

The New Third Generation: Post-1965 Immigration and the Long March of Assimilation

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ABSTRACT

A generation after the inception of a now vast body of research on the post-1965 “new second-generation,” we turn our attention to the “new third-generation.” If the past is a guide, this new third generation will write the next and most significant chapter in the assimilation of the post-1965 immigration wave. Using the 1980 Census and the 2008-13 Current Population Survey, we compare the family and household characteristics of post-1965 second-generation Latino and Asian children in 1980 to third-generation children a cohort later. We provide a portrait of the household and socioeconomic characteristics in which the new third-generation is growing up. We then examine the relationship between these household characteristics and two important outcomes for the new third-generation: ethnic/racial identification for children with intermarried parents, and multigenerational households. We discuss these findings in the context of the larger research agenda we offer for studying the new third-generation.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

It has been nearly a generation since the first statements on the assimilation of the post-1965 immigrants (Gans 1992; Portes and Zhou 1993) inspired what is now a vast body of research examining how America’s largest ever wave of immigrants, and their children, are making their way in US society (Kasinitz et al. 2008; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). In debates over whether the “new second generation” is following an assimilation path blazed by earlier waves of immigrants, social scientists have overlooked the rise of the grandchildren of the post-1965 immigrants – the “new third generation.” The grandchildren of earlier immigration waves completed the assimilation process and became part of a mainstream. With the tremendous ethnoracial and socioeconomic diversity of the post-1965 immigrants, this new third generation will write the next and most significant chapter on assimilation at the start of the 21st century.

Immigration scholars frequently use the historical, large-scale immigration from Europe as a reference point for understanding today’s post-1965 immigrants and descendants (Perlmann and Waldinger 1997; Perlmann and Waldinger 1998; Perlmann 2005). This comparison is temporally shortsighted. As the study of earlier immigrant groups revealed, assimilation is a multigenerational process. Now, we argue, is the time to put the new third generation at center stage in assimilation research in order to push ahead debates about post-1965 assimilation that have largely reached an impasse (Alba, Kasinitz, and Waters 2011; Haller, Portes, and Lynch 2011).

There are important lessons from the study of European-origin assimilation as well as those from the more contemporary literature on Mexican-American assimilation. We focus on the importance of generation-since-immigration, arguing that the third generation is a “settled generation” that, unlike their parents’ “bridge generation,” does not experience the strain of navigating between a foreign household and the American ways of life outside the home. We summarize the literature on the post-1965 second generation, noting the use of comparisons across groups and time to gauge second-generation assimilation. We argue that scholars engaging in a very important debate about the fortunes of second-generation as assimilation fate of an immigrant group are implicitly using a temporally truncated notion of assimilation because the process has not had enough time to play out.

The New Third Generation: A First Look – We note that the new third generation is still young, but not much younger than the second generation was when landmark studies, like the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey (Portes and Rumbaut 2001), began to examine the experiences of the second generation. We use the immigrant-generation-cohort method developed by Park and Myers (2010) to compare the kinds of households in which the new third generation is reared to that of their parents a generation earlier. We draw on 1980 decennial Census data to examine the household characteristics of the second generation, and compare those characteristics to third-generation children identified in the 2008-2013 Current Population Survey (CPS).¹ We select the new third

¹ We use data from the Minnesota Population Center’s Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS). First, to capture second generation households in the post-1965 immigration era, we use the 1980 5%

generation in CPS samples by including those households that have U.S.-born children co-residing with a second-generation parent as the head of household (the parent’s generational status is established by their parental nativity variables). Our unit of analysis is children in these households.

Findings— Table 1 shows that the vast majority of the Asian and Latino third generation are young children with over half under the age of 10.

