By contrast, the coefficient for the most recently arrived immigrants shows that they work one and a half weeks fewer than native whites. Weeks of work among the two native-born Mexican-origin stand at parity relative to native whites. African Americans, however, work three weeks fewer than native whites, a disparity that is statistically significant with respect to whites as well as to second- and third-generation-plus Mexican Americans.

3. *Chronic joblessness*—as compared to third-generation-plus whites, Mexican immigrants of the 1980s were less likely, and African Americans more likely, to report chronic joblessness, as shown in Table 6. Other differences were not significant, though we note the relatively low rate of chronic unemployment among the immigrants of the 1990s, and the relatively high rate of chronic joblessness among the second generation.

African Americans remain more likely to experience chronic joblessness, after controlling for background differences. While the coefficients for other groups, most notably second-generation Mexicans and Mexican immigrants of the 1990s, are of similar size, standard errors are large, and differences are not statistically significant. Among immigrants arriving prior to the 1990s, however, chronic joblessness is significantly lower, relative to third-generation-plus whites.

Summing up thus far, we can say that, although levels of education among the foreign-born are low, and low levels of schooling consistently yield negative impacts on all three outcomes of interest, the foreign-born show remarkably strong levels of labour force attachment, whether before or after controls. While African Americans are much better educated than the foreign-born, they fare poorly on all three indicators, whether before or after controls. Although second-generation Mexicans show weaker labour force attachment compared to whites, differences never attain conventional levels of statistical significance at the zero-order level and are then further reduced by controls. In contrast to African Americans, moreover, second-generation Mexicans are more likely to be employed and to work more weeks, a disparity that appears both before and after controls. While the gap between white and Mexican-origin third-generation-plus men is slight on all three indicators, both before and after controls, the same comparison indicates that the latter have significantly stronger levels of labour force attachment than those displayed by their African American counterparts. Thus, we find no support for the hypothesis of segmented assimilation.

Table 5. Effect parameters for OLS model predicting number of weeks worked in previous year for working-age males, 2001 and 2003 March CPS (N = 74,832)

Variables	Baseline model		Full model	
	Odds ratio	Standard error	Odds ratio	Standard error
Ethnic generational status¹				
Third-generation Blacks	-6.34**	.317	-3.10**	.252
Mexican early arrivals	-.987	.719	2.28**	.628
Mexican 1980s arrivals	2.28**	.500	.950*	.461
Mexican 1990s arrivals	-.355	.532	-1.71**	.531
Second-generation Mexicans	-1.45	.844	-.582	.704
Third-generation Mexicans	-.523	.551	.046	.442
All others	-1.27**	.193	-1.66**	.168
Education²				
Primary	-		-.589	.414
Some HS	-		-2.37**	.284
Some college	-		.953**	.162
College degree	-		1.06**	.173
Graduate training	-		.951**	.205
Labour force experience				
Experience (mean years)	-		.736**	.027
Experience squared	-		-.019**	.0005
Family context				
Married	-		3.50**	.161
Have children 18+ years	-		.474**	.144
Work characteristics				
% veterans	-		-.516**	.178
% disabled	-		-30.11	.317
City context				
Resident metropolitan area	-		.597**	.158
Third-gen. Blacks as reference				
Second-generation Mexicans	4.890**	.894	2.519**	.741
Third-generation Mexicans	5.822**	.624	3.148**	.499
Third-gen. Mexicans as reference				
Second-generation Mexicans	-.931	1.000	-.629	.823
Model fit				
Constant	44.22**	.087	38.94**	.343
R-square		.01		.33
Weighted sample size		74,832	74,832	

Notes: ¹Whites excluded; ²Completed High School excluded; *p < .05; ** p < .01.

