

**Second Generation Decline?**

**The Children of Immigrants Past and Present – A Reconsideration\***

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#### *Abstract*

Thirty years after the Hart-Celler Act brought renewed immigration to the United States, the immigration research agenda is slowly shifting from the newcomers to their children. While the timing is hardly fortuitous -- as the immigrants' children have only recently become a sizable presence in American schools and are just now moving from the schools into the labor market -- the striking feature of this emerging scholarship is its pessimism. This paper considers the prospects for today's second generation in light of the experience of the children of the last great immigration of the 1890-1920 period. Our review of the past suggests that the children of the post-1965 immigration begin with disadvantages no greater than those encountered by immigrant children before. On the one hand, the immigrants' class composition is far more heavily weighted toward the middle-class than was true earlier in the century. And on the other hand, American society is more receptive to immigrant incorporation -- in large measure, due to the efforts by earlier groups of outsiders to widen access to opportunity.

Thirty years after the Hart-Celler Act brought renewed immigration to the United States, the immigration research agenda is slowly shifting from the newcomers to their children. While the timing is hardly fortuitous -- as the immigrants' children have only recently become a sizable presence in American schools and are just now moving from the schools into the labor market -- the striking feature of this emerging scholarship involves its pessimism. Recent publications by Herbert Gans, Alejandro Portes, and Min Zhou -- leading students of American ethnic life -- outline, with clarity and acuity, the reasons for concern. Coming from everywhere but Europe, today's newcomers are visibly identifiable, and enter a mainly white society still not cured of its racist afflictions. Shifts in the structure of the economy aggravate the impact of discrimination: while poorly-educated immigrant parents seem to have no trouble getting started at the very bottom, the shift toward knowledge-intensive jobs means that the next generation will have to do well in school if it wishes to surpass the achievements of the foreign-born. With big-city schools in more trouble than ever before, the outlook for successful passage through the educational system seems dim. As second generation expectations are unlikely to remain unchanged, we can count on a mismatch between the aspirations of immigrant children and requirements of the jobs which they seek (Gans, 1992; Portes and Zhou, 1993).

There is another factor influencing scholarly views of today's immigrant children and that has to do with the past, with historical comparisons that have not been fully articulated. The descendants of the last great migration started out at the very bottom -- but they have now made it to the top, or thereabouts. One might find cause for comfort in the success of yesterday's downtrodden, but the emerging scholarship on the topic thinks not. To begin with, the immigrants of old shared a common European heritage with the then-dominant WASPs, and that blunted discrimination's edge. The old factory-based economy also allowed for a multi-generational move up the totem pole. Immigrant children could do better if they just hung on through the high school years, after which time well-paid manufacturing jobs would await them.

The third or fourth generation would continue on through college and beyond, completing the move from peddler to plumber to professional. By contrast, the restructuring of the U.S. economy gives the children of today's immigrants no time to play catch-up, requiring strong, and extended performance as the condition for moving ahead.

That the situation of today's immigrant children is in some ways distinctive lies beyond debate. But we argue that the interpretive stance towards the past, and towards certain features of the present situation as well, puts the contemporary situation in an especially unfavorable light. This paper takes another, albeit still preliminary, look at the prospects for second generation in light of historical experience. We begin with a quick overview of the second-generation upward mobility in the past. We then take up what appear to us the crucial similarities and differences between the past and present prospects of the second generation.

### **Second Generation Lessons**

Oscar Handlin's celebrated quip -- "Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants *were* American history (Handlin, 1951: 3)" -- does not oblige us to consider all American immigrations. For our purpose, the immigration of 1890-1920 provides the crucial comparison. The last mass immigration to occur before legislation choked off the European flow, this turn-of-the century stream was dominated by newcomers from southern and eastern Europe, sending areas of no previous importance. Compared to their predecessors, the immigrants of the turn of the century were far more likely to converge on the nation's cities, and far less likely to move into agriculture -- in striking parallel to the situation today. And the economy that the old "new immigrants" encountered, however different it may be from the postindustrial capitalism of late twentieth century America, is still closer to the contemporary situations than was the American economy of 1850 or before.

The great majority of the 1890-1920 immigrants entered the American economy and class structure near the bottom, dramatically below the average native-born family's position.

True, there were entrepreneurs among the immigrants of old -- mainly persons with a background in trade or crafts (as among the Jews) or unskilled laborers who somehow managed to move into entrepreneurial endeavors. Nonetheless, in 1910, as Table 1 shows, immigrants from all major groups, save the British, were far more likely to work at the least skilled jobs than were native whites of native parentage and all were less likely to work in white collar jobs, whether at high or low levels. Low levels of literacy also distinguished these groups from the natives and from late-nineteenth century immigrants from Northwestern Europe -- just over half of the "other Eastern and Southern Europeans" reported that they could read, and just over half of the Italians could not speak English, for example. Though the Jews entered America at occupational and literacy levels above their counterparts from southern and eastern Europe, they still began with quite a disadvantage compared to the native-born. The children of immigrants were a good deal less likely than the children of natives to remain in school, and those who remained in school were more likely to have fallen behind in grade attainment.

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Table 1 about here  
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It is within the context of these generalizations that studies of the economic mobility of European immigrants fall; these studies are of two kinds. The first is a set of historical studies of mobility among European immigrants and their children. The second is the series of ancestry studies based chiefly on the 1980 and 1990 Censuses, which provide novel information on individuals who are later-generation descendants of immigrants -- third, fourth, fifth or later generations. These two strands of research treat populations that do not quite connect: the first group focusing on immigrants and their children, the second, a set, often undefined, of distant descendants, with the bridging generation(s) often falling from view (as with the Germans, Irish, and English). The research results highlight this gap: the historical studies of social mobility

tend to show that ethnic differences in the economic standing of groups remained very important into the second generation; the outcome studies based on ancestry show that eventually these differences disappeared.

The American studies of American social mobility were mostly conducted in the sixties and seventies, when they were a staple crop among the then-new social historians. Associated most closely with the name of Stephan Thernstrom (1964, 1973), these studies came to a crashing halt in the late seventies, in part, due to increasing disenchantment with quantification among historians, in part because the research on social mobility in particular quickly reached a conceptual impasse. These studies had sought to explore the extent to which upward mobility characterized American life. Several conclusions quickly emerged: 1) that social mobility in America had indeed been considerable; 2) that it was not as salient as stated in the most naive versions of the rags to riches stories of the Horatio Alger type; 3) that it was more salient than Thernstrom's first, paradigmatic study (of Newburyport, Massachusetts) had suggested; 4) and that the quality of the data and of the quantitative skills of most authors were too poor to determine 4a) whether the extent of American social mobility varied much across time and place and 4b) whether American social mobility differed much from European rates of mobility. Given this state of affairs, interest declined.

The historians were also interested in educational differences among ethnic groups, although historical information school attainment was rare, since the U. S. Census began asking about grades of school completed only in 1940, and the question that had been asked earlier, whether a given child was in school in the census year was a poor proxy for school performance. The studies that did manage to include information on schooling 1) supported the generalization obvious from published surveys of the time, that the children of native-born parents were more likely to be in school, and in the higher grades than were the children of immigrants. Also, 2) some immigrant groups differed dramatically in the amount of schooling their children received,

although 3) much of this difference is easily explained by dramatic differences in the levels of economic well-being of the families. Nonetheless, 4) there do appear to have been some significant ethnic differences in years of schooling completed by different ethnic groups, even when all measurable family background factors are taken into account. The classic difference between 4a) the Jews and other immigrant groups from southern and eastern Europe, such as the Italians is a case in point. On the other hand, 4b) the major other easily observed line of division that has been observed is between immigrants from more and less economically developed parts of Europe (as for example, the Slavs and Italians, on the one hand, and the British, Germans or Scandinavians, on the other, circa 1910). The 5) value of schooling for the social progress of these groups -- returns to schooling -- may have differed somewhat (again, contrasts between Jews and others have been made in the literature). However, 6) the truly glaring ethnic difference in terms of returns to schooling involves the low degree of occupational advancement experienced by relatively better educated blacks in the North compared to various groups whites with the same education (see Perlmann, 1988).

All this impinges in tantalizing but ill-developed ways on the study of today's second generation. For our purposes, studies of immigrant and second generation mobility compared to the mobility of natives yields mildly interesting results -- establishing for example, that there were indeed differences in the starting points and in the degree of upward mobility by ethnic origins -- although explaining such differences is another matter. The description of the extent of mobility through the second generation sounds rather different if one reads Stephen Thernstrom's (1973) summary or John Bodnar's (1985) summary -- two major efforts at synthesis. However, the most important observation about this historical literature in the present context is that it focused on the question of the extent of mobility by group much more than on paths to upward mobility; yet it is precisely the question of paths that lies at the heart of today's debate. The extent to which the second generation was in fact crucially indebted to

semi-skilled jobs in factories, and the extent to which the decline in those jobs today means that route is now blocked is *not* a well-developed theme of this historical mobility literature.