Table 1: Age Composition of Hispanic and Asian Third Generation (2008-2013)

Age	Hispanics		Asians	
	Population (in thousands)	Percent Share	Population (in thousands)	Percent Share
0-9	829	55%	118	51%
10-19	496	33%	70	30%
20-24	123	8%	33	14%
25-34	28	2%	4	2%
35-44	24	2%	3	1%
45-54	7	0%	4	2%
Total	1,507	100%	231	100%

Data source: March CPS person weight: wtsupp (2008-2013)

Because the new third generation is still very young, it is premature to observe their socioeconomic attainment and other indicators of assimilation. Therefore, we observe the family and socioeconomic characteristics in the households in which they grow up. Table 2 compares the household characteristics of the third generation observed today to the second generation observed in 1980.

Table 2 describes Asian and Hispanic households at two time periods: in 1980 (when we observe households with second-generation children) and 2008-13 (the most recently available data on the emerging third generation). Household structure differs across the two groups, and some measures change over time. Heads of household are approximately across groups and over time, mid- to late-30s. Family size decreases and converges over time (4.1 in 2008-13) for both Asian and Hispanic groups. Both groups have approximately two children per household, and we note a decrease (from 2.5 to 2.2 children) among Hispanics from the second to third generation. Single-parent households became more common among Hispanic and Asian groups, although Hispanic single-parent households are much more common (nearly one-fifth by 2008-13) than among the

sample (Ruggles et al 2010) and the IPUMS Current Population Survey (CPS, March Supplement) from 2008 through 2013 (months in sample: 1 to 4 to avoid replicate cases in consecutive years).

Asians at either point in time.² Extended-family households are common, ranging from 10% among Asian third generation households (slightly lower than the Hispanic third generation) to 20% among Asian second generation households (slightly higher than the Hispanic second generation).

Whereas Asian and Hispanic households resemble each other on a number of household characteristics (e.g., family size, number of children, extended-family households), Hispanic socio-economic outcomes diverge from those of Asian households across both generations. Hispanic parents with at least bachelor's degree are much lower than Asian parents, and the latter have lower unemployment rates, much higher median incomes, and much lower poverty rates.

Multivariate Analyses— Beyond socioeconomic indicators of assimilation, the co-residence of the young third generation with their second-generation parents provides an ideal opportunity to examine the identificational assimilation of Hispanics and Asians. We plan to examine the share of the second generation who are interracially or inter-ethnically married and how they choose to identify their children. Will they consistently opt to select more than one race or will preference be given to the racial-ethnic identity of the father or mother? Or yet, a third pattern that may emerge where intermarried parents prefer to identify their third-generation children as one particular race/ethnicity. We then examine how socioeconomic status is associated with these identification choices.

The second set of analyses explores the presence of immigrant grandparents in these households. Immigrant grandparents offer a strong link to the country of origin and its traditions or culture. This may have a profound impact on the assimilation prospects of the third generation. Are multigenerational households more likely to be of a certain socioeconomic class or do they cut across attainment levels? Does multigenerational household status impact the racial-ethnic identification of the third generation?

² Single-parent household refers to heads of household (with at least one child) who have never been married.

Table 2: Household Characteristics for the Second Generation in 1980 and for the Third Generation in 2008-2013

	Hispanic Households		Asian Households	
	1980	2008-13	1980	2008-13
Household Structure				
Median age (household head)	36	35	38	38
Family size	4.6	4.1	4.3	4.1
Number of own children	2.5	2.2	2.1	2.1
Single-Parent Households (with children)	4.8%	19.3%	0.5%	5.3%
Extended-family Households	17.3%	12.4%	20.1%	10.0%
Socioeconomic Characteristics of Households				
Mothers with BA+ (%)	4.1%	16.9%	37.3%	56.5%
Fathers with BA+ (%)	6.0%	12.7%	47.0%	52.9%
Unemployment Rate (Household Head)	9.9%	10.1%	3.8%	8.3%
Working adults per household	1.4	1.5	1.7	1.6
Median Household Income (2013 dollars)	\$ 41,063	\$ 50,499	\$ 71,528	\$ 98,280
Poverty Status (100% below poverty line)	24.7%	21.7%	7.8%	8.7%

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