

Book Review

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Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation, by Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001. 406 pp. Hb. \$50; pb. \$19.95

Perhaps one of the most powerful things about this book is that the authors allow the immigrant subjects to have a voice. In Chapter 1 of the book's 10 chapters, Portes and Rumbaut tell 12 stories of different families (6 from Miami, Florida, and 6 from San Diego, California) and, thus, give readers a chance to look beyond the numbers by bringing the lives of these individuals and their families to the forefront, reminding us that these immigrants are not just statistics, but each statistic has a fascinating life story filled with his or her life experiences, hopes, dreams (some broken and some still waiting to be fulfilled), and challenges.

One key theme that continues throughout Portes and Rumbaut's book is that the United States offers segmented assimilation and acculturation—that “not everyone is chosen” (p. 44) and that there is not just one immigrant experience but different experiences, depending on where the immigrant comes from and how society receives him or her. Portes and Rumbaut argue that for some immigrants, the assimilation and acculturation process is much smoother and easier because society chooses to welcome and privilege some immigrants over others. The authors discuss the diverse aspects of the adaptation process and use this theoretical framework of segmented assimilation to present findings from their study. The authors base this book on their research in the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study, which is the largest survey to date of the new second generation (over 5,000 children and their families). The study took 12 years and was based on a series of surveys with immigrant children and their parents conducted between 1992 and 1996 in Miami–Ft. Lauderdale and San Diego. Although many immigrant studies (e.g., Valdés, 2001, 1996) focus on just one immigrant group, Portes and Rumbaut's study focuses on immigrants from Cuba, Nicaragua, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Trinidad, Mexico, Vietnam, the Philippines, Cambodia, and Laos.

In Chapter 2, the authors give an overview of the new second-generation immigrants. In Chapter 3, perhaps one of the most important chapters, Portes and Rumbaut argue that the United States offers segmented assimilation and discuss factors that determine society's acceptance of immigrants into the American mainstream: (a) the history of the immigrant first generation; (b) the pace of acculturation among parents and children and its bearing on normative integration; (c) the barriers, cultural and economic, confronted by second-generation youth in the quest for successful adaptation; and (d) the family and community resources for confronting these barriers.

Portes and Rumbaut state: "There are groups among today's second generation that are slated for a smooth transition into the mainstream and for whom ethnicity will soon be a matter of personal choice" (p. 45). However, for others, "their ethnicity will be a source of strength and [they] will muscle their way up, socially and economically, on the basis of their own communities' networks and resources," and there are others "whose ethnicity will be neither a matter of choice nor a source of progress but a mark of subordination" (p. 45). It is this last group that Portes and Rumbaut are most concerned about; they argue that this group is at risk of becoming a "new rainbow underclass" that will join "the masses of the dispossessed, compounding the spectacle of inequality and despair in America's inner cities" (p. 45).

According to Portes and Rumbaut, today's immigrants differ in three key ways: (a) their individual features, which the authors call "human capital" (e.g., age, education, occupational skills, wealth, and knowledge of English); (b) the social environment that receives them (e.g., government policies toward different immigrant groups, the attitudes of the society receiving them, and the presence and size of a co-ethnic community); and (c) their family structure. Human capital plays a key role in immigrants' ability to adapt economically. The immigrants who are educated are more likely to succeed in the adapting occupationally and economically in the United States.

However, one of Portes and Rumbaut's key points is that immigrants do not start on an even playing field—government policies, society's reception of immigrants, and presence and size of co-ethnic community (Portes and Rumbaut call this "mode of incorporation") have a great impact on immigrants' success in adapting to life in the United States. The authors argue that there is a continuum of how the government typically responds to immigrants: exclusion, passive acceptance, and active encouragement. This attitude toward immigrants can also be seen historically in the government's stance toward heritage languages: suppression, tolerance, accommodation, and promotion (Kloss, 1977/1998, as cited in Wiley, 2001). For example, exclusion could be when the government does not allow for immigration and thus forces immigrants to lead an "underground and disadvantaged existence," or when the government may grant immigrants legal access but not provide any additional support to facilitate their adaptation (pp. 46-47). Some groups of immigrants

receive active governmental support and assistance (e.g., refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia). Groups that receive government support gain an edge over other immigrants because they are allowed access to resources that other groups do not receive (e.g., economic assistance, job apprenticeship). However, Portes and Rumbaut note that race plays a key factor in social acceptance and may even have a greater impact than immigrants' class background, religion, or language. They state: "Regardless of their class origin or knowledge of English, nonwhite immigrants face greater obstacles in gaining access to the white middle-class mainstream and may receive lower returns for their education and work experience" (p. 47).