Table 6. Effect parameters for logit model predicting chronic joblessness in previous year for working-age males, 2001 and 2003 March CPS (N = 74,832)

Variables	Baseline model		Full model	
	Odds ratio	Standard error	Odds ratio	Standard error
Ethnic generational status ¹				
Third-generation Blacks	1.74**	.101	1.20**	.083
Mexican early arrivals	1.05	.217	.739	.176
Mexican 1980s arrivals	.296**	.089	.426**	.149
Mexican 1990s arrivals	.754	.127	1.30	.242
Second-generation Mexicans	1.32	.275	1.32	.308
Third-generation Mexicans	.909	.155	.865	.154
All others	1.00	.051	1.15**	.067
Education ²				
Primary	–		.905	.097
Some HS	–		1.17*	.085
Some college	–		.813**	.046
College degree	–		.862*	.062
Graduate training	–		.747**	.072
Labour force experience				
Experience (mean years)	–		.951**	.008
Experience squared	–		1.00**	.0001
Family context				
Married	–		.736**	.036
Have children 18+ years	–		.655**	.035
Work characteristics				
% veterans	–		1.15**	.061
% disabled	–		9.48**	.473
City context				
Resident metropolitan area	–		1.09	.059
Third-gen. Blacks as reference				
Second-generation Mexicans	.759	.161	1.092	.263
Third-generation Mexicans	.521**	.092	.715	.134
Third-gen. Mexicans as reference				
Second-generation Mexicans	1.456	.387	1.526	.445
Model fit				
Log Likelihood		–14,061		–11,241 ⁺⁺
BIC		–811,627		–817,132 ⁺⁺
Weighted sample size		74,832		74,832

Notes: ¹Whites excluded; ²Completed High School excluded; *p < .05; **p < .01; ⁺⁺ significant decrement in BIC and increment in Log Likelihood relative to baseline model.

Job Quality

4. *Low wage jobs*—concentration in low-wage jobs varies greatly among the groups of interest: roughly 15 per cent of whites receive wages that fall at the bottom quintile of the wage distribution, compared to 60 per cent among Mexican immigrants who arrived after 1990. Re-presenting these differences as odds ratios, the coefficients in Table 7 show that whites are significantly less likely to work in bottom-quintile jobs, with the greatest disparity relative to the two more recently arrived immigrant cohorts. While over-represented in these low-wage jobs, second-generation Mexican men are significantly less likely than blacks to be at the bottom quintile of the wage distribution. By contrast, third-generation-plus Mexican Americans and blacks were equally as likely to work in low-wage jobs.

The coefficients for the educational categories have very strong effects; low levels of education exercise a particularly strong impact on the likelihood of employment in a low-wage job. Given educational differences between the foreign- and native-born minority men in the sample, controls do more to reduce the disadvantage experienced by the foreign-born than among blacks or the native-born Mexican Americans. However, after controls, blacks are more likely to be employed in low-quintile jobs than either group of Mexican American men.

5. *Benefits*—whites are significantly more likely than all other groups to enjoy at least one fringe benefit, as shown in Table 8. Not surprisingly, the most recent immigrants stand at the greatest disadvantage, though the gap between whites and the more settled immigrants remains high. Blacks were significantly more likely than second-generation Mexican Americans to receive at least one benefit. By contrast, there was no significant difference in receipt of benefits between blacks and third-generation-plus Mexican Americans; as compared to the second generation, the odds that the latter would receive benefits approached conventional levels of statistical significance.

While the impact of background factors resembles the pattern seen earlier, this regression highlights the role of organisational characteristics. Workers in the public sector are significantly more likely than those in the private sector to receive benefits. Likewise, men working in the largest organisations (the omitted category) are more likely to receive benefits than those in any of the other size-classes; workers in the smallest firms—where immigrants are greatly over-represented and blacks are under-represented—enjoy little access to fringe benefits of any source. Although the model's fit is greatly improved after adding other variables, whites' lead, relative to all other groups, remains very strong. Controlling for other variables has the greatest effect on the three immigrant cohorts, though probabilities for receipt of benefits remain quite low for the more recent cohorts. The relative standing among the native-born minority groups, however, shifts, with third-generation-plus Mexican Americans the

