



Race and Ethnicity in America

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Print publication date: 2017

Print ISBN-13: 9780520286900

Published to California Scholarship Online: September 2017

DOI: 10.1525/california/9780520286900.001.0001

Hispanics and Asians

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DOI:10.1525/california/9780520286900.003.0004

[–] Abstract and Keywords

This chapter offer brief histories of Hispanics and Asians in the United States and examine patterns of socioeconomic achievement among them. It makes broad generalizations about these panethnic groups, while also describing the variation by country of origin where possible. It then reflects back on the theories discussed in chapter 2. The chapter provides considerable evidence that both Asians and Hispanics have experienced upward mobility across generations, indicative of some measure of incorporation in the United States. Asians have achieved parity, or even an advantage, when compared to whites in terms of education, income, and other outcomes. Among Hispanics there is evidence of educational and income improvements from the first generation to the second, and to some extent beyond, but a gap in achievement between Hispanics and whites persists. Whether this gap will narrow in the future remains to be seen.

Keywords: Hispanics, Asians, socioeconomic status, integration and incorporation, first generation, second generation, panethnic groups

All American families, except those who are wholly Native American, have an immigrant story to tell, whether they know it or not. For some, it is a story of allure—ancestors seeking new opportunities in a land full of natural resources and commerce. For others, it is a story of escape, such as fleeing religious or political persecution. For most blacks who came before the Civil War, it is a story of involuntary migration into servitude. Today, fortunately, most immigrants come to seek better opportunities in the United States or to join family members already living here, although a significant number also come as refugees escaping precarious conditions in their home country. Here is just one of these immigrant stories, related by Juan Roca, a young man whose parents immigrated from Mexico:

As a teenager, my father left his life of poverty in Mexico for the promise of a new life in the United States in 1959. The hard, physical work of picking crops in the fields of California, Arizona and Texas, earned him less than a dollar a day, once room and board was subtracted. The Braceros program granted him a work visa and when he finished the program, he began his path to citizenship. My father did not complete any formal

education past fourth grade.... Our upbringing was humble, but my parents provided for all 12 of us children. They taught each and every one of us the importance of **(p.62)** education. Our childhood was filled with the joys of love, laughter and belief in God....

I excelled at school. I decided to take a chance and apply for college. I started at the University of Texas at San Antonio in fall 2002 and graduated with a bachelor's degree in English and a Master's in public administration. I was the first in my family to get a college degree—I'm the seventh out of 12 children. All of my siblings after me went to college and today we have a public administrator, a teacher and a medical school student in the family. I have given myself to a life of service. I am now responsible for helping many young children reach their potential and live a life our ancestors could only dream of. I am the dream. I am an American. And I am the proud son of an immigrant.¹

This is obviously an immigrant success story—a traditional one that embodies, as explicitly described by Mr. Roca, the American Dream. This dream holds that any American, with determination and hard work, can succeed. While it is clear that European immigrants and their children who came in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by and large found success in the United States—they are now fully assimilated into the American mainstream—it is less clear whether immigrants and their children from the latest wave of immigration in the post-World War II period, mainly from Asia and Latin America, are fulfilling these dreams of upward mobility. Whether they are doing so is the focus of this chapter.

Pairing Hispanics and Asians here at least in some ways is a study in contrasts. By some measures (such as rates of high school completion), Hispanics are faring quite poorly relative to most other groups, and Asians are faring quite well, as they surpass whites by a comfortable margin. But the Asians and Hispanics share many similarities as well. Both have long histories in the United States, and these histories include bouts with intense racism and discrimination. Patterns of socioeconomic achievement among both groups are also heavily influenced by immigration over the past several decades, since a significant percentage of both groups are composed of either immigrants themselves or children of immigrants. Patterns today are then also influenced by the characteristics of the immigrants, with high levels of socioeconomic achievement among native-born Asians strongly influenced by the relatively high levels of education of Asian immigrants, and the lower levels of socioeconomic achievement **(p.63)** among native-born Hispanics likewise affected by the low levels of education among Hispanic immigrants.

It is also important to recognize the diversity of experiences among these groups. Hispanics and Asians come from many different countries and under different conditions, so there is considerable variation in histories and outcomes within the two. For example, the experiences of the Japanese are quite different from those of the Hmong from southeast Asia, many who came as refugees in the wake of the Vietnam War. Likewise, the experiences of people of Mexican origin are quite different from those of immigrants coming from Cuba.

The following sections of this chapter offer brief histories of Hispanics and Asians in the United States and examine patterns of socioeconomic achievement among them. I make broad generalizations about these panethnic groups, while also describing the variation by country of origin where possible (the data for specific ethnic groups are not available for all indicators). I then reflect back on the theories discussed in chapter 2, including human capital and social

capital; the role of culture, racism and discrimination; and, finally, assimilation theory in explaining patterns and trends in achievement.

My conclusion is that there is considerable evidence that both Asians and Hispanics have experienced upward mobility across generations, indicative of some measure of incorporation in the United States. Asians have achieved parity, or even an advantage, when compared to whites in terms of education, income, and other outcomes. This is true for most Asian groups. Among Hispanics, and particularly Mexicans, there is evidence of educational and income improvements from the first generation to the second, and to some extent beyond, but a gap in achievement between Hispanics and whites persists. Whether this gap will narrow in the future remains to be seen, though there are at least some indications that full incorporation may eventually occur, at least for many Hispanics.

Hispanics in the United States: A Brief History

As the British and other European groups settled on the eastern seaboard of what later became the United States, the Spanish colonized much of **(p.64)** Central and South America, as well as a significant portion of the Caribbean. There were a few Spanish settlements and missions in Florida, but the Spanish government eventually turned this territory over to the United States through the Adams-Onís Treaty in 1819. Mexico itself gained its independence from Spain after a protracted war from 1810 to 1821, and its population generally consisted of a mix of three groups: a Spanish-origin elite population; mestizos (those of mixed European and Indian ancestry), who were mostly landless but who occupied many middle-tier positions in society (working, for example, as craftsmen, soldiers, laborers, and traders); and, finally, Indians, who remained outside of Spanish-speaking society and who farmed land in a traditional manner.²

The Mexican government had a weak hold on its outlying states to the north in what is now California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. The size of the Mexican population in these states was likewise modest but made important contributions to the development of the Southwest, such as through cattle ranching and mining. As U.S. citizens from the East poured into Texas and eventually began to significantly outnumber the Mexican population there, conflict increased, especially as the aggressive newcomers began to assert more control. In 1836 Texas proclaimed its independence from Mexico and beat back a Mexican effort to reclaim the land. Then, at the request of the Texans, the United States annexed this territory in 1845, precipitating the Mexican-American War. After the Mexican army was defeated in 1848, Mexico ceded territory to the United States in what is now California, New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado as part of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This treaty also gave U.S. citizenship to the fifty thousand or so Mexicans who remained.³

Aside from frequent back-and-forth movement across border communities, the number of immigrants of Mexico in the United States was modest through much of the rest of the nineteenth century. Immigration increased considerably during the conflict and instability that accompanied the beginning of the Mexican Revolution in 1910. Immigrants from Mexico were also drawn to economic opportunities in railway construction, the expansion of commercial agriculture, and the development of manufacturing in the Southwest and other areas of the United States. Employers were also hungry for cheap labor. Mexican Americans were frequently treated as expendable, second-class citizens, often recruited **(p.65)** during labor shortages but at other times encouraged to return to Mexico, sometimes by force. For example, during the early years of the Great Depression, from 1929 to 1935, at least 415,000 Mexicans were compelled to leave the United States.⁴