Skipping a generation or two from their immigrants and their children to the 'twilight' of European-origin ethnicity, we have the ancestry studies from 1980-90. These show that socio-economic assimilation has been largely accomplished for the European-origin groups and that the rank ordering of well-being today is generally unrelated to that at the turn of the century, with the experience of Jews and possibly other groups at variance from this generalization. The matter of pathways once again falls out: where the groups stand in the contemporary ethnic division of labor and whether they occupy positions of any distinctiveness are questions that remain largely unasked.<sup>1</sup>

We note one curious exception: in contrast to these sociological studies of ancestry that stress convergence, George Borjas (1994) stresses that a key ordering at time of immigration, 1910 literacy levels in the immigrants' country of origin, continues to be correlated with the economic position of their descendants for a long time, for something like a century. How well these perspectives can be meshed neither he nor the relevant sociologists (Lieberson and Waters [1988], Neidert and Farley [1985], Alba [1990], etc.) have undertaken to show. We suspect that the resolution is a matter of interpretive spin -- 'convergence today' need not contradict 'differences lasting as long as a century' -- and also a matter of the way imperfect data are used (Borjas tends to focus on "third and later generations," while the sociologists often try to separate the third from the later generations). However the contrast between Borjas and the sociologists is to be understood, it is important. Economists (and many policy analysts) read Borjas, sociologists mainly read the work of their own colleagues, and historians do not regularly read the literature produced by either camp. How far, we wonder, do the difference in perspectives characterizes 'common knowledge' in these fields? Since Borjas's writings in particular are widely read and cited in connection with American policies of immigration



restriction, this divergence of emphasis regarding the 'common knowledge' about long-term character of immigrant absorption should not be ignored.

In any case, our perspective leads us to understand that the 'catching up' occurred, not in the first or second generations, but in those later generations on whom data are hard to obtain. The problem, unfortunately, involves more than data. By the third generation, the levels of intermarriage among groups of European origin became very high, so that the grandchildren of Slavic immigrants are also the grandchildren of many other ethnic groups. The ancestry question bypasses this problem by throwing it in the lap of the respondent: with whom does he or she identify? Yet if our goal is to understand socioeconomic mobility from the second generation to the present-day generation, resolving the problem of ethnic origin in terms of the respondent's choice of ethnic identity is problematic. Intermarriage makes the question of trajectory from immigrant origins to present-day outcomes much messier than it at first appears; and the usual operational simplifications miss the point -- which is *not* to clean up the messiness. The "mess", rather, is central to an accurate understanding the process, since the later generations did not progress by simply moving up from the bottom, but climbed to a different rung while also shifting to another, more ethnically mixed, social milieu. The passage from notable second-generation ethnic niches to the homogeneity of the ancestry data is and ought to be hard to describe with the ethnic categories derived from the first and second generation. Thus the story of socioeconomic assimilation of immigrants' descendants occurred at the same time that the meaning of ethnic descent became complex and indistinct; and these two developments are part of one story, a story as yet poorly told because of the available data and as well as its subtlety and complexity.

#### **Second Generation Starting Points**

Given the distinctive economic characteristics of the post-1965 immigrants, one might not have expected the discussions of their children's prospects to have turned so pessimistic so

quickly. In contrast to the immigrants of 1890-1920, concentrated at the bottom of the occupational distribution, socio-economic diversity is a salient feature of the new immigration. High-skilled immigrants have played a modest but significant role in immigration to the United States ever since the enactment of the Hart-Celler Act in 1965. Notwithstanding charges that America's immigrants are of "declining quality," the 1990 Census found that a college degree was as common among all immigrants as among natives (1 out of 5). Moreover, the high skilled are often present at levels well above the U.S. average, with the college graduate share ranging from 27 percent among Russians to 65 percent among Indians. Consequently, a good proportion of the recent arrivals begins, not at the bottom, but in the middle-class or above. In contemporary Los Angeles, for example, coveted professional occupations have become immigrant concentrations: more than 35 percent of the pharmacists in the L.A. region are foreign-born, as are more than 25 percent of the dentists, and more than 20 percent of the engineers, of various computer specialists, and of physicians.

At the same time, many of today's immigrants do, of course, start at the bottom. Whereas 95 percent of all U.S.-born adults had at least received some secondary schooling as of 1990, 18 percent of the foreign-born population had not gone beyond an 8th grade schooling and about 5 percent appear not to have received any education at all. We can refine this contemporary native-immigrant comparison in a crucial way: a great share of the immigrants coming in at the bottom are from Mexico, which is also by far the most important sending country numerically. 22 percent of the U.S.' 1990 foreign-born population were born in Mexico; the next most prominent source country, the Philippines, accounted for less than 5 percent. If we look at the immigrants from the many *other* sending countries -- eight-tenths of the whole -- we find that the educational achievements of native- and (non-Mexican) foreign-born adults no longer appear very different. The foreign-born are actually the more likely to have reached college than the native-born, although other foreign-born adults are still over-represented among those with little

or no formal schooling. In other words, were it not for the Mexican immigration, we would be looking at an immigration 80% as large as the current one, and saying that its members, on average, begin their progress through the American economy no worse off, on average, than other Americans who are not immigrants.

Mexicans loom large among the foreign-born population, but even more so among the children of the foreign-born. Roughly 1 out of every 3 immigrant children has at least one Mexican-born parent. Because those parents live under depressed socio-economic circumstances, the size and characteristics of the Mexican population strongly influences the overall profile of today's second generation, as can be seen in Table 2, which supplements the usual comparison of the children of immigrants and natives, with a further contrast between Mexicans and all other immigrants. The four indicators displayed in Table 2 -- percent of children living in households where the head is on public assistance, a single parent, a college graduate, or employed in an upper white-collar occupation -- are recalculated from research done by others (Oropesa and Landale, 1995) and are not meant to be determinative. Still, they suggest a pattern more complex and nuanced than one would expect given prevailing notions of second generation. On three of the four indicators, the children of all immigrants are living in less desirable circumstances than their native-born counterparts. But that disadvantage disappears when the Mexican population is excluded from the analysis, the lead passing, instead, to the children of the foreign-born.

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Table 2 about here  
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A more complete analysis would certainly muddy the waters further; we have no doubt, for example, that the proportion of non-Mexican-origin immigrant children living in households with heads who lack a high school degree or work in blue-collar jobs is higher than the average

among natives. At this stage of the game, however, our ambitions are not so great as to require a complete analysis of the most recent U.S. census. The thrust of this paper concerns the contrast with the children of the 1890-1920 wave; from that perspective, one is hard pressed to argue that today's immigrant children – Mexicans excepted – are starting out from circumstances less favorable than those of the past. And they may indeed be better: to note that 30 percent of today's non-Mexican second generation lives in a household where the head has a college degree is no trivial observation in light of the historical experience -- especially when the level for all natives is seven percentage points lower.

Regardless of comparisons to immigrants past, today's debate asks about the effect of the 'new economy'. While the new economy may render the children of non-Mexican immigrants vulnerable, it must be having about the same influence on the children of the native-born. For children in some of these immigrant families the new economy may indeed confront them with 'missing rungs' on the ladder out of the bottom -- but no more so on average than it does for the children of native-born families. Only Mexican immigrant population, therefore, stands distinctively at risk; and only its magnitude makes immigrants as a whole appear distinctively exposed to the winds of economic change. By contrast, at the turn of the century, no single group could have altered the generalization that most immigrants were much more likely than natives to start out near the bottom (see Table 1).

#### **Second Generation Race: Then**

The European immigrants of 1890-1920, write Portes and Zhou, were "uniformly white;" consequently "skin color reduced a major barrier to entry into the American mainstream (Portes and Zhou, 1993: 76)." Using the categories of Milton Gordon (1964), Gans concurs: "while dark-skinned immigrants from overseas cultures will also acculturate, racial discrimination will not encourage their assimilation, at least not into white society. (Gans, 1992: 177)"<sup>2</sup>

Since "race", as historian Barbara Fields has argued, explains nothing, but is something

that has to be explained, contentions such as these beg the question at hand: under what conditions do such categorical distinctions among groups gain salience. A look at other societies demonstrates that neither skin color nor any other physical attribute is a necessary condition for the erection of racial divisions. The central complaint of modern European anti-Semitism was precisely the point that the Jews had become indistinguishable from everyone else. And current French attitudes are far less antagonistic to black Africans or Antilleans than to North Africans. Yet the latter are frequently blond and of fair complexion.