Table 7. Effect parameters for logit model predicting presence in lowest income quintile among males in public or private sector, 2001 and 2003 March CPS (N = 56,764)

Variables	Baseline model		Full model	
	Odds ratio	Standard error	Odds ratio	Standard error
Ethnic generational status¹				
Third-generation Blacks	2.33**	.093	2.03**	.091
Mexican early arrivals	2.59**	.253	1.30**	.145
Mexican 1980s arrivals	4.97**	.401	2.74**	.257
Mexican 1990s arrivals	8.23**	.580	3.75**	.314
Second-generation Mexicans	1.75**	.211	1.28*	.168
Third-generation Mexicans	2.10**	.170	1.66**	.146
All others	1.83**	.056	1.83**	.063
Education²				
Primary	—		2.57**	.173
Some HS	—		1.95**	.091
Some college	—		.692**	.023
College degree	—		.398**	.017
Graduate training	—		.347**	.022
Labour force experience				
Experience (mean years)	—		.904**	.004
Experience squared	—		1.00**	.0001
Family context				
Married	—		.442**	.013
Have children 18+ years	—		.939*	.029
Work characteristics				
% veterans	—		1.07*	.040
% disabled	—		5.59**	.390
City context				
Resident metropolitan area	—		.688**	.023
Employment characteristics				
Public sector employment	—		.808**	.038
Corporation size³				
Fewer than 10	—		2.83**	.116
10–24	—		1.85**	.084
25–99	—		1.32**	.054
100–499	—		1.15**	.047
500–999	—		1.05	.068
Third-gen. Blacks as reference				
Second-generation Mexicans	.750**	.093	.629**	.085
Third-generation Mexicans	.901	.078	.818*	.077

Table 7 (Continued)

Variables	Baseline model		Full model	
	Odds ratio	Standard error	Odds ratio	Standard error
Third-gen. Mexicans as reference				
Second-generation Mexicans	.831	.119	.768	.119
Model fit				
Log Likelihood	–27,795		–24,061 ⁺⁺	
BIC	–565,697		–572,967 ⁺⁺	
Weighted sample size	56,764		56,764	

Notes: ¹Whites excluded; ²Completed High School excluded; ³Greater than 1,000 employees excluded; *p < .05; **p < .01; ++ significant decrement in BIC and increment in Log Likelihood relative to baseline model.

most likely, and blacks the least likely, to receive benefits, though only the differences in the coefficients for blacks and each Mexican American generation are statistically significant (as opposed to the difference between the second and third Mexican American generations).

To sum up our findings on job quality, although low levels of education appear to exercise little impact on job-holding patterns among Mexican immigrants, the effects of low levels of schooling (and other deficits associated with a foreign background) are readily perceptible when the focus shifts to an analysis of compensation. In contrast to the immigrants, the native-born minority groups are less likely to work in low-wage jobs and are more likely to enjoy fringe benefits. Notwithstanding, neither native-born Mexican-origin nor third-generation-plus blacks match the levels achieved by whites. Relative to the Mexican American groups, blacks are more likely to work in large organisations, where fringe benefits are the most likely to be available and personnel systems are the most heavily bureaucratised and therefore the least susceptible to discriminatory pressures; however, controlling for these characteristics reduces any advantages enjoyed by blacks. On the other hand, the native-born Mexican-origin groups are as likely to work for large organisations as whites and display comparable levels of public sector employment. Nonetheless, white versus Mexican American disparities persist after controlling for background characteristics.

The Sources of Disparity: Characteristics or Treatment?