The next large period of large-scale immigration accompanied World War II, during a period of acute labor shortages in the United States, when many working-age men joined in the armed forces. The Bracero Program was implemented in 1942 to recruit Mexican workers to the agricultural industry, mainly in California, though some immigrants were brought in to work on railroad construction in other states as well. Conditions were generally poor for the workers, but the jobs often paid considerably more than they could earn back at home. The Bracero Program ended in 1964.⁵ Nevertheless, the number of Mexican immigrants to the United States continued to grow even after that time. In 2013 about 11.6 million Mexican immigrants lived in the United States, compared to 2.2 million in 1980.⁶

The presence of other Hispanic groups is more recent. Spain ceded Puerto Rico to the United States in 1898 as a result of its defeat in the Spanish-American War. In 1952 it was established as a commonwealth, in which it was a self-governing community voluntarily associated with the United States, with its own governor and legislature. Reflecting its status, Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens at birth (and have been since 1917). Puerto Rico underwent a period of industrialization and development in the post-World War II period. During this period of change and displacement, when, for example, the mechanization of the sugar industry reduced the number of jobs on farms, migration to the U.S. mainland increased rapidly. New York City became the main destination for these migrants; by 1970 New York had a population of 818,000 Puerto Ricans, compared to 463,000 in San Juan, the main municipality in Puerto Rico.⁷ While Puerto Ricans, compared to other Latino migrants, enjoy the benefit of U.S. citizenship at birth, the population is generally very racially mixed; many have some African ancestry, and darker-skinned Puerto Ricans in particular have encountered significant racial barriers.⁸

Cubans entered the United States in significant numbers after the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Many of these immigrants were highly educated professionals and business and political leaders who had been supporters of the deposed president and dictator, Fulgencio Batista, or who **(p. 66)** became disillusioned by the increasing repressiveness of the Castro regime as Fidel Castro consolidated political and economic power. By the 1970s the immigrant population from Cuba was becoming economically more diverse—with a substantial number from the working class—and thus more representative of the Cuban population as a whole. Another wave of Cuban immigrants entered in 1980 as part of the Mariel Boatlift, and this group was both racially and socioeconomically very mixed. In that year 803,000 Cubans, or about 8 percent of Cuba's population, lived in the United States. Cubans overwhelmingly settled in Miami, and many found success as entrepreneurs and small-business owners.⁹

Immigration from the Dominican Republic to the United States also increased since the 1960s. The country experienced considerable economic growth, but also population growth, urbanization, significant income inequality, and political turmoil—all which contributed to immigration over several decades. Some Dominicans went to Miami and other destinations, but New York was by far the principal destination.¹⁰ Since the 1980s there has been a growth in the United States in the number of Latinos from a variety of origins, including El Salvador and Guatemala—two countries that have experienced considerable political instability (sometimes exacerbated by U.S. interference, as in the Dominican Republic as well).

These patterns of migration have had a considerable impact on the demographic composition of the U.S. population. In 1970 just 5 percent of the U.S. population was Hispanic. By 2013 this had risen to 17 percent, and population projections suggest that perhaps 28 percent of the population might be Hispanic in 2050, though, as discussed in chapter 2, the actual percentage

will depend on how data are collected in the future and changing patterns of self-identification, especially among people of mixed-ethnic origins.¹¹ Table 1 provides greater detail about the composition of the Hispanic population, according to the 2010 census, and how this changed during the preceding decade. A significant majority of the Hispanic population is of Mexican origin (63.0 percent), with the next largest groups being Puerto Ricans (9.2 percent), Cubans (3.5), Salvadorans (3.3), and Dominicans (2.8). All countries of origin have seen demographic growth from 2000 to 2010, with particularly large increases, in percentage terms, for Uruguayans (from a very small population base), **(p.67)** Hondurans, Guatemalans, and Salvadorans. Overall, the growth in the Hispanic population from 2000 to 2010 (43.0 percent) far exceeded the growth of the U.S. population as a whole (9.7 percent).

While Hispanics are overrepresented in particular regions of the country, with different groups being concentrated in different specific areas due to historical circumstances, the Hispanic population is gradually spreading to new areas across the United States. For example, 11 percent of the Mexican origin population lived in the Los Angeles metropolitan area in 2010, down from 19 percent in 1990. Similarly, while 38 percent of mainland Puerto Ricans lived in the New York City area in 1990, by 2010 this figure was down to 20 percent. Mexicans can now be found in significant numbers in states where they had little historical presence, such as North Carolina and Georgia. A majority of Cubans now live outside of the Miami metropolitan area as well.¹²

Because of this spread, there are a growing number of communities across the United States with little recent experience with immigration now grappling with population growth and increasing diversity. Immigrants often bring economic vitality but can also strain resources, such as by increasing the need for more schools to meet the needs of immigrant children. Sometimes there is a wariness of the newcomers among the native population, a clash of cultures, or outright hostility. For example, in one study of people's attitudes toward immigrants in a rural midwestern community that had a growing number of Hispanics working in a local food-processing plant, one respondent reported, "We used to feel like we knew everybody. I mean, you used to walk around town and you could walk down [Main Street], and you knew everybody, you knew all of the faces. And now, you don't know all the faces and so, I think sometimes you feel a little isolated, or maybe vulnerable, just because you're not familiar with that person's background." Others looked down on the newcomers: "A friend in town had a house for sale for I think over three hundred thousand. And unfortunately next door was a rental property with a, uh, Spanish-Mexican family, and they had about three cars in the yard.... It just looks bad. Three, two, cars ... all covered in junk."¹³

Wariness of immigrants is nothing new. Most immigrant groups, ranging from the Irish in the nineteenth century to Italians early in twentieth century, have faced a certain level of animosity, both in the form of

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Table 1 Hispanic population by origin, 2000-2010

	2000		2010		Change, 2000-10	
	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent
Total U.S. population	281,421,906	100.0	308,745,538	100.0	27,323,632	9.7
Hispanic	35,305,818	12.5	50,477,594	16.3	15,171,776	43.0
Not Hispanic	246,116,088	87.5	258,267,944	83.7	12,151,856	4.9
Hispanic population	35,305,818	100.0	50,477,594	100.0	15,171,776	43.0
Mexican	20,640,711	58.5	31,798,258	63.0	11,157,547	54.1
Puerto Rican	3,406,178	9.6	4,623,716	9.2	1,217,538	35.7
Cuban	1,241,685	3.5	1,785,547	3.5	543,862	43.8
Other Hispanic or Latino	10,017,244	28.4	12,270,073	24.3	2,252,829	22.5
Dominican	764,945	2.2	1,414,703	2.8	649,758	84.9
Central American (excluding Mexican)	1,686,937	4.8	3,998,280	7.9	2,311,343	137.0
Costa Rican	68,588	0.2	126,418	0.3	57,830	84.3
Guatemalan	372,487	1.1	1,044,209	2.1	671,722	180.3
Honduran	217,569	0.6	633,401	1.3	415,832	191.1
Nicaraguan	177,684	0.5	348,202	0.7	170,518	96.0
Panamanian	91,723	0.3	165,456	0.3	73,733	80.4
Salvadoran	655,165	1.9	1,648,968	3.3	993,803	151.7
Other Central American	103,721	0.3	31,626	0.1	-72,095	-69.5

Hispanics and Asians

		2000		2010		Change, 2000-10	
		Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent
(p.69)	South American	1,353,562	3.8	2,769,434	5.5	1,415,872	104.6
	Argentinian	100,864	0.3	224,952	0.4	124,088	123.0
	Bolivian	42,068	0.1	99,210	0.2	57,142	135.8
	Chilean	68,849	0.2	126,810	0.3	57,961	84.2
	Colombian	470,684	1.3	908,734	1.8	438,050	93.1
	Ecuadorian	260,559	0.7	564,631	1.1	304,072	116.7
	Paraguayan	8,769	0.0	20,023	0.0	11,254	128.3
	Peruvian	233,926	0.7	531,358	1.1	297,432	127.1
	Uruguayan	18,804	0.1	56,884	0.1	38,080	202.5
	Venezuelan	91,507	0.3	215,023	0.4	123,516	135.0
	Other South American	57,532	0.2	21,809	0.0	-35,723	-62.1
	Spaniard	100,135	0.3	635,253	1.3	535,118	534.4
	All other Hispanic	6,111,665	17.3	3,452,403	6.8	-2,659,262	-43.5

Source: Ennis, Rios-Vargas, and Albert 2011, table 1.