Of course one can agree that race is a social construction, and still retort that by the late nineteenth century, "the social construction of race" in the particular historical context of the United States, had led to an association between skin color on the one hand and slavery and its legacy on the other. But this historical legacy, as two streams of American historical writing emphasize, did not fully determine how the European immigrants of the past would be slotted into the American racial classifications. A generation ago, John Higham's Strangers in the Land (1955) showed the influence of racial thinking -- with its distinctions among "Nordic," "Alpine," and "Mediterranean" races -- among intellectual and political circles and in the framing of the immigration restriction legislation of the 1920s. As applied to the European immigrants, those racial classifications often employed visible physical features, including differences in skin color. In the 19th century, for example, the Irish were labeled a "race" and regularly characterized as "savage", "simian", "low-browed", and "bestial" (Roediger, 1991). Black Americans were referred to as "smoked Irishmen" suggesting that these two groups were then looked at through a remarkably similar lens (Ignatiev, 1995). Later observers stressed the "Saracen blood" of the southern Italians, whose "dark complexion...sometimes resembles African more than Caucasian hues." (Rieder, 1985:32)

Over the past half-dozen years, several scholars have taken such evidence seriously, and linked it to the very low social class position of the immigrant arrivals. It is easy to imagine,

they point out, that the immigrants could have been defined, not as 'white', perhaps not as black, but as some distinctive, stigmatized "other". That such an alternative grouping never emerged had much to do with the actions of the immigrant European groups themselves, who engaged in deliberate strategies that distinguished themselves from blacks, and which, in turn, yielded "whitening".

It is easy to forget how recently these 'racial' divisions among 'whites' faded. Social scientists today will make sport of E.A. Ross, whose book *The Old World and the New* contains such gems as this quote from a physician who claimed that "the Slavs are immune to certain kinds of dirt. They can stand what would kill a white man." (quoted in Lieberson, 1980: 25) But it is well to remember that as late as 1945 Warner and Srole could distinguish between "light" and "dark" "Caucasoids", the latter "a mixture of Caucasoid and Mongoloid" blood, slated for very gradual assimilation -- anywhere from six generations to "a very long time in the future which is not yet discernible.

It could not have been more than a few years after 1945 that Warner and Srole's "dark Caucasoids" became "white ethnics". Racial perceptions changed as the Irish, Poles, Italians, and Jews moved ahead; in this sense, for the descendants of the European immigrants, race was an *achieved*, not an ascribed status. Yet today we are told that the earlier immigrants were able to move ahead because they were white, and that the immigrants of today will have trouble doing so because they are not white. At best, this view drastically needs to be fleshed out with historical detail, and with ample shades of gray; at worst it mistakes cause and effect.

### **Second Generation Race: Now**

The recent historical treatment of 'whiteness' attends to the processes by which the European immigrants distanced themselves from the natives of African descent. "Proximity -- real and imagined -- to the dark-skinned other was pivotal to the emergence" of the hyphenated identities that the European ethnics established in their quest for acceptance in America. The

struggle for place in a contested, ethnic order provided ample motivations for the newcomers to resolve any ambiguity over how their racial identity was to be defined. As Robert Orsi writes, the "effort to establish the border against the dark-skinned other required an intimate struggle, a contest against the initial uncertainty over which side of the racial dichotomy the swarthy immigrants were on and against the facts of history and geography that inscribed this ambiguity on the urban landscape.(Orsi, 1992: 318)" Labor competition furnished additional incentives, though as the Italians often found themselves pitted against the Irish, and the Irish against the Germans, the conflict over jobs does not suffice to explain why they all became white (see Ignatiev, 1995). But they did; and in becoming white, the immigrants and their descendants also became party to strategies of social closure that maintained black exclusion and ensured more stable employment and better wages for others of their own kind.

Can today's immigrants draw on a similar ethnic card? The answer is not yet in, but there is no question that they certainly can try, especially when it comes to differentiating themselves from poorer, less educated African-Americans who fall at the bottom of the racial order. We all know about the tensions that suffuse the relations between African-Americans and the new middleman minorities that run businesses in the Harlems and Watts of today's United States. Whatever their causes, these conflicts yield the consequence of shifting entrepreneurial, but visibly identifiable, immigrants to the advantaged side of America's racial division.

It is not that difficult to imagine that professional or entrepreneurial immigrants find rewards for falling on the "right side" of the color divide. We suggest that the same can even be said for the labor migrants whose presence so many Americans now seem to dislike. Certainly, urban employers in New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago have come to prefer immigrants to native-born, American blacks (Kirschenman and Neckerman, 1991; Waldinger, 1996a, 1996b).

As in the past, conflict at the racial divide coexists with tensions among workers of diverging national or regional attachments. We have repeatedly heard reports of bad blood

between Mexicans and various Central American groups, as well as of intra-ethnic conflict within Central American populations, when interviewing employers in the Los Angeles region.<sup>3</sup> But far more Latino hostility seems to be directed towards blacks. "And I have to tell you that there is natural resentment between the two races," reported one manager referring to blacks and Latinos. "They do not get along well together in manufacturing." The owner of a large furniture company, with almost 40 years in the business, told Roger Waldinger that:

The shop has always been 98 percent Latino. I have hired some blacks. But you put two men on a machine, Mexicans won't work with a black. [They will] aggravate him till he quits. They can't make it inter- racially. I'm not going to be a sociologist and tell them "you're in the same boat, you ought to work together." The only place where we have blacks is in the trucks, because they work by themselves.

Today, as at the turn of the century, then, the second generation will move into a context in which their parents have been busily at work distancing themselves from native blacks. And, in Los Angeles, that work has produced dividends, since Mexican immigrants, exploited proletarians that they are, have nonetheless moved into a wide swath of the region's economy, from which they are unlikely to be dislodged. In this respect, the most oppressed of America's new immigrants occupy a position of structural centrality, quite unlike the marginal role filled by urban African-Americans at a comparable point in their movement to urban centers. For that reason, the children of today's Mexican immigration will probably have a better chance of finding positions up the job ladder than did the children of the great black migration northwards.

But there is a rejoinder to the argument just advanced, namely the contention that the geographic and ethnic origins of the new immigrants leave them in no position to play the "race card." From this perspective, the influence of the past is important in that it defines today's newcomers as "people of color". Consequently, immigrants from Latin American, the Caribbean, or Asia will not be able to separate themselves from caste-like treatment, unlike the immigrants of the past (see, for example, Okihiro, 1994, chapter 2).

One need only look at the present dynamics of white-Asian relations today, to realize



that the argument for this sort of historical continuity falls short. It is not just that all of the legislated racial divisions seem now curiously barbarous and are disowned; in crucial respects the eradication of the legal barriers is paralleled by changes in social conditions. Asians at the bottom of the class structure there may be; but Asians throughout the class structure there are as well, in impressive numbers. And the educational achievement of large numbers of Asians ensures that for significant numbers of the second generation of Asians the disappearance of the lower rungs of manufacturing jobs is about as relevant to their economic advancement as it is for readers of this paper. Moreover, trends in intermarriage between the offspring of new Asian immigrants are far closer to historic trends in immigrant-native intermarriage than to historic trends in black-white intermarriage. In contrast to the pattern that prevailed during the great immigrations of 1830-1920, a quantitatively meaningful plurality of "races" is now evident on the national scene in the United States. At the same time, white and Asian groups are engaged in extensive intermingling. The conjunction of these two facts alone may help diminish the significance of the black-white divide in American life. In the same way, the fact that tremendous numbers, and great proportions, of the Latin American immigrants arrive with an interracial legacy -- having 'Indian' and/or black ancestors as well as white ancestors -- also creates a novel and quantitatively massive race complexity in America. All this may help erode the centrality of the black-white divide.

Acknowledging these tendencies, we think, yields a pessimistic and an optimistic scenario. The pessimistic scenario suggests that the crucial line will remain between blacks and all others, with some segmented assimilation leading a fraction of the second generation to integrate into the black population and the rest into some, as yet undefined category, that may not be 'white' in any meaningful sense, and may not remain designated as such. All we lack to make this scenario more plausible is a term in the popular culture to replace white -- a term that can include Asians and Hispanics easily enough and that essentially means 'native-born, and not

black.' If that term emerges, we should note it as an important and worrisome development.

The more optimistic forecast rests on the evolution of black-white relations themselves. It may seem worse than Pollyannaish in a year of so much black-white tension to insist on the prospect for qualitative change in relations across that divide and if not Pollyannaish, then hard to take seriously, as suggested by the commentator on a conference draft of this paper. Nevertheless, 1996 has also been the year in which leaders of the more conservative of the two major political parties donned sackcloth and ashes because a black would not run as their candidate for the presidency. During the last great wave of immigration, a president who ate lunch at the White House with a black was obliged to claim that the luncheon was necessitated by busy schedules, and was not a social function. One needn't argue that black-white dynamics are at a happy pass to understand that they have shifted enormously for the better in the past six decades. It is highly significant that black-white intermarriage remains low; but with ten percent of young black men marrying whites, it is now significantly above zero and rising (Alba, 1995: 17). If the social class and educational situation of inner-city blacks is a national disaster, there is nevertheless also a serious growth in the black middle class and in black collegiate enrollment. The point is simply that the black-white divide, while remaining terribly salient is itself very different from it was when immigrants and their children defined themselves in the past.

