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# West Coast Poverty Center

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

A Partnership of the SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK, the DANIEL J. EVANS SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
and the COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

## Poverty Research Flash

2008-08/09

### Highlighting New Poverty Research

This special issue of *Poverty Research Flash* highlights research by participants in the West Coast Poverty Center's conference on immigration, "Local Contexts and the Prospects for the Second Generation," held at the University of Washington in October 2006.

The conference was the first major multi-disciplinary effort to address how socio-spatial contexts, labor markets, education, and religious and racial identity affect the economic, political and social progress of second-generation immigrants. Conference papers are forthcoming in a special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.

The West Coast Poverty Center's *Poverty Research Flash* presents new research by Center faculty affiliates and others on causes, consequences, and effective policy responses to poverty, with an emphasis on changing labor markets, demographic shifts, family structure, and social and economic inequality. More information about the West Coast Poverty Center is available from our website:  
www.wcpc.washington.edu

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### Special Issue on Second Generation Immigrants

## The Adaptation of the Immigrant Second Generation in America

Historically, immigrants to the U.S. have been able to expect that their children would do better economically than they did. Faced with today's two-tier labor markets, racism based on skin color, and the temptations of deviant cultures, however, the children of recent immigrants (known as the "second generation") may not all experience the same kind of economic mobility as past generations of immigrants and their families. While second generation children with access to sufficient parental resources and strong societal support are still likely to overcome these barriers and follow a traditional

path of assimilation and upward mobility, those with fewer parental and community resources, and those who experience more racism, may instead stagnate in the working class or assimilate downward into the lower strata of American society in a life of school abandonment, poverty, and incarceration. The theory of segmented assimilation, which predicts these diverging pathways, suggests that in the contemporary American context the second generation's chances of doing better than their parents may now depend more heavily on their parents' human capital, their family composition, and the general reception their ethnic group receives from the government, society, and community.

To test this theory, Alejandro Portes, William Haller, and Patricia Fernandez-Kelly use data from the third wave of a longitudinal study to investigate whether parental resources and economic and social barriers predict outcomes for over 3,500 young adults in Miami and San Diego (surveyed at ages 14, 17, and 24). The authors use a combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses to isolate factors that increase the likelihood of negative outcomes and those that protect otherwise disadvantaged youth from these problems.

While the majority of second generation youth in the study avoided negative outcomes, the authors find that a small but significant fraction failed to finish high school or get further education, experienced poverty, or had children early. These outcomes were more likely among children of non-white and poorly educated immigrants, although the incidence of these markers of downward assimilation varied across national-origin groups. For example, incarceration rates in the sample varied from zero among Chinese men to 15 percent among Vietnamese men, to 20 percent among West Indian and Mexican men.

As predicted, multivariate analyses showed that national origin and family characteristics were significant predictors of negative outcomes. Youth of Mexican, Haitian and West Indian origins experienced more dropping out of school, poverty, early child-bearing, and arrests or incarceration than youth from other immigrant groups. Having a stable family and higher family socioeconomic status reduced the likelihood of negative outcomes.

Through in-depth interviews with several dozen youth from very disadvantaged backgrounds who managed to attend college or obtain a professional degree, Portes and his colleagues pursue the question of why limited family resources and social and economic barriers predict negative outcomes for some, but not all, second generation youth. For those who succeeded, strong parental authority and discipline, external support from teachers and counselors,

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organized programs to help students succeed academically, and families' cultural assets, such as family pride or higher status in the home country, all appear to have played a role. Of these, the authors note that programs to help disadvantaged students with their education and improving the quality of schools are the most amenable to policy intervention.

## Immigrants and Neighborhoods of Concentrated Poverty: Assimilation or Stagnation?

New immigrants often settle in neighborhoods with fellow immigrants, many of whom are poor. Prior research has suggested that concentrated poverty provides a negative context for social and economic progress. Much of this research has focused on native-born populations, however. Some immigration scholars argue that, for immigrants, living in a strong community of co-ethnics may provide benefits, such as access to information and social networks that outweigh the negative effects of concentrated poverty. If immigrants do indeed benefit from the resources of an ethnic community, these resources might help them transition out of high-poverty neighborhoods. Alternatively, concentrated poverty might have the same negative effects for immigrants as for the native-born and an influx of immigrants into areas that already have high poverty rates may even exacerbate the poverty and negative effects of these neighborhoods.

Using Census data from 1990 and 2000, Paul Jargowsky investigates whether immigrants and the native-born live in areas with similar poverty rates, how immigration has influenced poverty rates in areas with high levels of immigration, whether or not cohorts of immigrants tend to move from higher to lower poverty neighborhoods over time, and whether these effects are similar for all groups of immigrants.

Jargowsky finds that immigrants in general experience more concentration of poverty than non-Hispanic whites, but much less than in minority groups that constitute the bulk of native-born poor in most urban areas. (The concentration of poverty is the proportion of a group's poor that lives in neighborhoods with poverty rates of 40 percent or more.) While immigration undoubtedly raises poverty rates in some areas, it also tends to reduce poverty rates in many of the poorest inner-city communities. The settlement patterns of the native-born and immigrants often offset each other, and when the two settlement patterns are overlaid, the measured level of concentration of poverty actually declines.