Note: Percentages might not appear to sum to the total due to rounding.

(p.70) violence against individuals and widespread discrimination against group members. Over time and across generations this hostility ebbed and group members experienced upward mobility and eventual incorporation. Whether this is also occurring among Hispanics is discussed after a brief review of Asian immigration to the United States.

Asians in the United States: A Brief History

Among Asian groups, the Chinese were the first to immigrate to the United States in significant numbers around the time of the California gold rush in 1848. There was also considerable demand for cheap labor in the developing western part of the country. In the 1860s an estimated twelve thousand to sixteen thousand Chinese laborers were employed to build the western leg of the Central Pacific Railroad. Some Chinese also worked in agriculture, and others were entrepreneurs in San Francisco.¹⁴ In China there were also “push” factors that helped spur migration, including economic decline and civil conflict, resulting in part from the Opium War, in the 1840s and 1850s that opened China up to Western imperialism, led by Great Britain.¹⁵

The Chinese experienced considerable discrimination and violence in the United States as the community grew—they were viewed as economic competitors who would drive down the wages of native Americans—especially after the completion of the transcontinental railroad project in 1869. Nonwhite immigrants had long been excluded from naturalization, beginning with the Naturalization Act of 1790, which allowed only white immigrants to be eligible for citizenship. The Naturalization Act of 1870 expanded naturalization in the United States to “white persons and persons of African descent,” but other nonwhites remained excluded. Thus, Chinese immigrants were ineligible for citizenship and remained so until 1943 (though the principle of birthright citizenship regardless of race is anchored in the Fourteenth Amendment, passed after the Civil War, and affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court in the 1898 ruling, *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*). The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act went further, barring the immigration of all Chinese laborers. As sociologist C. N. Le notes, “Because they were forbidden from owning land, intermarrying with Whites, owning **(p.71)** homes, working in many occupations, getting an education, and living in certain parts of a city or entire cities, the Chinese were, in effect, forced to retreat into their own isolated communities as a matter of survival. At the least, these first Chinatowns allowed them to make a living among themselves.”¹⁶ And because Chinese immigration was so heavily male, the Chinese population in the United States began to gradually decline until about 1920, after which it slowly rebounded due to natural increase.¹⁷

The first group of Japanese arrived in California around 1869, but the Japanese-origin population began to increase more markedly in the 1890s, first in Hawaii and then in the U.S. mainland. Most Japanese initially worked in agriculture, filling a strong demand for labor, though many went on to live in larger cities, including San Francisco and Los Angeles, and others became successful farm owners and entrepreneurs. Japanese immigrants, like the Chinese before them, faced many discriminatory laws and prejudices, including restrictions on homeownership and the ability to become citizens.¹⁸ White Californian workers and others eventually lobbied for their exclusion, culminating in the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907. According to this bilateral agreement, the Japanese government agreed—under pressure—to stop issuing passports to Japanese laborers wishing to migrate to the United States. In 1913 and 1920 California enacted “alien land laws” aimed at Japanese American farmers, essentially barring them from purchasing and leasing agricultural land. The Japanese Americans, however, found ways to get around some of these obstacles, and many continued to prosper. Immigration from Japan was later completely halted in 1924.¹⁹

After the Japanese navy attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the Japanese-origin population came under intense scrutiny. As Le writes, “Combined with falsified reports of espionage and lobbying by White farmers in California, this racist paranoia culminated in President Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066. This effectively revoked the rights of Japanese Americans as U.S. citizens and eventually led to about 120,000 Japanese Americans being rounded up and incarcerated in prison camps in nine states. The lives of Japanese Americans were devastated—not only was their economic well-being destroyed and their emotional security shattered, but their cultural traditions were severely damaged as well” in the communal camp conditions.²⁰ While some noncitizen Germans and **(p.72)** Italians were interred in the United States during World War II, this did not have the universality and racial character of Japanese American internment.

A relatively small number of Koreans, perhaps about seven thousand, immigrated to the United States in the early twentieth century—mainly to Hawaii.²¹ Of greater demographic consequence, Filipinos began migrating to the United States in larger numbers in the wake of the American annexation of the Philippines in 1898. As residents of a U.S. territory, Filipinos traveled with U.S. passports and could migrate freely to both Hawaii and the U.S. mainland. In the 1920s and 1930s larger numbers came as farmworkers, filling in the kinds of jobs held by the Chinese and Japanese immigrants in previous years.²² Filipinos also faced a significant amount of prejudice and discrimination. For example, rigid antimiscegenation laws in a number of states barred interracial marriages with whites.

Whereas immigration policies gradually became more restrictive in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century—such as in the form of the Immigration Act of 1882, which prohibited immigration from China, and the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924, which greatly limited immigration from outside of northern and western Europe and the Americas—policies after World War II generally became less restrictive. One small step in this direction was the 1952 McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act, which generally retained discriminatory immigration quotas but allowed more exceptions and, importantly, abolished immigration and naturalization statutes that had limited naturalization to white immigrants only. This allowed Asian immigrants to officially receive the right to become naturalized U.S. citizens, though the number of such immigrants allowed to enter the United States remained very small.

A more fundamental shift in U.S. immigration policy came in the form of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act (also known as the Hart-Celler Act). This act eliminated the discriminatory national quota system that favored northern and western Europeans and instead allowed an annual quota of 20,000 immigrants for any country outside of the Americas, with a total cap of 170,000 annually. While there was a global ceiling of 290,000 immigrants annually, the actual number arriving has always been much greater. People exempt from quotas include spouses, parents, and unmarried minor children of U.S. citizens, as well as refugees and other smaller **(p. 73)** categories of immigrants.²³ The most profound effect of the 1965 Hart-Celler Act was the surge of immigration from Asia that followed.

This wave of Asian immigrants came from a variety of countries, including China, Japan, the Philippines, India, Vietnam, and Korea. Table 2 provides an overview of the Asian population by origin in 2000 and 2010. The first set of columns under “Asian alone” indicates that the percentage of U.S. population that identified as Asian but not as any other race group grew from 3.6 percent to 4.8 percent over the decade. Among these Asians, the largest countries of origin are China (24.1 percent of Asians were of Chinese origin in 2010), India (19.9 percent),

Philippines (18.1), Vietnam (11.1), Korea (10.0), and Japan (5.7). Thus, unlike Hispanics, where Mexicans are by far the largest group, there is no dominant country-of-origin group among Asians. Most groups experienced considerable increases in population, with the exception of Japanese (and the small number who identified as Okinawans and Iwo Jimans). Among the largest groups mentioned earlier, Asian Indians grew the most rapidly and increased their share among Asians as a whole.

