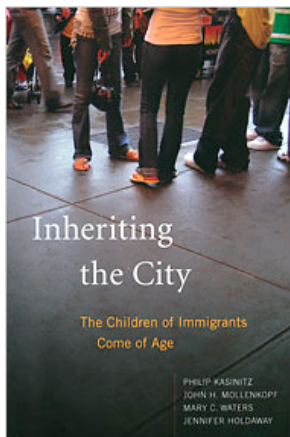


# Immigrants' Children Find Better Lives, Study Shows

By SEWELL CHAN  
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A decade-long study of adult children of immigrants to the New York region has concluded that they are rapidly entering the mainstream and doing better than their parents in terms of education and earnings — even outperforming native-born Americans in many cases.



But the study also warned of problems that could block upward mobility for members of the "second generation," including persistent poverty and poor school performance among Dominicans and racial discrimination against black immigrants from the Caribbean.

The results of the \$2 million study are detailed in "Inheriting the City: The Children of Immigrants Come of Age," published this month by Harvard University Press and the Russell Sage Foundation, which finances social science research.

It focused on five groups: Dominicans, Chinese, Russian Jews, South Americans (consisting of Colombians, Ecuadoreans and Peruvians) and West Indians, defined as immigrants from the English-speaking Caribbean, including Belize and Guyana. The researchers also interviewed native-born whites, blacks and Puerto Ricans (those born on the mainland) in the New York area for

comparison purposes.

The study identified broad similarities among adult children of immigrants. They were overwhelmingly fluent in English; were less occupationally segregated than their parents; lived longer with their parents than native-born Americans; and were firmly rooted in the United States, with fewer personal and financial ties to their ancestral homeland than their parents.

The Russian and Chinese second-generation adults had higher high school and college graduation rates than, and earned as much as, native-born whites their age. The other groups reported higher educational attainment and earnings than native-born blacks and Puerto Ricans their age. In almost all of the immigrant groups, women outperformed men in school, though men continued to earn more.

Family life varied considerably among the groups. Dominicans and South Americans tended to marry young, while the Chinese postponed marriage and children the longest. Caribbean immigrants had a high rate of single-parent households, but the disadvantages of being raised by a single parent were offset, in part, by close extended families and the heavy involvement of grandparents in child-rearing.

The study was based on 3,415 telephone interviews conducted between 1998 and 2000; 333 face-to-face follow-up interviews in 2000 and 2001; and a final round of 172 follow-up interviews in 2002 and 2003. The subjects of the study were 18 to 32 at the time of the initial interviews and were either born in the United States to at least one immigrant parent, or arrived in the United States by age 12. The study covered 10 counties: the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, Westchester and Nassau in New York and Essex, Hudson, Passaic and Union in New Jersey.

Three of the book's authors — Philip Kasnitz, a sociologist at the City University of New York Graduate Center; John H. Mollenkopf, a political scientist at the Graduate Center; and Mary C. Waters, a sociologist at Harvard — presented their findings at a panel discussion on Wednesday at the Graduate Center. (This reporter served as moderator.) The fourth author was Jennifer Holdaway, who directs the

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migration program at the Social Science Research Council.

In 1992, [Herbert J. Gans](#), a [Columbia University](#) sociologist, published an influential essay suggesting that members of the post-1965 second generation might do worse than their parents, refusing to accept low-level, poorly paying jobs and adopting negative attitudes toward school and work.

But the authors of the new study found that Professor Gans's fears have not been realized. Most of the young people studied worked in white-collar clerical or service jobs in retail and major financial services and most had achieved "real, if modest, progress over their parents' generation."

One important reason why, according to the authors, is that even poor, uneducated immigrants have often "shown that they have the drive, ambition, courage and strength to move from one nation to another," and transmit their determination to their children. And the new second generation is able to take advantage of civil rights programs, including affirmative action policies, in applying to universities and for jobs.

The authors acknowledged that it was hard in some cases to explain why some of the five groups studied appeared to do better than others. The relative success of Russian Jews seemed clear: They immigrated with high levels of education, benefited from government programs because they came as refugees and received aid from established Jewish organizations.

The authors said it was more difficult to explain why "Chinese youngsters have achieved the greatest educational and economic success relative to their parents' often humble origins." The Chinese have a fairly cohesive community with "a high degree of social connection between its better- and worse-off members," the book argued, while ethnic newspapers, churches and media served as a link between middle- and working-class immigrants and helped share "cultural capital," like information on how to get into the city's best schools.

Finally, Chinese parents were less likely to divorce, and they encouraged their children to put off marriage and children until their education was completed.

West Indians tend to have high rates of homeownership and do well in school and in the labor market, even though many grew up in single-parent households. But they also reported high rates of discrimination, particularly at the hands of the police.

"In many ways they are assimilating into African-American neighborhoods and social networks," Professor Waters said in a phone interview. "On the other hand, they tend to live on the outskirts of those neighborhoods."

The authors found that Dominicans "probably present the clearest cause for concern." Many second-generation Dominicans are black and face discrimination, and unlike Caribbean immigrants, few have parents who spoke English on arrival. Many live in neighborhoods that are poor and attend some of the city's worst schools.

Nevertheless, the study found that second-generation Dominicans were much better educated than their parents.

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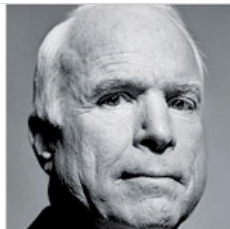


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