One measure of change even in the most recent years is the fate of the phrase 'the Browning of America', denoting the expectation that the crucial divide will separate non-Hispanic whites from all others, to be loosely united as "browns". In this sense, the term 'Browning of America' is as common today as was the term 'the Greening of America' a generation ago – and about as reliable in predictive value. Another measure, along a different dimension, is the problem that federal agencies have in earnestly trying to fit the children of racial intermarriages into their racial classification systems; in our reading, these problems should be viewed as symptoms of transition to a time in which those classifications seem quaintly passe.<sup>4</sup> The

present racial situation is in flux; but if we truly believe that race is socially constructed, then we should know that the broader dynamics of American culture and politics and *not* the skin complexion of the new immigrants will matter most to their absorption. Race, as David Montejano has written, "represents an arena of struggle and accommodation.(Montejano, 1987: 4)" And for that reason, the new second generation will themselves have some say in America's complex racial and ethnic order, as we shall now see.

### **Second Generation Advance**

The new conventional wisdom emphasizes the obstacles to second generation progress, while also conceding that one form of contemporary adaptation "replicates the time-honored portrayal of growing acculturation and parallel integration into the white middle-class (Portes and Zhou, 1993: 82) Clearly, there is little question that many, possibly even most of today's immigrant children are heading upward, exemplified by the large number of Asian students enrolled in the nation's leading universities, some the children of workers, others the descendants of immigrants who moved right into the middle-class. The rapid Asian ascent evokes parallels with the past, most clearly the first and second generation Russian Jews who began appearing at the City College of New York, and then Harvard, Columbia, and other prestigious schools shortly after 1900.

If there is similarity between past and present experiences of second generation movement into the middle-class, we are more struck by variation; in particular, the distinctive institutional reactions to the Jewish and Asian inflows, respectively, into higher education. The history of the quotas against Jewish students is reasonably well known. By the second decade of the twentieth century, the number of Jews seeking admission to elite academic institutions was still a relatively small minority of the Jewish age cohort, but the numbers were nonetheless large enough to create a notable presence and to discomfit the then-dominant WASPS. Administrators at Columbia University were already fretting that the university's "position at the

gateway of European immigration" could make it "socially uninviting to students who came from homes of refinement (Wechsler, 1977: 135)". The first efforts at restricting Jews soon followed: new application blanks that asked for the candidate's birthplace, religious affiliation, and father's name; interviews; and psychological tests. By 1921, Jews made up 22 percent of Columbia's entering class, down from 40 percent just a few years earlier; by 1934, the Jewish share of the entering freshman class fell still further, to 17 percent (Wechsler, 1977: 163-4; 168). By the end of the 1920s, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Duke, Rutgers, Barnard, Adelphi, Cornell, Johns Hopkins, Northwestern, Penn State, Ohio State, Washington and Lee, and the Universities of Illinois, Kansas, Minnesota, Texas, Virginia, and Washington, had all adopted measures that restricted Jewish enrollment (Dinnerstein, 1994: 85-6). Professional schools followed the same course, especially in medicine, often dispensing with the subterfuges that the undergraduate institutions used, such as legacy admissions or geographical preferences; instead, they set outright ethnic quotas, which in this case extended to quotas against Catholics or against such particular ethnic groups as Italians. By the 1930s, a 10 percent Jewish quota was common at many medical schools; by 1946, 11 percent of law students were Jewish, down from the 26 percent mark recorded eleven years earlier (Dinnerstein, 1994: 158).

Less well-known are the circumstances under which these policies were reversed. The tide began to change during World War II, when the draft made it harder for colleges, like so many institutions, to pursue discriminatory practices without immediately harming themselves. More decisive, however, was the new legal and social environment that emerged with war's end. In 1946, New York's City Council passed a resolution, clearly aimed at Columbia, that threatened the tax exempt status of colleges and universities that used racial or religious criteria in selecting students. Anxious to avert any similar threat, Yale acted pre-emptively, outlawing quotas and giving first priority to students of highest merit (Oren, 1985). In 1948, New York State forbade discrimination on grounds of religion or race in higher education and

simultaneously established a state university, threatening the hegemony of Columbia and the other privates while also promising greater accessibility to Jews, Catholics, and blacks. Authoritative reports from a Presidential Commission and the American Council on Education provided additional confirmation and condemnation of discriminatory practices. And so the era of anti-Jewish discrimination in higher education ended, in some places, like medical schools, quickly; in others, like Yale or Princeton not 'till the mid- to late-1960s.

An echo of this earlier controversy arose in the 1980s, amidst charges that prestigious colleges, private and public, had established quotas against Asians, just as they had against Jews several decades before.<sup>5</sup> While the rhetoric is slightly over-heated, the description is not entirely off the mark. By the mid-1980s, it was apparent that something strange was happening at elite educational institutions. Public institutions, even the more selective among them, were rapidly increasing their Asian enrollments, and admitting Asians in much the same fashion, and using the same criteria, as everyone else. But Asian students with records comparable to those of their white counterparts were not doing as well when it came to admission to the most selective, private institutions. Moreover, Asian enrollments, which had been rising quite sharply in the late 1970s and early 1980s, suddenly flattened out at schools like Princeton, Brown, Harvard, Stanford, and their like (Hsia, 1988: 90-91).

If the pattern was reminiscent of the earlier experience and the underlying cause familiar -- competition with native whites over scarce and valued resources -- the controversy worked itself out in different ways. In contrast to the earlier experience, Asian administrators, faculty, and students were numerous and influential, sufficiently so that their voice could not be ignored. Several of the universities accused of discrimination -- Princeton, Harvard, Stanford, and Brown, to name just a few -- took a critical look at their own admissions practices and then took steps that led to significant increases in Asian-American admissions. At Brown, for example, the University's self-study owned up to "an extremely serious situation" in which "Asian

American applicants have been treated unfairly in the admissions process"; the University then adopted a series of recommendations which virtually eliminated any gap in admissions rates distinguishing Asians from other students (United States Civil Rights Commission, *Civil Rights Issues Facing Asian Americans in the 1990s*, 1992, pp. 111-112).

The external response also proved distinctive. In contrast to the Jews, who, in the 1920s and 1930s, were isolated politically and intimidated by a rising tide of anti-Semitism, Asian American organizations were able and willing to use political influence; that, in turn, galvanized the scrutiny of outside monitors. In California, where admissions policies at UC Berkeley became highly suspect, the state's leading Democratic politicians "held numerous fact-finding hearings, intervened by bringing together university officials and Asian American community leaders, passed special resolutions on admissions, and had the state Auditor General undertake an unprecedented audit of admissions policies... (Nakanishi, 1995: 277)" In Washington, both liberals and conservatives kept the spotlight on allegations of discrimination in admissions. And even Harvard was not exempt from review, with the Office of Civil Rights undertaking a major investigation, which cleared Harvard of charges of discrimination, but found that Asians did suffer from the preferences granted to alumni children and athletes.

There are a number of lessons to be drawn from this story of Asian and Jewish efforts to scale the ivy walls. First, note the sequence of changes in second-generation status. East-European Jewish acculturation had proceeded rapidly, judged by success in academic achievement. While WASP elites complained about the ungentlemanly behavior of Jews, Horace Kallen maintained that "It is not the failure of Jews to be assimilated into undergraduate society which troubles them [the Protestant elite]. What troubles them is the completeness with which Jews want to be and have been assimilated (quoted in Levine, date, 150)." Whether gentlemen or not, second generation Jews did *not* find that their parents' ethnic economy served "as a platform enabling them to climb into the mainstream economy at high levels;"<sup>6</sup> nor were

they able to move up the pecking order by taking over the positions vacated by others who moved even further ahead. Instead, above a certain level of attainment and outside the expanding ethnic niche, Jews encountered exclusion. Scholastic success had moved them into competition with the nation's elite, who found effective means of blocking Jewish ascent. Moreover, the reaction in the academic world reflected broader social patterns. Jews seeking employment outside the ethnic economy ran into similar barriers; as Heywood Broun and George Britt wrote in a study completed just before the Great Depression, the doors of New York's large, corporate organizations -- "railroads, banks, insurance companies, lawyers' offices, brokerage houses, the New York Stock Exchange, hotels... and the home offices of large corporations of the first rank" -- were infrequently opened to Jews (Broun and Britt, 1931: 224). In the strongly nativist, anti-Semitic environment of the 1920s and 1930s, organized efforts to overturn discriminatory practices were of little avail. Hence, the second generation was forced to fall back on the institutions of the ethnic community, which by the 1930s included not just a greatly expanded business sector but also substantial employment in the civil service (Waldinger, 1996).

Changed power relations after World War II upended the exclusionary practices put into place during the inter-war years. Once quotas were removed, the Jewish presence on campuses swelled, though the change was often gradual, in part because recruiters never developed much affection for institutions of high Jewish density, such as New York City's specialized high schools. But by the 1970s, Jewish numbers were high; and with fraternities and other social organizations likewise curbed in their ability to use religion as a criterion of selection, contact probabilities shifted, producing greater exposure to Gentiles, which in turn accelerated Jewish "structural assimilation" into the American mainstream, to use the concept made famous by Milton Gordon (1964).