The second set of columns shows those who identified as Asian, including those who might have marked another racial group as well (such as white or black). The number of Asians counted in this way is, by definition, as large or larger than the number of single-race Asians in the first set of columns. In 2010, 5.6 of the U.S. population identified as Asian alone or in combination with another group, and the growth of this population was even larger than the growth of the Asian-only population. Using the alone or in combination definition, the Japanese-origin population grew at a moderate clip from 2000 to 2010 (in contrast to the decline in the Japanese-origin population who identified as Japanese alone), indicative of the high rates of intermarriage and mixed-race offspring of such marriages. Otherwise, the patterns of growth across countries of origin do not differ that much across the two sets of numbers.

The Well-Being of Hispanics and Asians Today

Table 3 provides information on the characteristics of Hispanics by national origin. As discussed in chapter 3, Hispanics lag behind the

(p.74)

Table 2 Asian population by origin, 2000-2010

	Asian alone					Asian alone or in combination with another group				
	2000		2010		% change	2000		2010		% change
	Number	% of total	Number	% of total		Number	% of total	Number	% of total	
Total U.S. population	281,421,906	100.0	308,745,538	100.0	9.7	281,421,906	100.0	308,745,538	100.0	9.7
Asian population	10,242,998	3.6	14,674,252	4.8	43.3	11,898,828	4.2	17,320,856	5.6	45.6
Asian Indian	1,718,778	16.8	2,918,807	19.9	69.8	1,899,599	18.5	3,183,063	18.4	67.6
Bangladeshi	46,905	0.5	142,080	1.0	202.9	57,412	0.6	147,300	0.9	156.6
Bhutanese	192	0.0	18,814	0.1	9,699.0	212	0.0	19,439	0.1	9,069.3
Burmese	14,620	0.1	95,536	0.7	553.5	16,720	0.2	100,200	0.6	499.3
Cambodian	183,769	1.8	255,497	1.7	39.0	206,052	2.0	276,667	1.6	34.3
Chinese	2,564,190	25.0	3,535,382	24.1	37.9	2,865,232	28.0	4,010,114	23.2	40.0
Filipino	1,908,125	18.6	2,649,973	18.1	38.9	2,364,815	23.1	3,416,840	19.7	44.5
Hmong	174,712	1.7	252,323	1.7	44.4	186,310	1.8	260,073	1.5	39.6
Indonesian	44,186	0.4	70,096	0.5	58.6	63,073	0.6	95,270	0.6	51.0
Iwo Jiman	18	0.0	2	0.0	-88.9	78	0.0	12	0.0	-84.6
Japanese	852,237	8.3	841,824	5.7	-1.2	1,148,932	11.2	1,304,286	7.5	13.5
Korean	1,099,422	10.7	1,463,474	10.0	33.1	1,228,427	12.0	1,706,822	9.9	38.9
Laotian	179,103	1.7	209,646	1.4	17.1	198,203	1.9	232,130	1.3	17.1
Malaysian	15,029	0.1	21,868	0.1	45.5	18,566	0.2	26,179	0.2	41.0

Hispanics and Asians

	Asian alone					Asian alone or in combination with another group				
	2000		2010			2000		2010		
	Number	% of total	Number	% of total	% change	Number	% of total	Number	% of total	% change
Maldivian	29	0.0	102	0.0	251.7	51	0.0	127	0.0	149.0
(p.75) Mongolian	3,699	0.0	15,138	0.1	309.2	5,868	0.1	18,344	0.1	212.6
Nepalese	8,209	0.1	57,209	0.4	596.9	9,399	0.1	59,490	0.3	532.9
Okinawan	6,138	0.1	5,681	0.0	-7.4	10,599	0.1	11,326	0.1	6.9
Pakistani	164,628	1.6	382,994	2.6	132.6	204,309	2.0	409,163	2.4	100.3
Singapore an	2,017	0.0	4,569	0.0	126.5	2,394	0.0	5,347	0.0	123.4
Sri Lankan	21,364	0.2	41,456	0.3	94.0	24,587	0.2	45,381	0.3	84.6
Thai	120,918	1.2	182,872	1.2	51.2	150,283	1.5	237,583	1.4	58.1
Vietnames e	1,169,672	11.4	1,632,717	11.1	39.6	1,223,736	11.9	1,737,433	10.0	42.0
Other Asian	162,913	1.6	238,332	1.6	46.3	376,723	3.7	623,761	3.6	65.6

Source: Hoeffel et al. 2012, table 6.

Note: The numbers by detailed Asian groups do not add to the total Asian population. This is because the detailed Asian groups are tallies of the number of Asian responses rather than the number of Asian respondents. Respondents reporting several Asian groups are counted several times. For example, a respondent reporting Korean and Filipino would be included in the Korean as well as Filipino numbers.

(p.76)

Table 3 Characteristics of Hispanics by national origin, 2010

	BA degree (%) ¹	Median household income	Poor (%)	Foreign-born (%)	Citizens (%)	Proficient in English (%) ²	Homeowners (%)	Without health insurance	Median age
U.S. population	28	\$49,800	15	13	93	91	65	16	37
Hispanics	13	\$40,000	25	37	74	65	47	31	2
Colombian	32	\$49,500	13	65	66	59	49	28	34
Cuban	24	\$40,000	18	59	74	58	57	25	40
Dominican	15	\$34,000	26	57	70	55	24	22	29
Ecuadorian	18	\$50,000	18	65	60	50	39	36	31
Guatemalan	8	\$39,000	26	67	49	41	30	48	27
Honduran	10	\$38,000	27	67	47	42	29	50	28
Mexican	9	\$38,700	27	36	73	64	50	34	25
Peruvian	30	\$48,000	14	67	62	59	49	30	34
Puerto Rican	16	\$36,000	27	1	99	82	38	15	27
Salvadoran	7	\$43,000	20	62	55	46	42	41	29

Source: Motel and Patten 2012, figs. 3, 4, 6-12. Their tabulations are from the 2010 American Community Survey summary files.

(¹) Educational attainment calculated for the population aged twenty-five and over.

(²) Refers to those who speak English at home or speak English “very well.”

(p.77) general population in terms of educational attainment, median household income, and wealth. This table confirms this but also shows the variability in outcomes across groups. For example, while 28 percent of the U.S. population aged twenty-five and over has a bachelor's degree, only 13 percent of Hispanics have a bachelor's degree or more.²⁴ This figure, however, ranges from a low of 7 percent among Salvadorans to 32 percent among Colombians. Notably, then, a larger percentage of Colombians have a college degree than the U.S. average. The figure among Mexicans, at 9 percent, is very low, and this helps explain the low figure for Hispanics as a whole. The rate of college completion for Cubans (24 percent) is below the national average, but only modestly so.

The median household income figures and poverty rates are correlated with educational attainment. For example, the median household income among Hispanics as a whole (\$40,000) is below the national average (\$49,800), with most groups, including Mexicans, having incomes below the national median, but a couple of groups, such as Colombians and Ecuadorians, having median incomes that are almost the same as the national figure. The poverty rate for Colombians (13 percent) is below the national average (15 percent), though some groups, including Mexicans and Puerto Ricans (both at 27 percent) have poverty rates far above the national average.