By overlaying maps of poverty and immigration, Jargowsky shows that the relationship between the two varies dramatically from one metropolitan area to another. In Los Angeles, many of the highest poverty neighborhoods are majority immigrant, and majority immigrant neighborhoods that are not high-poverty tend to be contiguous to native-born concentrations of poverty. In Chicago and New York, majority immigrant neighborhoods are almost never classified as high-poverty, but in Chicago immigrant neighborhoods are contiguous to high-poverty neighborhoods while in New York they are not.

Most immigrant groups experience spatial assimilation over time. In other words, the longer an immigrant has been in the US, the less likely he or she is to live in a high-poverty neighborhood. Mexican immigrants, however, seem to remain in impoverished neighborhood contexts for decades, suggesting that they may not have the same opportunities for economic and social assimilation as immigrant groups from other regions and immigrants from prior periods.

### About the Authors

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## How Do Neighborhoods Matter for Immigrant Children?

### The Formation of Educational Resources in Chinatown, Koreatown, and Pico Union, Los Angeles

Neighborhoods provide the context within which immigrants and their children enter their new societies. One important way neighborhoods can affect immigrant experiences is through their shaping of educational prospects.

**Min Zhou**

Based on ethnographic research, Min Zhou examines how local institutions such as nonprofits, ethnic organizations, and businesses influence the educational resources available to children in three ethnically diverse and immigrant-rich inner city neighborhoods in Los Angeles.

Although all three neighborhoods are socioeconomically disadvantaged and face some of the same urban issues, such as poor schools, Zhou finds that neighborhoods provide an institutional basis for ethnic organizing and that ethnic groups with a sizable middle class tied to the ethnic community and a strong enclave economy seem better able to support education for immigrant children. While all three neighborhoods show evidence of community organizing focused on co-ethnicity, the level of support for education that emerges from local areas varies across ethnic communities. In Chinatown, neighborhood institutions benefited from the participation of co-ethnics from wealthier areas of Los Angeles in commercial activities such as dining and shopping. This geographical exchange was reciprocal, as Chinatown residents were able to benefit from the close proximity of educational and community resources in nearby ethnic suburbs. Moreover, ethnic businesses and organizations offered a variety of private afterschool programs for children. Koreatown also sustained participation by non-resident Koreans in ethnic businesses and in ethnic organizations. Like Chinatown, Korean businesses also provided a wide range of afterschool academic and enrichment programs for children, but the level of educational resources was much higher than that in Chinatown. However, in both Chinatown and Koreatown, these local resources benefited Chinese and Korean youth, but were not accessible by the Hispanic population living in the neighborhoods. Pico Union, a neighborhood that was 78 percent Hispanic, drew fewer co-ethnic middle-class clientele into its community institutions and provided a lower level of institutional support for its youth. Even though ethnic businesses were visible in the neighborhood, few Hispanic businesses offered educational programs to the youth.

Overall, Zhou concludes, it is not just the characteristics of residents of a neighborhood that matter for educational success, but the availability and accessibility of local educational resources created by ethnic communities.

Even when ethnic groups participate in local institutions that are not directly focused on education (such as an ethnic business or an ethnic language school), a vibrant ethnic community with a strong enclave economy can create institutional relationships that may have indirect benefits for education.

## The Political Impact of the New Hispanic Second Generation

Since 1970, the Hispanic share of the U.S. population has grown from less than 5 percent to 15 percent. Although Hispanics' increasing numbers should increase their political influence, their representation in public office at the national and the local levels consistently lags behind their representation in the population. In 2004, for example, only 6 percent of Congress-people were Hispanic, less than half of their representation in the U.S. population at that time.

**John Logan,  
Sookhee Oh, and  
Jennifer Darrah**

Using Census data, the Current Population Survey, and biographical data collected by the Library of Congress about Congressional Representatives elected between 1974 and 2004, John R. Logan, Sookhee Oh and Jennifer Darrah investigate several possible explanations for why Hispanic population strength has been slow to manifest itself in political representation. They conclude that three main factors inhibit a more direct translation of Hispanic population numbers into political power, as measured by co-ethnics in elected office.

- 1) Compared with other racial and ethnic groups, Hispanics are less likely to be naturalized and therefore less likely to be eligible to vote;
- 2) Hispanics who are eligible to vote are also less likely than eligible voters in other racial and ethnic groups to actually vote; and
- 3) The impact of Hispanic population growth on political participation may be attenuated by the concentration of Hispanics in political districts that are already represented by Hispanic politicians.

In spite of these challenges, the authors note that sustained mobilization efforts, redistricting, and participation by Hispanics in cross-racial coalitions might help increase Hispanic political influence.

# Poverty Research Flash

## Special Issue: Second Generation Immigrants

**The West Coast Poverty Center** serves as a hub for research, education, and policy analysis leading to greater understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and effective approaches to reducing it in the west coast states. The Center, located at the University of Washington, is one of three regional poverty centers funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Education (ASPE). More information about the West Coast Poverty Center is available from our website: [www.wcpc.washington.edu](http://www.wcpc.washington.edu)

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