This portrait stands at variance with the belief that "the process of assimilation (of the European origin groups) largely depended on individual decisions to leave the immigrant culture

behind and embrace American ways" (Portes and Zhou, 76). In contrast to that view -- which mirrors conventional assimilation theory -- the acquisition of skills and the most obvious forms of acculturation were enough to lead Jews to the threshold of membership, but were not sufficient to carry them across the barriers created by insiders. Contact probabilities (the necessary condition of assimilation) only shifted following conflict, mediated by the relative ability of contending ethnic groups to maintain or overturn strategies of social closure. The Asian chapter of our story reveals the same dynamics of exclusion and conflict that followed educational attainment and adequate economic resources to support college enrollment.

The Asian/Jewish comparison also points to an important historical difference in the response to educationally high-achieving claimants. As in the past, insider groups sought to protect a privileged position by pursuing strategies of social closure; but unlike the past, the more recent efforts at exclusion were widely seen as illegitimate. The contemporary controversy also arose in a different organizational and political matrix: earlier struggles against discrimination had changed the rules of the game, making it far more difficult for dominant groups to engage in strategies of social closure than was the case earlier in the century. Moreover, insider groups operated under greater constraint than before, while outsider groups enjoyed more leverage within the affected institutions and more scope for mobilization outside them. The relatively high class standing of Asian immigrants did not simply carry them to the threshold of membership, as in the Jewish case earlier in the century, but generated the resources needed to quickly overturn barriers. Of course, not all barriers fell (preferences for alumni children and a premium for geographical diversity, installed to keep out Jews, have a similar effect on Asians today); but overall, the rapid influx of Asians into the upper reaches of American higher education highlights the distinctively favorable situation of a notable portion of today's second generation -- both with respect to the higher educational endowments which they or their parents arrive and to the greater openness of the society they encounter. And the advantages derived from the more



open society of the late twentieth century should temper generalizations about the determining position of skin pigmentation in the fate of the new second generation.

### **Second Generation Bottleneck?**

Gans, Portes and Zhou argue that the mismatch between aspiration and opportunity is greater today than before. In their view, the conundrum of the contemporary second generation lies in the continuing transformation of the U.S. economy. The manufacturing economy of old allowed for a three, possibly four generational sequence of modest steps that took the immigrants' descendants far beyond the bottom-most positions to which their ancestors had been originally consigned. By contrast, today occupational segmentation has "reduced the opportunities for incremental upward mobility through well-paid, blue-collar positions" (Portes and Zhou, 85). The declining viability of small business reduce the possibilities for advancement through the expansion of businesses established by the immigrant generation. And the general stalling of mobility reduces the chances for ethnic succession: Jews and Italians followed the Irish into the public sector as the latter moved on to more lucrative pursuits; today's civil servants are unlikely to enjoy the same options, which will close off this path of mobility to today's second generation (Gans, 1992). And thus emerges the 'hourglass economy' -- many good jobs at top, many bad jobs at bottom, few decent jobs in-between.

Or so the new conventional wisdom contends. We offer an alternative view, which contends that long-term change in the urban economies where America's immigrants have converged involves a secular trend toward jobs requiring extended sojourns in school. As an example, consider the changes in the skill structure of America's quintessential immigrant city -- New York -- which has shifted from the pyramid of 1940 -- where the great bulk of workers stood at the bottom -- to the upside down pyramid of 1990 -- where the largest category is to be found at the top (see Figure 1). The postindustrial city still has ample room for less skilled newcomers, but as the result of a game of ethnic musical chairs, in which immigrants replace natives to fill

the economy's least desirable jobs. While ethnic succession creates openings that low-skilled immigrants can fill as janitors or sewers, the number of janitorial or sewing jobs is at best stagnant or more likely, declining. Moreover, there are lots of newcomers seeking those jobs -- which keeps earnings depressed, leaves too many immigrant households mired in poverty, and thereby harms the educational prospects for immigrant children. Even so, the children of the least-skilled immigrants will almost certainly surpass the educational attainments of their parents; unfortunately, the high school educated child of a parent with an eighth grade education is likely to be employable, but not likely to earn a satisfactory wage. The supply/demand equation for less skilled workers of all ethnic backgrounds has turned unfavorable since the late 1970s, the reason why the real wages of males with less than a college degree have been on the slide.

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Figure 1 about here  
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The declining demand for less educated labor may threaten the prospects for second generation advance; but it need not be determining. Immigrant offspring of the past altered their attitudes toward and behavior in school when they realized that more education would yield dividends -- the recently documented history of Italian-American women in New York City the perfect case in point (Cohen, 1992) -- and there is no reason to assume that today's second generation will not do the same. Indeed, immigrants and the children of immigrants comprise 41 percent of the first year students enrolled in the City University of New York -- a rate that leaves immigrant children over-represented in the third largest public system of higher education in the United States by a factor of almost 50 percent (City University of New York, 1994: 10). The New York experience is not unique: nationwide, 74 percent of all college-age immigrants are enrolled in some form of post-secondary schooling as opposed to 65 percent among the native-born;

likewise, in-school rates for immigrant 18-21 year olds are above native-born levels (Vernez and Abrahamse, 1996: 38). Movement into higher education is a realistic prospect for many, precisely because a large fraction of the immigrants do not start at the bottom and a similarly substantial portion of immigrant offspring do not seek positions that only represent "incremental improvements" over low-skill jobs.

These considerations aside, it does seem reasonable to think that the less educationally successful of today's second generation, especially those stemming from the immigrant families entering near the bottom, will be likely to run into trouble. But do they differ, in this respect, from their counterparts of the past? Questions about the future of yesterday's second generation were a commonplace earlier in the century. At the time, contemporaries did not fret over the possibility that large number of jobs would remain at the bottom of an economy shifting toward an hourglass shape. Rather, they observed that increasing proportions of decent jobs required extended levels of schooling, and worried that the children of workers, generally, and the children of the immigrant workers, in particular, would not obtain those jobs, unless they were convinced to stay in school longer than it seemed their wont to do.

It is one thing to remember that contemporary observers were concerned about the prospects of yesterday's immigrant children; another thing to note that those concerns were founded in a reality of continuing educational disadvantage; still another thing to argue that because predictions were wrong in the past, they are wrong today. Obviously we do not make this last claim. Nevertheless, insofar as the predictions were wrong, they do suggest caution in simply assuming that growing demands for high skilled labor forecloses the possibility that the children of immigrants can move beyond their parents. Moreover, the historical parallel is instructive also insofar as it is in part true: the economy did in fact require more jobs for the educated; but the second generation and their children also found pathways to amelioration (in part, by adjusting their educational horizons, of course). Both the relatively slow pace of

economic change and the ability of the ethnics to respond to the changes are relevant.

But yesterday's second generation enjoyed at least one advantage that today's second generation will be unlikely to exploit: namely, a labor market in which the number of low-skilled competitors was on the downswing. Those immigrant children who began work after 1940 no longer had to contend with legions of low-skilled newcomers flooding the labor market. But that situation does not hold true at the end of the century: as of 1994, nearly 12 percent of all 16- to 24-year old males were foreign born, as was an even larger proportion -- 29 percent -- of all persons who have not completed school. And the influx of low-skilled immigrants has meant a long-term turnaround in the job prospects for workers whose skills put them at the end of the hiring queue. Data from New York City, for example, show that the ratio of low-skilled New Yorkers to low-skilled jobs fell noticeably between 1940 and 1970 -- just as one would expect, given the rapid educational upgrading of the city's workforce and the diminishing presence of workers from the old immigration, who had arrived in the United States with little, if any education (see Figure 2). Things then changed for the worse, but not because of any shift in employers' requirements: if anything, the number of low-skilled jobs declined at a slightly slower rate than before. Rather, the new immigrants began converging on New York after 1970, producing an uptick in the ratio of low-schooled workers chasing after the remaining low-level jobs. Those with a high school diploma have suffered only slightly from this new supply/demand equation. Not so New Yorkers who had dropped out before completing high school: the competitive situation for New Yorkers with just some high school situation was worse in 1990 than had been fifty years before. Bad as the New York scene looks as of 1990, the situation is far more severe in Los Angeles, with its much larger influx of even less-skilled immigrants. Consequently, the least successful of immigrant children are likely to be endangered by a confluence of trends: the upgrading of skill requirements, on the one hand, and a burgeoning population of low-skilled newcomers, on the other.

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Figure 2 about here  
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Even these less fortunate members of the new second generation may not find themselves trapped. The U.S. economy is enormous and today's second generation a relatively small fraction of its workforce. If there is one cliché about ethnicity and the economy, it is that ethnic groups are not randomly distributed but are clustered in various types of niches, which both provide shelter from competition and yield mechanisms for progress up the ladder. Unless we rule out the emergence of second generation niches, the observation that manufacturing jobs generally have declined does not end the task of analysis but begins it; it is not impossible, for example, that despite any decline, the remaining decent, less-skilled jobs are heavily populated by, and are sufficient for, the current day second generation aspirants.<sup>7</sup> Finally, it is well to remember that most employed persons without college degrees are neither immigrants nor their children. If the new economy poses serious problems of upward mobility for the offspring of these workers, it thereby confronts American society and *all* its working-class families with a very serious and widespread problem. For once it would seem true that we really can ignore ethnicity and focus on class.