As will be discussed in more detailed, all these statistics might be affected by the fact that 37 percent of Hispanics are foreign-born. This ranges (with one exception), from 36 percent of Mexicans being foreign-born to 67 percent among Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Peruvians. The one exception is Puerto Ricans, who are U.S. citizens at birth, given the status of Puerto Rico as a U.S. territory. Table 3 also shows that a majority of all groups are U.S. citizens, with the exception of Guatemalans (49 percent) and Hondurans (47 percent). A majority of most groups are also proficient in English, though there is variability across groups, which is correlated with the percentage of foreign-born from each group.

Homeownership is less common among all Hispanic groups than among the U.S. population as a whole, and this again may be affected by the fact that over a third of Hispanics are immigrants, as well as the low median household incomes of most groups. All groups except Puerto Ricans have lower rates of health insurance coverage than the U.S. population as a **(p.78)** whole. Finally, all groups except Cubans have a lower median age than the U.S. population as a whole, indicating the young age of many immigrants and the higher levels of fertility among many of the Hispanic groups than among the rest of the U.S. population.

Table 4 shows the characteristics of the Asian population for the six largest national origin groups. Here we see that all but one of the six groups have higher levels of education than the U.S. population. Specifically, while 28 percent of the U.S. population aged twenty-five and over has a bachelor's degree, among Asian groups, this number ranges from 26 percent among Vietnamese to a high of 70 percent among Indians. All Asian groups have higher median household incomes than the U.S. population, ranging from \$50,000 among Koreans to \$88,000 among Indians. These high median incomes are reflected in low poverty rates as well. The percent of adults who are foreign-born range from a high of 87 percent among Indians to a low of 32 percent among Japanese, reflecting the longer history of the Japanese in the United States as well as the low levels of recent immigration from Japan. The high levels of achievement among Asian groups along with the high proportions born abroad for most of them indicate that Asian immigrants come with higher levels of education than Hispanic immigrants. Table 4 also shows that the variation in nativity across Asian groups is similar to the variation in citizenship

and English proficiency. Finally, homeownership is modestly less prevalent among Asian adults than among all U.S. adults, likely reflecting the fact that many are foreign-born (including students and people with H1B visas) and perhaps also due to the fact that many live in high-cost areas.

Among a few smaller Asian-origin groups not shown in the table, such as the Hmong and Cambodians, poverty rates are fairly high (about 20 to 28 percent), consistent with their low levels of education. Nevertheless, their median household incomes are close to the U.S. national average. Overall, while most Asian groups are faring well, on average, there is variation across groups.²⁵

Explaining Patterns of Well-Being

Several factors could contribute to patterns and trends in the socioeconomic achievement of Hispanic and Asian groups in the United States. **(p.79)**

Table 4 Characteristics of Asians by national origin, 2010

	BA degree (%) ¹	Median household income	Poor (%)	Foreign-born (%)	Citizens (%)	Proficient in English (%) ²	Homeowners (%)
U.S. population	28	\$49,800	15	13	93	91	65
Asians	49	\$66,000	12	74	70	65	58
Chinese	51	\$65,050	14	76	69	52	62
Filipino	47	\$75,000	6	69	77	78	62
Indian	70	\$88,000	9	87	56	76	57
Japanese	46	\$65,390	8	32	79	82	64
Korean	53	\$50,000	15	79	67	54	48
Vietnamese	26	\$53,400	15	84	80	41	64

Source: Data on Asian groups come from Pew Research Center 2013. Their calculations are based on analyses of 2010 American Community Survey Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample files. Data on the U.S. population come from Motel and Patten 2012. Their tabulations are from the 2010 American Community Survey summary files.

(¹) Educational attainment calculated for the population aged twenty-five and over.

(²) Refers to those who speak English at home or speak English “very well.”

Here I begin with a discussion of racism and discrimination, followed by other explanations, including differences in human capital and social capital, the role of culture, and, finally, assimilation theory.

The brief history of Hispanics and Asians in the United States included here describes how racism and discrimination shaped the early experiences of these groups. The Mexican-origin population, for example, were often regarded as second-class citizens in the border states in which they lived. Mexicans in the Southwest were largely segregated and had access mainly to inferior educational facilities. Today, discrimination is less blatant than in the past, but there are ways in which discrimination may occur. As sociologists Edward Telles and Vilma Ortiz argue, “For example, ideas about Mexicans as inferior leads to discrimination in the form of educators deciding to track individuals into less challenging curriculums on the basis of their race and holding Mexican-origin students to lower academic and social standards. Teachers often invest more in non-Hispanic white and Asian students, whom they expect to be more **(p.80)** successful.” Telles and Ortiz also note that, on average, Mexican Americans have darker skin color than European ethnics (even though there is considerable variation among Mexicans), and there is greater discrimination against darker-skinned people than lighter-skinned ones in education, the labor market, and other social institutions, such as the criminal justice system and the housing market.²⁶

With respect to Asians, contemporary discrimination may come in different forms. For example, a number of universities have been accused of instituting quotas on admissions of Asian students, such that Asians have to score higher than others students to get into elite colleges.²⁷ Researcher Jonathan Zimmerman argues that Asians are the “new Jews on campus,” referencing quotas on the admissions of Jewish applicants in the middle decades of the twentieth century.²⁸ Various Asian groups have faced hostility from the native population in different parts of the country where they have settled, ranging from the Hmong in Minnesota to Koreans in Los Angeles.²⁹

In terms of people reporting having experienced discrimination, a survey from the Pew Center in 2013 indicated that 20 percent of Hispanics said that they had experienced discrimination or had been treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity in the past twelve months—higher than the 10 percent figure for whites, though lower than the 35 percent figure among African Americans (figures for Asians were not reported in this survey).³⁰ Another survey indicated that about three in five Hispanics believed that “discrimination against Latinos is a major problem in preventing Latinos in general from succeeding in America”; this varied by nativity, with under half of native-born Hispanics reporting this, compared to 70 percent of the foreign-born.³¹

In a different survey consisting of just Asian respondents, about 20 percent of Asians reported that they had personally experienced discrimination in the past year, ranging from a high of 21 percent among those of Chinese origin to a low of 9 percent among those of Japanese origin. About 13 percent reported that discrimination is a “major problem,” and another 48 percent that it was a “minor problem,” with 35 percent saying it was “not a problem.” Nevertheless, a greater proportion of Asians said that being Asian “helps” when it comes to admission into schools and colleges and finding a job (20 percent and 19 percent, respectively) more than it “hurts” (12 percent to both)—with most (about three in five) saying **(p.81)** it makes no difference. About an even proportion said being Asian helps (14 percent) rather than hurts (15 percent) when it comes to getting a promotion, with most again believing it doesn’t make a difference.³²

One careful study of the earnings of white and Asian men finds that, after taking into account a wide range of factors, including educational attainment, nativity, college major, region of residence, and other factors, native-born Asian men have slightly lower earnings than otherwise similar white men, though Asian men born abroad but schooled in the United States did not. It is thus not entirely clear about the extent to which discrimination reduces Asian American earnings, though its effect is likely modest.³³

In a study of the second generation of young adults in several immigrant groups in New York City, including Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, West Indians, South Americans, Chinese, and Russian Jews, sociologist Philip Kasinitz and his coauthors find that native-born blacks and West Indians (which includes Haitians, most of whom are dark-skinned) report the most prejudice and discrimination, followed by Hispanic groups, then the Chinese, Russian Jews, and native-born whites. Among the Hispanic groups, the darker-skinned Puerto Ricans and Dominicans experienced more discrimination than lighter-skinned ones. This can occur in school, the workplace, in shopping areas, and encounters with the police. As Kasinitz and his coauthors note, “This expectation of trouble with the police has led some young people to avoid neighborhoods or situations where their race will stand out:

RESPONDENT:

If I go to Bellevue I going to have problems 'cause the cops, they're racist up there. They don't like dark-skinned people. Or Spanish. They don't like them at all. So you try to keep yourself away from that area. Even now, even now you go up there, like I go up there, they're gonna ask me “whatchu doin' over here?” Or “whatchu want? I give you five minutes so you could get out of here. You don't belong here.” For no reason. I thought it was a free country, you could go anywhere you want as long as you're not messing with nobody, but they all used to kick us out so we just don't go over there.