Thus far, we have been interested in the size and sign of the coefficients for the ethnic dummies, contrasting differences before and after applying controls for the entire sample. But the more relevant intellectual question may be somewhat different: namely, how would disparities alter under a hypothetical situation, in which either group characteristics or treatment were made similar to those of the most advantaged group? To pursue this question, we conducted a series of decompositions, as described above. The decompositions are displayed in a series of graphs (Figure 1) presenting, for each group, first a baseline figure then a prediction based on the group

Table 8. Effect parameters for logit model predicting no benefits at job among employed males in public or private sector, 2001 and 2003 March CPS (N = 52,303)

Variables	Baseline model		Full model	
	Odds ratio	Standard error	Odds ratio	Standard error
Ethnic generational status¹				
Third-generation Blacks	1.69**	.077	1.84**	.095
Mexican early arrivals	3.29**	.329	2.05**	.237
Mexican 1980s arrivals	5.75**	.484	2.78**	.280
Mexican 1990s arrivals	11.89**	.912	4.94**	.451
Second-generation Mexicans	2.25**	.268	1.75**	.228
Third-generation Mexicans	1.81**	.156	1.48**	.141
All others	1.95**	.061	1.94**	.072
Education²				
Primary	—		2.28**	.168
Some HS	—		1.77**	.092
Some college	—		.789**	.029
College degree	—		.501**	.022
Graduate training	—		.357**	.023
Labour force experience				
Experience (mean years)	—		.941**	.005
Experience squared	—		1.00**	.0001
Family context				
Married	—		.682**	.023
Have children 18+ years	—		1.01	.031
Work characteristics				
% veterans	—		1.10**	.047
% disabled	—		2.45**	.230
City context				
Resident metropolitan area	—		.951	.035
Employment characteristics				
Public sector employment	—		.493**	.029
Corporation size³				
Fewer than 10	—		10.82**	.471
10–24	—		4.93**	.231
25–99	—		2.52**	.110
100–499	—		1.48**	.071
500–999	—		1.21**	.091
Third-gen. Blacks as reference				
Second-generation Mexicans	1.328*	.166	.952**	.130
Third-generation Mexicans	1.070	.101	.806*	.084

Table 8 (Continued)

Variables	Baseline model		Full model	
	Odds ratio	Standard error	Odds ratio	Standard error
Third-gen. Mexicans as reference				
Second-generation Mexicans	1.241	.181	1.181	.187
Model fit				
Log Likelihood	−25,381		−20,837 ⁺⁺	
BIC	−517,411		−526,305 ⁺⁺	
Weighted sample size	52,303		52,303	

Notes: ¹Whites excluded; ²Completed High School excluded; ³Greater than 1,000 employees excluded; *p < .05; **p < .01; ++ significant decrement in BIC and increment in Log Likelihood relative to baseline model.

mean (applying white coefficients), and then a prediction based on the white mean (applying group coefficients). Outcomes are all graphed relative to the white mean, which appears as a horizontal line. We have allowed scales to vary, given the underlying differences in the variables of interest, for example employment—which engages the great majority of men in all groups—as opposed to chronic joblessness—which affects only a small proportion of any of the groups. Note that group bars surpassing the white mean do not necessarily imply positive outcomes: e.g., a higher proportion reporting chronic joblessness or employment in jobs with lowest-quintile earnings denotes disadvantage. Consequently, substantive interpretation needs to be keyed to the variable in question.

Either hypothetical reduces the size of the disparity relative to third-generation-plus whites, for every group, and for each of the dependent variables. For example, giving each group white coefficients, but leaving their own means unchanged, increases employment rates, producing convergence with whites among blacks and second-generation Mexicans, and pushing third-generation-plus Mexicans above the white mean. Assigning white means, but applying group coefficients, however, has an even greater positive effect, propelling all groups slightly above the white mean. The hypotheticals yield their greatest impact on blacks, an unsurprising result in light of the underlying black/white disparity.