#### **Second Generation Revolt?**

The immigrants arrive willing to do the jobs that natives won't hold: however low the jobs may fall in the U.S. hierarchy, they still offer wages and compensation superior to the opportunities back home. Having been exposed to different wage and consumption standards from the start, the children want more. This process is inherent in the immigration process -- an endogenous source of changing aspirations and outlooks; following Piore (1979), we can call this "second generation revolt". To say it is inherent in the immigration experience is to imply

that it is by no means unique to the current second generation, but rather that it characterized those of the past as well. Both Gans and Portes and Zhou draw on this source of changing attitudes. However, especially in the formulation of Portes and Zhou, other factors, exogenous to this process, are found to be interacting with it. For them, whether second generation "careers...keep pace with their U.S.-acquired aspirations" (Portes and Zhou, 85) will be answered in a new historical context. These new exogenous factors include the racial composition of the new immigration and the nature of the hourglass economy already discussed. Also new is a kind of cultural diffusion. The new immigrants converge on central cities where they live in close contact with earlier established, native minorities. Proximity to African- and Mexican-Americans yields exposure to the "adversarial" norms of "marginalized youth". As immigrant children come into contact with the reactive subculture developed by native minorities, they undergo a process of "socialization" that "can effectively block parental plans for intergenerational mobility." (Portes and Zhou, 83).

In the concept of an "oppositional" or "adversarial" culture we see the shadow of the anthropologist John Ogbu. For Ogbu, an oppositional culture is the indigenous response adopted by African-Americans and other supposedly like groups to the experience of oppression and exploitation in America. On the one hand, the legacy of discrimination breeds ties of extraordinary, kinlike solidarity; not only does group loyalty take primacy over the quest for individual achievement; but any effort to break out from the pack is seen as a betrayal of the group, and appropriately sanctioned. On the other hand, African-Americans have pursued a strategy of cultural inversion, as have the other subordinated groups, responding to mainstream society's rejection by rejecting the mainstream and its values.<sup>8</sup> As Foley (1991: 66) puts it, "This sort of occupational logic dictates that they must choose between being occupationally successful (white) and culturally successful (black). Quite ironically, the battle to preserve their ethnic culture becomes the very thing that dooms castelike minorities of color to academic

failure."

But just as second-generational revolt is not a phenomenon distinctive to African-Americans or Ogbu's other caste-like minorities, there is good reason to assume that an oppositional culture is not phenomenon distinctive to these new sorts of immigrants. As we've emphasized, discrimination and stigmatization were well-known to the earlier generations of European immigrants. Whatever the faults of today's multicultural education, it could not possibly be as dismissive of the immigrants' background and culture as were the Americanization programs of the 1920s or 1930s; a common reaction to this curriculum must have been resentment and opposition, especially in those schools where alienation from school values of educational achievement and extended education were prevalent.

Nor should we forget that solidarity has always been among the most cherished of working-class values with effects besides those one sees on the picket line. Here is Pete Hamill, on growing up in Brooklyn during the forties:

In the final three years of grammar school at Holy Name, I always finished at the top of the class in grades, averaging 98 or 99, was placed on the honor roll and granted awards for general excellence. But there was an assumption that if you got good grades you must be soft, a sissy, or an AK -- an ass kisser. This was part of the most sickening aspect of Irish-American life in those days: the assumption that if you rose above an acceptable level of mediocrity, you were guilty of the sin of pride. You were to accept your place and stay in it for the rest of your life; the true rewards would be given to you in heaven, after you were dead. There was ferocious pressure to conform, to avoid breaking out of the pack; self-denial was the supreme virtue....it was arrogant, a sin of pride, to conceive of a life beyond the certainties, rhythms, and traditions of the Neighborhood. Sometimes the attitude was expressed directly, by my friends or the Big Guys, or some of the men from Rattigan's. More often, it was implied. But the Neighborhood view of the world had fierce power. Who did I think I was? Who the *fuck* did I think I was? Forget these kid's dreams, I told myself, give 'em up. Do what everybody else does: drop out of high school, go to work, join the army or navy, get married, settle down, have children (Hamill, 1994: 110-111; 146).

This pressure for leveling in solidarity again implies a we-they division between the neighborhood and the middle class norms. That the precise cultural content of the division is not that which Ogbu describes does not mean that the we-they division was less oppositional.

Other descriptions of second generation youth culture in the early twentieth century make the skepticism about the value of schooling and the opposition between ethnic youth and schools explicit. Ewa Morawska provides this summary of the second generation outlook among the East European immigrants in a Pennsylvania steeltown:

...the sons and the daughters of the immigrants were...keenly aware of the gulf between ...[the] ideals [of the dominant society] and their actual chances in Johnstown. This perception was summarized by Mike T., a second generation Serb, born in 1905: "At school we learned [about how man is master of his fate], but we knew that we had a double strike against us, foreign extraction and poor and uneducated parents." In the perceptions of the second generation, some schooling and some personal advancement were correlated, but education, the basis of individual achievement in the dominant cultural paradigm, "was not the most important [factor] for your future." By and large, success was determined by particularistic considerations: "In 70 percent of the cases, it mattered more who your father was, his nationality and all...and whom he knew, and whom you knew (Morawska, 1985: 267-8)."

Skepticism toward the value of education, combined with cultural conflicts between school and community -- these themes combine in the work of Caroline Ware describing the Italians of Greenwich Village in the 1920s and the 1930s. "Among the boys in the district," she wrote, "it had always been very much the code to hate school. Although there is nothing unique in boy's antagonism to school, the intensity with which the local boys hated school was conspicuous (Ware, [1935] 1965: 337)." As Ware tells it, conflict had various roots: the curriculum and teachings had little in common with what the children learned in the streets; the schools disregarded the cultural background of the children; they also rejected the behavioral norms that the children had acquired at home, which "often set the children vigorously against the school." Writing contemporaneously, Leonard Covello (1967) recounts a similar story about the Italians of East Harlem; there the accent lies on the extraordinary cohesion of the Italian community and on the way in which parental pressures and children's preferences converged to produce high dropout rates by high school years. Composed twenty-five years later, Gans' description of the Italians of Boston's West End differs only in degree: the students are poorly motivated; the parents are ambivalent; the schools clash with the attractions of the children's



peer groups; the "junior high school principal's main problem [is] truancy, and the parental acquiescence concerning this (Gans, 1962: 133; emphasis added)." The school was "anathema to many" of the teenagers, in large measure for the reasons adduced by Ware twenty-five years earlier: it sought to train them for a way of life diametrically opposed to the one for which they had been prepared at home (Gans, 1962: 68). And a good part of that opposition stemmed from the parents' rejection of middle-class society and its values and their hostility toward individualistic striving. What little we know of more contemporary, ethnic working-class communities suggests that the school-child antagonism has not since been significantly tempered (See, for example, McLeod, 1987).

Moreover, the accommodation to the routine of working-class life was often made grudgingly and few of the sixteen year old boys who dropped out of high school, as did Hamill, made a beeline for the factory. Instead, they spent their time on the street corner, hanging around, drinking liquor, and getting into fights; Hamill describes the "times of the gangs", in pages differing little from those of today's newspaper, only in that the arsenal of violence was not as complete.<sup>9</sup> Whether gangs were present or not, the nature of the youth labor market made for an extended "moratorium", as Paul Osterman (1980) termed it, in which youth were excluded from positions of the primary or craft type, and bounced from one more or less casual job to another. Unstable employment was compatible with that form of protest against the routines and aims of both school and work described by Gans as "action-orientation": youth "want the material appurtenances of modern life -- especially cars and spending money -- and they want to be freed from the routine-seeking society which 'bugs' -- or imposes on -- them. (Gans, 1962: 68)" Since the youth labor market provided plenty of jobs, deficient only because they were boring and badly paid, action-orientation could persist until other commitments forced a reckoning with routinization (See Spergel, date, 149-152; Wial, 1988).

The historical evidence, reviewed above, is certainly not definitive; but it does imply that

an "oppositional culture" can emerge from the immigrant experience *without* exposure to a "proximal host" comprised of visible, stigmatized, native-born minorities. This conclusion points to greater continuities in the experiences of immigrants past and present; it reminds us of the difficulties experienced by the earlier groups; it also suggests that the time frame for immigrant accommodation was extended and that we should not expect different today. There is also a hint of another factor missing from current debates, namely class. Though the context for the discussion above is ethnic, the explanatory factors seem to be of a different nature, having to do with the disarticulation between schools, on the one hand, and the world of manual work to which immigrant children were destined, on the other. That disconnection breeds revolt: working-class children correctly perceive that school has little to do with their chances in life; *and* they also react against the middle-class culture of the school and *its* denigration of working-class life and labor.

The youthful revolt described in the paragraphs above, however, is almost certainly conditioned by the subsequent opportunities that working-class children encounter. School could be flouted with relative impunity, as long as there was a vibrant factory-based economy, which unsuccessful students could access through the help of relatives and neighborhood-based friends. The stronger the industrial economy, the greater the value placed on manual work, which in turn sanctioned youth rebellion and gave it a ritualized form. Though the literature is fragmentary, it appears that these same circumstances persist, in attenuated form, in the remaining ethnic working-class enclaves in the Northeast and Midwest. One can certainly hypothesize that similar conditions come into play in Los Angeles, with its massive, thriving factory-based economy, and the movement of Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans into the ranks of the skilled working-class. But outcomes are sure to take a different form in a deindustrialized city like New York or a service-based city like Miami, where school leavers have few alternatives and the erosion of the industrial economy has sorely devalued manual work.