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In short, the evidence suggests that blacks face the most discrimination, followed by Hispanics (especially darker-skinned Hispanics), followed by **(p.82)** Asians. We will return to this question about the extent to which discrimination may hamper the socioeconomic achievement of Hispanics and Asians after reviewing the evidence on the effects of other factors.

The importance of human capital—one's educational attainment and work experience—in determining other kinds of socioeconomic achievement, such as occupational attainment and income, is straightforward. One would expect that groups with higher average levels of human capital would fare well in terms of household income. Education is important for having access to professional occupations that pay more, on average, than blue-collar professions requiring relatively little education. Indeed, figure 4 from the previous chapter and tables 3 and 4 indicate that Asians have higher levels of educational attainment than Hispanics and whites and, unsurprisingly then, also have a higher median household income. Hispanic and Asian groups of national origins with higher levels of education also tend to have higher median incomes than those with lower levels. Thus, the extent to which human capital differentials across groups will converge in the future will help determine whether group differences in income will persist.

As discussed in chapter 2, social capital refers to the resources people have due to their social networks. Immigrants typically rely on social networks and ethnic communities to adapt to their new country. As Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut argue, “Ethnic networks provide sources of information about outside employment, sources of jobs inside the community, and sources of

credit and support for entrepreneurial ventures. Because isolating themselves from the influence of kin and friends is quite difficult for newcomers in the early stages of adaptation, the characteristics of the ethnic community acquire decisive importance in molding their entry into the labor market and hence their prospects for future occupational mobility.” The implication is that some groups might have stronger, more rewarding social networks than others, and this contributes to their socioeconomic achievement. But some have noted that strong social networks are not always positive—they can sometimes constrain people, impose conformity, and lock them into certain kinds of jobs in ethnic enclaves.³⁵ Networks might not be that useful to low-income people if they connect them only to other people facing the same problems and challenges.

(p.83) On the whole, evidence suggests that social capital matters and likely contributes to the success of some groups more so than others. But the extent of the effect is not known or easy to measure. The positive effect of social capital sometimes comes in the form of reducing the vulnerability of members of better-off groups to trouble and downward mobility. For example, in their study of young adult children of immigrants in New York mentioned earlier, Kasinitz and his coauthors find that many of the second generation with strong social ties are less likely to find themselves permanently damaged by adolescent misbehavior than are the Puerto Ricans and native blacks who have fewer economic and family resources and even less societal good will to draw on when they get into trouble.³⁶

Social capital also likely helps some Asian groups succeed in school and hence afterward in the labor market. For example, Chinese immigrants in New York City are socioeconomically diverse, but the group is relatively cohesive, with social networks that cross class lines. Knowledge about how school systems work and how best to navigate them and succeed is spread through the Chinese community, if not through personal social networks, then through Chinese-language newspapers and other ethnic organizations. As Kasinitz and his coauthors argue, “Working class Chinese second generation youth acquire social capital because they are embedded in a social structure—the networks encompassing their immigrant parents—with educational and class diversity. This social capital is not available to Dominican youth, whose parents’ community is homogeneously poor, nor to South American youth, whose group exhibits less ethnic solidarity.”³⁷

The emphasis that many Asian groups place on education might reflect, at least to some extent, a *cultural* attribute that contributes to socioeconomic mobility. In a study attempting to explain Asian Americans’ academic advantage over whites, sociologists Amy Hsin and Yu Xie examine the possible role of sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., family characteristics, such as marital status), cognitive ability, and academic effort. They find that greater academic effort among Asian students is the most important factor explaining the Asian academic advantage and further attribute this to cultural differences in beliefs regarding the connection between effort and academic achievement, as well as immigrant status.³⁸ The academic orientation is reflected in, and reinforced by, ethnic-specific **(p.84)** resources such as supplemental schooling, private tutoring, and college preparation, facilitated by the strong social networks described earlier. The kind of knowledge of how to navigate through the system is often termed *cultural capital*. Thus, social capital and an academic cultural frame both facilitate upward mobility.³⁹

Moreover, the stereotype of Asians as a “model minority”—a minority group with high achievement—may further reinforce educational achievement. Hsin and Xie argue, “These positive stereotypes may help bolster Asian-American achievement just as negative stereotypes have been shown to hinder the achievement of African-American youth. Positive stereotypes help

frame Asian-American youths' understanding of academic success as both attainable and expected of them. These positive stereotypes may also cause teachers to perceive and evaluate Asian-American students in ways that positively enhance their performance."⁴⁰ At the same time, Hsin and Xie acknowledge that this emphasis on education does not always make Asian youth happier—they report lower levels of subjective well-being than white youth—because of the pressure they feel to succeed.

The strong cultural emphasis on academic success usually instilled in the children of Asian immigrants is likely rooted in the fact that Asian immigrants are a very selective group—they have higher levels of education than both native-born Americans of all other races and Asians in their own countries of origin.⁴¹ Asian immigrants are highly selective on skills in part because of the changes to immigration policy in 1965 that provided two important avenues for prospective immigrants to enter the United States: family reunification and occupation skills. Since there were relatively few Asians in the United States at that time, many were admitted on the basis of their skills. In contrast, a higher proportion of Hispanics, and Mexicans in particular, entered because they already had kin living in the United States. Unsurprisingly, immigrants who enter through the occupational-skills provisions have much higher education on average than those who entered on the basis of the family-reunification provisions.⁴²

These high-skilled immigrants believe in the importance of education for achieving upward mobility and instill this in their children. This achievement has become attached to racial and ethnic identity. In some communities Asians are thought to be the smart superachievers, while whites are, **(p.85)** relatively, slackers.⁴³ In ethnographic work on this issue by Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou, one of their respondents, Debra, a young Chinese woman in Los Angeles who arrived in the United States at a young age, explains,

Doing well in school is the Asian thing. You just see a lot more Asians being valedictorians, being top ten, never getting in trouble with the teachers, and entering into the good UC's and the Ivy League schools. And I even heard jokes from my best friend, this Caucasian girl, she liked hanging around with Asians because she knew that Asians were good students. The ones that I hung around with ended up at Harvard, Stanford, Cal.⁴⁴

As in work by sociologists Tomás Jiménez and Adam Horowitz, Lee and Zhou find that in Silicon Valley's high schools, Asians are "cast as high-achieving, hard-working, and successful, while whites are stereotyped as low-achieving, lazy, and all too willing to settle for mediocrity—essentially flipping the traditional US hierarchy between the native-born white host society and the new Asian second-generation population."⁴⁵ Like the study by Hsin and Xie, Lee and Zhou find that their respondents internalize a considerable amount of pressure to succeed, have very high aspirations, and are thus sometimes not satisfied with their own achievements, no matter how much education they attain.⁴⁶ They conclude that culture, but also ethnic resources, in terms of human, social, and cultural capital, helps Asians attain upward mobility in the United States.