On the other hand, the impact of the hypotheticals varies among the groups. Both hypotheticals leave third-generation-plus Mexicans outperforming whites on each dimension. Among second-generation Mexicans, outcomes are advantaged, relative to whites, when white means are assigned but group coefficients are applied; the hypothetical applying white coefficients to second-generation Mexicans means, however, leaves second-generation Mexicans with slightly lower levels of employment and slightly fewer weeks worked than whites. Hypothetically assigning white means to blacks, however, has the least consistently positive effect: assuming that blacks now possess the characteristics of whites but receive the same treatment leaves them with fewer weeks worked, a higher proportion in jobs at the lowest quintile, and a lower proportion with at least one benefit.

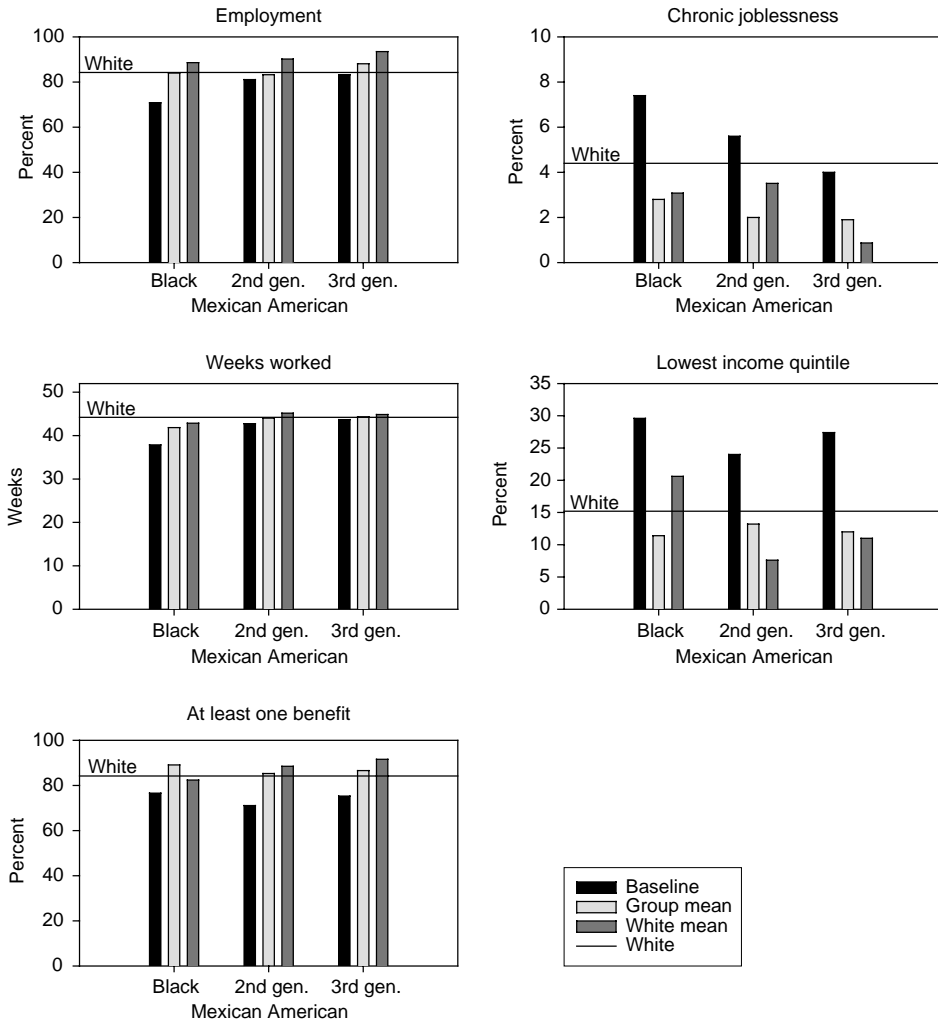


Figure 1. Results from decomposition analyses.