As these are also the conditions that have intensified the "oppositional culture" among native minorities, it may be common experience, and not exposure, that yields self-defeating rebellion among the children of the inner city, whether of foreign- or native-born roots.

### **Conclusion: Second Generation Prospects**

The descendants of the last great immigration to the United States have now moved far up the totem pole; from the perspective of the 1990s, it is hard to imagine that their adaptation to American could have turned out differently. But this view of an inexorable climb up the social ladder is certainly not how the children and grandchildren of the European immigrants experienced the process themselves. Their beginnings, as we have noted, were not particularly promising; nor were the established groups of the time ready to accept the newcomers and their descendants. Even the most skilled of the lot, the Jews, found that rapid acculturation and the acquisition of schooling were not sufficient to open the doors. The acquisition of full membership was an uncertain, protracted process to which the immigrants and their descendants contributed -- both through attempts to undo obstacles to progress and to place themselves on the white side of America's racial divide.

At a minimum, this portrait of the past suggests that the children of the post-1965 immigration begin with disadvantages no greater than those encountered by immigrant children before. That generalization is probably too cautious. On the one hand, the immigrants' class composition is far more heavily weighted toward the middle-class than was true earlier in the century. And on the other hand, American society is more receptive to immigrant incorporation - in large measure, due to the efforts by earlier groups of outsiders widen access to opportunity.

Two themes emerge from this comparison: class and agency.

*Class:* While America's new immigrant population is extraordinarily diverse, its overwhelmingly largest component -- the Mexicans -- falls at the very bottom of the skill ladder; the Mexicans are even more heavily represented among the immigrants' children. Absent the

Mexicans, today's second generation looks little different from the rest of the American population in socio-economic characteristics. Those characteristics are not sufficient to guarantee satisfactory adjustment to the economy of the next generation; but the same can be said for young, third-generation-plus Americans of any ethnic stripe. The immigrant children most at risk are the Mexicans; and it is the presence of this very large group, so far below the others in skills, that distinguishes today's from yesterday's second generation. However, we note that the advent of the new economy means trouble for the children of the native-born members of America's working-class, who also find themselves in conflict with the middle-class values and expectations of schools. These are the main reasons why we should worry about the future for the offspring of Mexican immigrants and of other less skilled newcomers.

*Agency:* As did their predecessors, the children of today's new immigrants will transform America. The relatively high class background of so many immigrant children makes it more likely that they will do so quickly and on their terms -- witness the contrast between the Jewish and Asian fate in higher education. That higher class standing is also likely to change the import of race, historically fluid *except* at the black/white divide, and currently under rapid transition even there. One can certainly imagine that some section of African-, Latin American-, and Asian-origin Americans will find themselves pigeonholed in some new, but stigmatized and subordinated "other" category. But other options are clearly visible. The ever growing ethnic diversity of American life -- thanks, in large measure to immigration itself -- suggest that those possibilities are more likely. We expect that today's second generation will make itself busy reshaping the meaning of race -- an endeavor to be pursued with at least some modicum of success.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Lieberman and Waters point out that the occupational concentrations established by groups as of 1900 were still noticeable as of 1980. But while it useful to know that Italians are still more likely to be shoemakers than others, the questions posed by the current debate have to do with the occupations and industries to which the children of the immigrants moved on, and whether those niches have been retained to any significant extent.

<sup>2</sup> Though we concede, as Gans reminded us in a private communication, that "Gans wrote 'dark-skinned' quite deliberately; he did not say yellow and dark-skinned." (Letter to Roger Waldinger, January 12, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Ongoing research by Roger Waldinger is the source of the material reported in the remainder of this section. For a preliminary discussion of the study on which this paragraph reports, see Waldinger 1996b

<sup>4</sup> For example, a recent article in the New Yorker contains the following excerpt from an article entitled, "How to Date a Brown Girl:" "A halfie will tell you her parents met in the movement. Back then she'll say, people thought it was the radical thing to do. It will sound like something her parents made her memorize. Your brother heard that one too and said Sounds like a whole lot of Uncle Tomming to me .... Black people she will say, treat me real bad. That's why I don't like them. You'll wonder how she feels about Dominicans. Don't ask. Let her speak..." (84). On the state of official difficulties with classification of mixed races, see Wright, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> " To maintain their privileged status and to perpetuate their domination," wrote L. Ling-chi Wang, the head of UC Berkeley Ethnic Studies Department, the nation's elite colleges and universities "have been forced in the 1980s to modify their admissions criteria in order to slow down the Asian American 'invasion', much like what these same institutions had to do from 1918 to 1947 when they discovered the "Jewish problem".... (Wang, 1988: 201, 205).

<sup>6</sup> As argued by Richard Alba and Victor Nee in their already influential 1995 state-of-the-art review.

<sup>7</sup> Suppose for example, that the 7/10 of all second generation members of 1940 were found in such jobs (very likely an overestimate; but who has as yet checked?). And finally, suppose that the share of such jobs fell to 3/5 its earlier proportion between 1940 and 1990. If the second generation comprised 10% of the workforce would there not be more than enough such jobs for them?

<sup>8</sup> Publications by some of Ogbu's associates have had considerable influence on the emerging debate on today's second generation. See Gibson, 1988. Matute-Bianchi, 1986.

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<sup>9</sup> For social scientific evidence on this point, based on a comparative study of three New York City neighborhoods in the late 1950s, see Spergel, 1964, pp. 38-47.

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**Table 1: Immigrants and Ethnics in 1910**

	First generation				Second Generation											
	British	Irish	Scand	German	Italian	Polish	Jews	EE	Other E&		S Eur	British	Irish	Scand	German	NWNM
									S	E						
<b>Men 10-64, Occups</b>																
(% of non-farm)																
% Mgrl, Prof	10%	6%	6%	10%	2%	2%	9%	3%	12%	11%	10%	11%	13%			
% Technical, Sales	15%	11%	8%	14%	7%	5%	29%	8%	22%	21%	27%	21%	24%			
% Craft	40%	22%	41%	34%	23%	23%	31%	25%	31%	24%	25%	27%	24%			
% Ops, Laborers	28%	47%	39%	34%	59%	68%	28%	60%	30%	35%	33%	32%	32%			
<b>All males 10 and over</b>																
% speaking English	99%	100%	91%	90%	49%	46%	78%	51%	99%	99%	99%	98%	99%			
% able to read	99%	96%	98%	97%	65%	73%	90%	55%	98%	98%	98%	98%	96%			
<b>% 14-18 yr olds in school</b>																
Boys	45%	47%	48%	69%	28%	28%	57%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	58%			
Girls	47%	49%	54%	37%	34%	26%	55%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	60%			

Source: Watkins, 1994: Tables B1, B2, B3, B4

Note: First generation=foreign born; second generation=native born with at least a foreign-born mother; NWNM=native born of native mothers. For group definitions, see Watkins, 366-371. "Other East and Southern Europeans" include Greeks, Russians, Magyars, Bohemians and Moravians, Slovaks, Lithuanians and Letts, Slovenians, and Croatians.