Assimilation, the last explanation for explaining patterns of group achievement, refers to the decline of distinctions between ethnic groups over time. These distinctions could refer to linguistic ones, such as the English-language proficiency of newcomers; socioeconomic ones (education, income, occupational attainment); residential segregation; culture; and the degree to which friendships and intermarriage occur across groups. The key empirical debate centers on

the extent to which the post-1965 wave of immigrants and their descendants are becoming incorporated into mainstream U.S. society.

Complicating this issue is that a snapshot of a group at any given point in time sometimes can be misleading because it often does not provide a clear picture of trajectories. For example, Hispanics are clearly disadvantaged compared with the non-Hispanic white population when it comes to education, income, wealth, and other metrics. But the Hispanic **(p.86)**

Table 5 Characteristics of Hispanics and Asians by nativity, 2013

	Hispanic		Asians	
	Native-Born	Foreign-Born	Native-Born	Foreign-Born
Share of group population	65	35	26	74
Proficient in English (%) ¹	89	70	95	53
Education ²				
High school completion (%)	81	52	95	84
College completion (%)	18	11	49	49
Median household income	\$45,000	\$38,000	\$67,400	\$65,200
Poor (%)	25	24	11	12
Homeowners (%)	48	43	57	58
Segregation from whites (D) ³	48	60	39	48

Sources: All estimates for Asians except for residential segregation are from Pew Research Center 2013, 10, and reflect 2010 characteristics; all estimates for Hispanics except for residential segregation are from Pew Research Center 2015d, tables 3, 8, 16, 31, 32, 37, and reflect 2013 characteristics. Residential segregation for all groups is from Iceland 2009, app. table B1.

(¹) Refers to those who speak English at home or speak English “very well.”

(²) Educational attainment calculated for the population aged twenty-five and over.

(³) Residential segregation is measured with the dissimilarity index. These calculations are based on summary file data from the 2000 census.

population is heterogeneous and includes both foreign-born Hispanics—who come to the United States with very low average levels of education—and native-born Hispanics, who might look very differently. Thus, we must go beyond examining Hispanics as a whole and investigate generational differences.

Table 5 sheds light on this issue by showing a few indicators of integration for both Hispanics and Asians. Among both groups, the native-born are advantaged compared to the foreign-born across most indicators, illustrating some measure of integration. For example, native-born Hispanics are more likely to be proficient in English and to have completed high school and college than foreign-born Hispanics. They also have a higher median income, are more likely to be homeowners, and are less residentially segregated from non-Hispanic whites than foreign-born **(p.87)** Hispanics. Poverty rates are about the same for both groups. The differences between the native- and foreign-born among Asians are smaller, as both groups tend to display high levels of socioeconomic achievement.

In fact, while greater English proficiency and less residential segregation across generations is clearly indicative of greater integration among Asians, it is not entirely clear what assimilation should look like when using some of the other indicators. If assimilation refers strictly to a reduction of group differences over time, then greater incomes among native-born Asians than foreign-born Asians would actually represent an augmentation of difference with non-Hispanic whites. But if we use the terms *integration* or *incorporation* to more loosely refer to socioeconomic achievement that is not altogether impeded by race, ethnicity, or origin, then we can say that some important measure of incorporation has occurred. Many studies using other data and methods have also tended to find important gains in socioeconomic achievement between the first and second generations among both Hispanics and Asians.⁴⁷

Even so, the findings in table 5 still don't resolve the broader debate about immigrant incorporation. Among Hispanics in particular, even though there are some improvements in education and income from the first generation to the second, levels of achievement still lag behind those of non-Hispanic whites. Poverty among native-born Hispanics is still fairly high. Hispanics sometimes face substantial hostility in a number of communities, including new destinations that have little recent experience with immigration.⁴⁸

In addition, some studies cast doubt on whether there is significant additional improvement in the well-being of Hispanics between the second generation and the third and higher ones.⁴⁹ For example, in their analysis of data collected from respondents in Los Angeles and San Antonio, Telles and Ortiz assert that while cultural, social, and political assimilation occurred slowly and continuously, economic assimilation stalled after the second generation.⁵⁰ Some studies indicate that the fact that many Latino immigrants—and Mexicans in particular—arrive as undocumented immigrants slows the incorporation process.⁵¹ Lacking documentation inhibits access to all kinds of resources that could facilitate upward mobility, such as financial services, legal protections, and good jobs in the formal labor market.

(p.88) One challenge in tracking Hispanic socioeconomic achievement among those of the third generation and higher (and this applies to Asians as well), is that intermarriage can cause ethnic attachments to fade across generations. Economists Brian Duncan and Stephen J. Trejo find that among third-generation children with at least one Mexican grandparent, 19 percent no longer identify as Hispanic. These percentages are higher for those with at least one Dominican grandparent (30 percent) or Puerto Rican grandparent (40 percent), and even higher for other groups. These patterns of ethnic “attrition” (no longer identifying with a particular group) are

more common among children with mixed parental origins. Moreover, these children of Hispanic origin who no longer identify as Hispanic have parents with higher levels of socioeconomic achievement on average than those children who continue to identify as Hispanic. This indicates that conventional surveys understate the extent to which third generation and higher people of Hispanic origin are achieving upward socioeconomic mobility. In fact, among Asians, the opposite is true—those of some Asian origin who no longer identify as Asian have parents with lower levels of socioeconomic achievement, suggesting that conventional surveys may somewhat overstate the extent of upward mobility among individuals with some Asian origin.⁵²

Overall, while a debate continues among social scientists about the extent of economic incorporation of Hispanics, studies of nationally representative data tend to illustrate slow but steady generational progress.⁵³ But the incorporation process could take longer for Mexicans than for many other immigrant groups because of the low socioeconomic starting point of Mexican immigrants combined with the fact that many are in the United States without valid visas. Thus, Joel Perlmann, in a careful comparison of the Mexican-origin population with Italians and other southern and eastern European groups a century ago, concludes that Mexican socioeconomic mobility is slowly progressing such that it may take them “four or five generations rather than three or four to reach parity with the native-white mainstream.”⁵⁴

Finally, it is worth considering the possibility that we might see a difference of outcomes among Hispanics based on skin color. Darker-skinned Latinos are more likely to experience discrimination and identify as a “racialized minority”—a group distinct from the American mainstream, **(p.89)** and certainly from the white mainstream.⁵⁵ In contrast, lighter-skinned Latinos may be more likely to consider themselves as essentially racially white and ethnically Latino or of a specific country of origin.⁵⁶ This is more or less what occurred to other white ethnic groups (such as Italians) who initially viewed themselves—and were viewed by others—as distinct outsiders and only after time became part of the mainstream.⁵⁷ For example, a NBC news story about the diversity of the Latino population highlights the experiences of one woman, Julie M. Rodriguez, which illustrates the complexity of identity among many Latinos: “I am light-skinned, so people often forget that I am Latina. I’ve been around extended family members who made racist comments, not realizing that they were offending me.... Then I point out, ‘Hey, you are talking about me right now.’ It gets awkward and everyone apologizes.”⁵⁸

Yet Rodriguez, who lives in the San Francisco Bay area, said she doesn’t fully connect with other Latinos because she doesn’t speak Spanish. “If I go to a Spanish grocery store, people try to talk to me. I am embarrassed to say that I sometimes feel a need to shut them down pretty quickly, because I don’t speak Spanish beyond a few phrases. I’ve always related to people from mixed backgrounds because we didn’t fit the stereotypes together.... It can be just as hard to connect with Latinos as it can be to connect with white Mormons. I am not quite in either space. I feel like I am between both worlds,” said Rodriguez, whose family, including her Mexican grandparents, are Mormon and who was raised in Utah and later Colorado.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Asians and Latinos have a long history in the United States. But because of increases in immigration since the 1960s, a significant percentage of both groups are either foreign-born or of the second generation. Thus, it is imperative to take into account patterns of immigration to assess how well each group is doing over time and across generations. In addition, it is important to be cognizant of the diversity of experiences among Asians and Hispanics, as they hail from many different countries in Asia and Latin America.