The relative importance of each hypothetical similarly differs among the groups. Possessing the characteristics of whites is the more important factor in every case for third-generation-plus Mexicans; similarly, the same hypothetical is more important for second-generation Mexicans on all dimensions, with the exception of chronic joblessness. For blacks, however, the pattern is quite different, as applying white coefficients to black means has the greater impact on chronic joblessness, jobs in the lowest quintile, and receipt of at least one benefit. Thus, in contrast to the two Mexican-origin groups, for whom equalisation of traits is the crucial factor, equalisation of treatment exercises the strongest and most consistently powerful impact among blacks.

Conclusion

As argued by the proponents of segmented assimilation themselves, the offspring of Mexican immigrants provide the litmus test for the view that the children of working-class immigrants are at risk of 'downward assimilation'. But no support for this hypothesis can be found in the empirical evidence reviewed above. Defining the 'underclass' as those for whom 'work disappears', we have focused on three indicators of *labour force attachment*: employment, weeks of work and chronic joblessness. Although second- and third-generation-plus Mexicans never attain the levels of labour force attachment demonstrated by whites, the disparities are modest, fail to attain statistical significance, and are further reduced by the application of conventional demographic controls. By contrast, labour force attachment among third-generation-plus blacks compares unfavourably with that of whites across all three indicators—a contrast that persists both before and after controls. In comparison to blacks, second-generation Mexicans display higher levels of labour force attachment on two indicators, and third-generation-plus Mexicans display higher levels of labour force attachment on all three indicators, both before and after controls.

Our examination of *job quality* indicators provides support for the most basic of conventional assimilation claims: namely, that immigrant children, born in the United States, do better than the foreign-born themselves. On the other hand, an outcome of this sort is hardly a surprise, given the very low levels of schooling of immigrants from Mexico and the bottom-level positions they occupy in the labour market. As noted earlier, and underscored again here, the levels of schooling attained by Mexican immigrant offspring involve a sizeable advance relative to the first generation; not surprisingly, the quality of the jobs secured by offspring also shifts for the better.

More impressively, perhaps, the evidence suggests that the immigrant offspring have gone from the margins of the economy into its mainstream, at least as conceptualised by Alba and Nee (2003). If not quite at the level of third-generation-plus whites, the proportion of second-generation Mexicans working in the public sector stands just above the grand mean—in stark contrast to the situation of the foreign-born. Likewise, the share of Mexican immigrant offspring working in the largest organisations puts them six percentage points above the national mean, whereas the immigrants are over-represented among employers of the very smallest sort.

But if Mexican Americans have moved from marginal to 'mainstream' employers, it is not clear that they have succeeded in shifting from 'bad' to 'good' jobs. Relative to whites, second-generation Mexicans are far more likely to be working in jobs that fall at the low end of the earnings distribution. Furthermore, they are less likely to receive fringe benefits of any sort. While controlling for background characteristics that might depress receipt of fringes—most notably experience and education—diminishes the disparity, it still leaves Mexican immigrant offspring lagging behind whites.

As the decompositions show, those lags are principally related to differences in characteristics, a finding consistent with previous research employing a similar technique (Trejo 1997), and more supportive of the conventional, rather than the segmented, assimilation approach. Treatment, however, matters, since assigning white coefficients to the Mexican-origin groups, while leaving group means unchanged, substantially reduces ethnic disparities. While the hypotheticals do suggest that the Mexican-origin groups would receive better jobs were they to possess the skills (and other relevant attributes) of native whites, the prospects for narrowing that gap are at best uncertain, as disparities in educational attainment between whites and Mexican Americans seem to be deeply entrenched (Grogger and Trejo 2002). While college completion has a strongly positive effect on all of the outcomes reviewed in this paper, second- and third-generation-plus Mexican Americans complete college at far lower levels than whites, with the most recent evidence on young Mexican American adults pointing to a persistent college completion gap (Fry 2004).

The findings for African American men are no less relevant for the assimilation approach, and its underlying claims regarding the ‘mainstream’. Not only do treatment effects matter more than characteristics, but they matter more for the allocation of benefits and access to better-paid jobs—precisely those outcomes that are the most likely to be affected by the institutional factors emphasised by assimilation theory, as revised by Alba and Nee (2003).