**Table 2: Characteristics of Immigrant Children, aged 0-17, 1990**

Head college graduate

Total	20%	22%	21%	23%
Mexican	3%	4%	4%	8%
Total-Mexican	27%	30%	30%	23%

Head single parent

Total	25%	18%	20%	25%
Mexican	23%	19%	20%	39%
Total-Mexican	25%	17%	19%	25%

Public Assistance

Total	13%	9%	10%	9%
Mexican	17%	10%	11%	13%
Total-Mexican	12%	9%	9%	9%

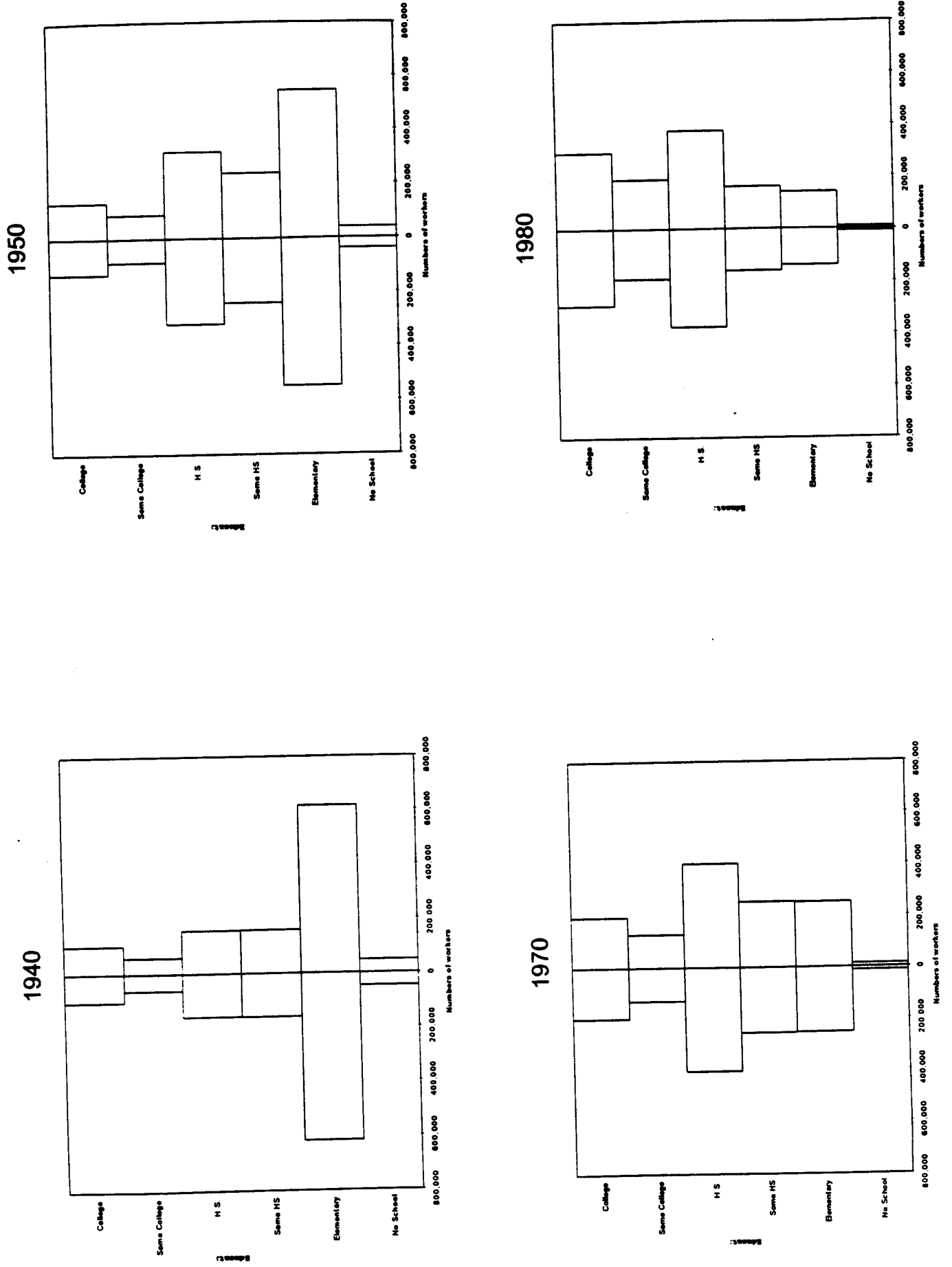
Head upper white-collar

Total	16%	22%	21%	25%
Mexican	4%	6%	6%	13%
Total-Mexican	21%	30%	28%	25%

Source: Oropesa and Landale, 1995

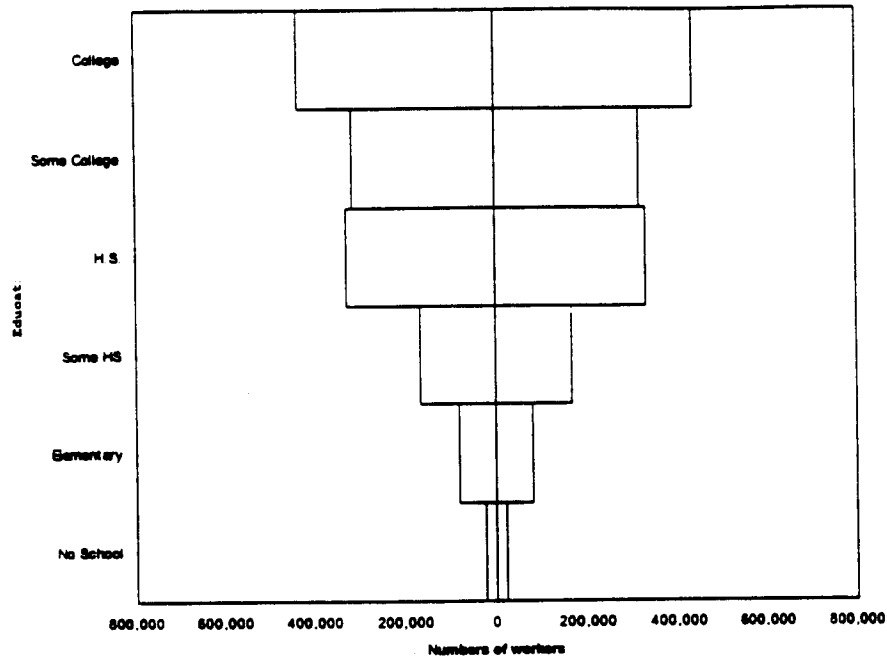
Note: First generation=born abroad; Second generation=born US of at least 1 FB parent;  
All immigrant kids=first+second generations.

Figure 1. Employed New Yorkers by Education, 1940-1990



# Figure 1. Continued

1990



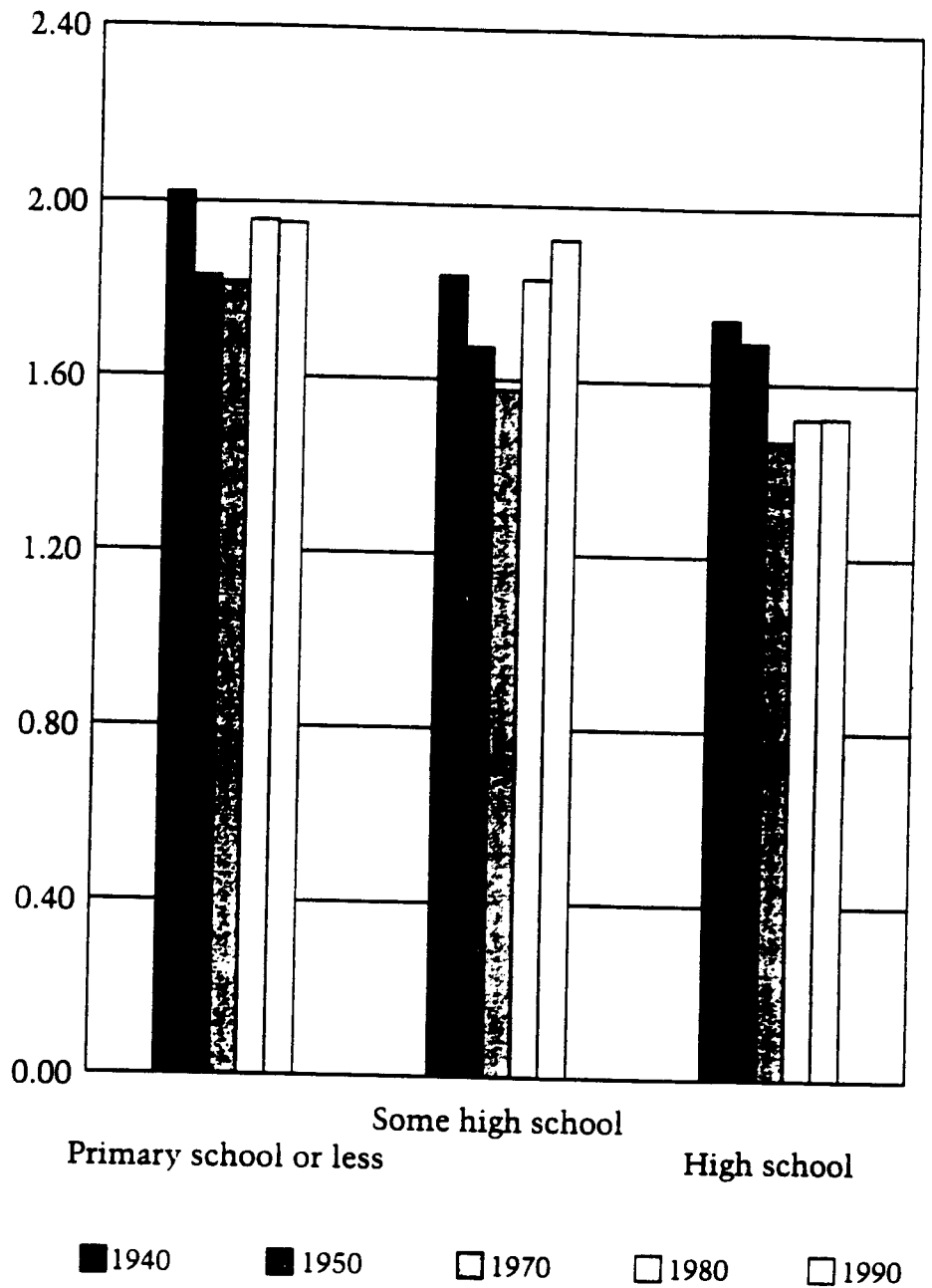


Figure 2. Ratio of low-skilled persons to low-skilled jobs, 1940–1990.  
 (Source: Census of Population, 1940–1990.)