(p.90) This chapter has shown that most Asian groups have relatively high levels of education and high median household incomes—often higher than non-Hispanic whites—indicative of successful economic incorporation. In contrast, most Hispanic groups have lower levels of education and income than non-Hispanic whites. What explains these differences across groups? I reviewed several factors, including human capital and social capital; the role of culture, racism, and discrimination; and, finally, assimilation theory. All likely play some role in explaining patterns of attainment.

Starting with human capital, Asian immigrants arrive, on average, with high levels of education, while Hispanics immigrants come with relatively low levels. This helps explain the relatively high household median income among Asians and the low income among many Hispanic groups. With regard to social capital, Asian immigrant networks also provide critical information about educational opportunities and how to navigate the public school system for less educated immigrant parents. These kinds of networks are less extensive among Hispanic groups.

Asian immigrants also place significant emphasis on educational attainment (a cultural attribute) as the vehicle for upward mobility, and this is transmitted to their children. This emphasis on education may reflect the fact that these immigrants have much higher average levels of education than people from their original home country (i.e., they are “positively selected,” as termed in the academic literature), and they instill their value of it in their children. In contrast, some groups of Hispanic immigrants, such as Mexican immigrants, have lower levels of education than people from their country of origin, and this might help explain differences in educational aspirations between Asians and Hispanics.

Both Hispanics and Asians have experienced racism and discrimination in the United States, historically and today. The extent to which it affects the social and economic incorporation of these groups is not altogether clear. For Asians, it appears that discrimination is not widespread enough to greatly reduce average levels of socioeconomic achievement, though it could hamper them from attaining top managerial positions (though more research on this issue would be helpful).⁶⁰ For Latinos, it likely plays a larger role, especially among darker-skinned Latinos. Finally, assimilation also helps explain some of the observed patterns of achievement. Among both Asians and Hispanics, the second generation tends to **(p.91)** outperform the first one in terms of income and education. This is particularly evident among Hispanics, since immigrant parents tend to have quite low levels of education and income. But despite generational improvement, Hispanic socioeconomic levels among the second and greater generations still lag behind non-Hispanic whites. This in part reflects the low starting point among Hispanic immigrants and is exacerbated by the undocumented status of many immigrants from Mexico and Central America. While debates continue on whether Hispanics will eventually catch up to non-Hispanic whites, there is reason to believe that such progress will continue, albeit slowly. Among Asians, the generational improvement is often small, given that Asian immigrants already have high levels of education and income, though there is some variability by country of origin. Thus, despite challenges and obstacles, Asians have achieved considerable upward mobility and incorporation in the United States, even if such incorporation is as yet incomplete.

Notes:

(1.) Rocha 2015.

(2.) Gann and Duignan 1986, 4.

(3.) Gill, Glazer, and Thernstrom 1992, 349; Gann and Duignan 1986.

- (4.) Gann and Duignan 1986, 52; see also Marger 2011, 293.
- (5.) Daniels 2002, 310-11.
- (6.) Zong and Batalova 2014.
- (7.) Gann and Duignan 1986, 76.
- (8.) Rodriguez 1989. This chapter uses the terms *Hispanic* and *Latino* interchangeably, reflecting how data on Hispanic origin are collected by the U.S. Census Bureau (which follows federal guidelines set by the Office of Management and Budget). A 2013 Pew Research Center poll found that about half of their respondents who identified as Hispanic/Latino did not have a preference between the two terms. Among those who did have a preference, “Hispanic” was preferred over “Latino” by two to one (Lopez 2013).
- (9.) Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Gann and Duignan 1986, 98-104.
- (10.) Gann and Duignan 1986, 114-16; see also Grasmuck and Pessar 1991.
- (11.) Gibson and Jung 2002; U.S. Census Bureau 2012, 2013a; Alba 2016.
- (12.) Logan and Turner 2013, 6-7.
- (13.) Fennelly 2008, 162, 165.
- (14.) Daniels 2002, 239-43; Gill, Glazer, and Thernstrom 1992, 33.
- (15.) Lee 2014, 30-31.
- (16.) Le 2007, 16.
- (17.) Daniels 2002, 245.
- (18.) Le 2007, 17.
- (19.) Daniels 2002, 250-55; Gill, Glazer, and Thernstrom 1992, 333-34.
- (20.) Le 2007, 18.
- (21.) Le 2007, 17.
- (22.) Lee 2014, 52-56.
- (23.) Daniels 2002, 343-44.
- (24.) In this chapter the percentage of Hispanics who have a bachelor’s degree or more for the total population is a little lower than the percentage shown in chapter 3 because of the different year being considered (2014 in chapter 3 versus 2010 here) and different data set (Current Population Survey in chapter 3 versus the American Community Survey here). As described in chapter 3, estimates of educational attainment are slightly lower in the ACS than the CPS, at least in part due to the inclusion of the group quarters population in the ACS. Group quarters

includes places such as college dorms, nursing facilities, and correctional facilities, to name a few.

(25.) Sakamoto and Kim 2013.

(26.) Telles and Ortiz 2008, 78–79, 131, 233–34; see also Massey 2007, 154.

(27.) Espenshade and Radford 2009.

(28.) Zimmerman 2012.

(29.) Hein 2000, 413; Marger 2011, 270.

(30.) Caumont 2013.

(31.) Lopez, Morin, and Taylor 2010, figs. 11–12.

(32.) Pew Research Center 2013, 110–14.

(33.) Kim and Sakamoto 2010.

(34.) Kasinitz et al. 2008, 310–12, 317.

(35.) Portes and Rumbaut 2006, 95–96.

(36.) Kasinitz et al. 2008, 350.

(37.) Kasinitz et al. 2008, 362–63.

(38.) Hsin and Xie 2014; see also Sakamoto, Kim, and Takei 2012.

(39.) Lee and Zhou 2014, 39.

(40.) Hsin and Xie 2014, 8420–21.

(41.) Sakamoto and Kim 2013.

(42.) Chiswick 1986; Feliciano 2005.

(43.) Jiménez and Horowitz 2013.

(44.) Lee and Zhou 2014, 45.

(45.) Jiménez and Horowitz 2013; Lee and Zhou 2014, 45–46.

(46.) Hsin and Xie 2014; Lee and Zhou 2014, 47–48.

(47.) White and Glick 2009; Bean and Stevens 2003; Kasinitz et al. 2008; Reitz, Zhang, and Hawkins 2011; Park and Myers 2010.

(48.) Lippard and Gallagher 2011.

(49.) Grogger and Trejo 2002.

(50.) Telles and Ortiz 2008, 16.

(51.) S. K. Brown 2007; Bean et al. 2014; Rugh 2015; Perlmann 2005.

(52.) Duncan and Trejo 2011, 2016.

(53.) Perlmann 2005, 117; S. K. Brown 2007; Bean et al. 2014.

(54.) Perlmann 2005, 117.

(55.) Frank, Akresh, and Lu 2010; Golash-Boza and Darity 2008; Itzigsohn, Giorguli, and Vazquez 2005.

(56.) Frank, Akresh, and Lu 2010.

(57.) Alba 1985.

(58.) Reyes 2014.

(59.) Reyes 2014.

(60.) See Sakamoto and Kim 2013.