Though the results reported in this paper are at odds with the claims of assimilation theory, whether in its conventional or its segmented form, they should not surprise. The contention that Mexican immigrant offspring would assimilate downward into a ‘rainbow underclass’ always warranted scepticism. Today’s immigrants from Mexico, as noted by Douglas Massey and his collaborators, ‘may be poor in financial resources, but they are wealthy in social capital, which they can readily convert into jobs and earnings in the United States’ (Massey *et al.* 1987). Consequently, many Mexican immigrant offspring grow up in communities that are often poor, but are also deeply embedded in local labour markets, providing the connections, information and role models needed to keep the second generation firmly attached to work.

On the other hand, there are also good reasons for caution regarding the optimistic scenario forecast by the proponents of conventional assimilation. While immigrant offspring may abandon the ethnic enclaves and niches of the first generation for the economic mainstream, the latter is hardly an undifferentiated category. Not only do personnel practices within the mainstream vary widely (consider, for example, the contrasts between Wal-Mart, General Motors and municipal government), but job characteristics tend to cluster together. Moreover, the evolution of the American economy is such that ‘good’ jobs, at least as defined here, are increasingly likely to elude workers who have not completed college—such as the Mexican immigrant offspring whom we have studied in this paper.

By contrast, the prospects for ‘working-class incorporation’ seem the most realistic. Contrary to the proponents of segmented assimilation, the situation of the

contemporary second generation is not *sui generis*. An 'oppositional culture' may indeed characterise some of today's second-generation youth. However, as we have previously noted (Perlmann and Waldinger 1997), it also bears a striking similarity to the subcultures of the European-American ethnic working-class of a generation or two ago, which never prevented transitions from rebellious adolescence to work. But if a historical perspective implies that strong attachment to work is likely to persist from first to second generations, it can also suggest that changes in the quality of jobs may be difficult to secure. As in the past, the ethnic connections of the parental generation may help lubricate entry into the world of work, but are unlikely to reach far up the organisation. Moreover, the shadow of the first generation may not be that easy to escape. Just as immigration from Mexico is of long-standing vintage, so too are employers' stereotypes: now, as earlier in the century (see Deverell 2004; Monroy 1999), the immigrants are seen as the right workers for the wrong jobs. Should employers retain these negative views, all the while restructuring workplaces in ways that circumscribe access to 'good' jobs, the immigrant offspring of Mexican immigrants may run into trouble, as they seek to gain the acceptance from the "mainstream' required for moving ahead.

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Notes

- [1] Since 1994, the Current Population Survey has often been used for studies of the second generation. We note that the CPS shares many of the shortcomings that afflict other similar sources of official data used for the study of immigration: in particular, it does not ask about legal status. However, this lacuna is likely to be of limited importance for the purposes at hand, which entail studying those children of immigrants who are born in the United States, and for whom US citizenship is a birthright status. While an unauthorised legal status may affect the foreign-born, the huge rise in legal admissions from Mexico and, more importantly, adjustments among Mexicans already residing in the United States imply that the migrants of earlier vintage found in the sample represent a largely legalised population.
- [2] If migrant selectivity is diminishing, as is likely to be true among Mexican immigrants (e.g. Borjas 1994), cross-sectional comparisons between first and second generations may yield upwardly biased indicators of inter-generational change, as the contemporary second generation are the offspring of an earlier, and possibly more selective group than the most recent cohorts. By contrast, cross-sectional comparisons between second and third generations may yield downward biases, due to differences in the ways in which these populations are identified. Whereas the second generation is identified genealogically, using information about parent's birthplace, the third-plus generation is identified psycho-socially, using information regarding ethnic identity. While current knowledge does not tell us whether retention of Mexican ethnic identity varies by social class or ethnicity of marital

partner, research on other groups (e.g. Alba 1990) suggests that social mobility and intermarriage decrease the likelihood of continued affiliation.

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