In Chapters 4 and 5, Portes and Rumbaut focus on the immigrant parents: how they adapt to life in the United States, their socioeconomic status, family composition, the determinants of immigrant economic achievement and family structure, and their perceptions and experiences raising children in the United States. Chapters 6 and 7 focus on the children: how the children change over time—their language shift to English and how their ethnic identities evolve and are shaped. Portes and Rumbaut's finding that this new second generation is rapidly shifting to English as the preferred means of expression (72% in junior high and 88% by high school graduation) seems to support Veltman's (1999) assertion that "no immigrant group has been able to preserve its minority language longer than two or three generations," with the exception of marginal religious groups (e.g., Hassidim and the Amish) (p. 60). However, a follow-up study to see what percentage of the third generation is able to maintain its minority language would be very interesting.

In Chapter 8, Portes and Rumbaut focus on the world of the second-generation youth: patterns of parent-child conflicts and cohesion, self-esteem, and aspirations for the future. In Chapter 9, Portes and Rumbaut examine the factors that affect the new second-generation youth's academic performance and chances of educational success. In the last chapter, Portes and Rumbaut look at the ideologies that have been guiding policy.

Portes and Rumbaut conclude their book by stating that two mainstream ideologies have tended to guide America's attitudes and policies toward immigrants up to now: "intransigent nativism" that "seeks to stop all or most immigration, send unauthorized immigrants back as quickly as possible, and put immigrants who remain in the United States on notice that they occupy an inferior position, ineligible for privileges of citizens" and "forceful assimilation," which tends to "delegitimize the culture and language of parents" by teaching children that their parents' native language has less value than English and helps to promote dissonant acculturation (p. 271). Intransigent nativism underlies the rationale behind California's Proposition 187 (1994) and Arizona's Proposition 200 (2004): the stated purpose to "protect" California and Arizona from illegal aliens' access to social services such as schools and other services.

Portes and Rumbaut assert that “to the extent that it is translated into policy, intransigent nativism yields heightened discrimination and new barriers to successful adaptation” and likely to produce self-fulfilling and self-defeating prophecies due to discrimination and factors that support poverty (p. 272). The ideology of forceful assimilation, when played, may force many children to experience dissonant acculturation and may result in immigrant children having “limited bilingualism,” in which they have a full command of neither their heritage language nor English (p. 273). California’s Proposition 227 (1998) and Arizona’s Proposition 203 (2000), banning bilingual education, can be seen as policies stemming from forceful assimilation.

Instead of these two mainstream ideologies, Portes and Rumbaut call for a third way: selective acculturation (preservation of native culture and language while learning English and American culture) and bilingualism. There are many benefits to selective acculturation; it is linked with preservation of fluent bilingualism, which is linked to less parent–child conflict, higher self-esteem, higher educational and occupational expectation, and higher academic achievement. However, Portes and Rumbaut acknowledge that “despite its advantages, selective acculturation has no political constituency” (p. 274). This also parallels Crawford’s (2000) analysis of the mood of Americans since the mid-1980s that “many US voters have reacted defensively against the racial, cultural, and language diversity brought by rising levels of immigration” (p. 85).

One interesting finding from Portes and Rumbaut’s study is that while U.S. nativity and long-term residence increases English skills, it has lowered grades. Portes and Rumbaut suggest that this finding indicates that second-generation children gradually lose their achievement drive with increasing acculturation. Furthermore, the authors found that both passage of time and type of acculturation has a major influence on children’s academic achievement: One common result of forced language immersion is limited bilingualism, which leads to loss of parental languages and is strongly associated with cultural dissonance such as increased parent–child cultural conflict. Parent–child conflict was also found to have a consistently negative and powerful influence on achievement.

Another interesting finding from the study was the two achievement paradoxes of the Southeast Asians and the Cubans. The Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian students—who tended to come from poor families with low human capital—seldom retained their parental languages, commonly had low self-esteem and modest expectations for the future, and tended to do well academically. Portes and Rumbaut attribute their academic success to the strong social capital provided by their ethnic communities. However, Cuban Americans in public schools, despite a favorable reception and high levels of human capital, tended to have low grades and a higher propensity for dropping out of school. Portes and Rumbaut attribute the poor performance of Cuban

American students in public schools to two forces: (a) favorable modes of incorporation benefited the early but not the recent arrivals and (b) some of the Cuban American students dropped out of school because jobs were plentiful for Spanish-language speakers in Miami.

This book is a wonderful resource with great content as well informative tables and figures that present the authors' findings. It is probably one of the most comprehensive books on the new second-generation youth that I have read and attempts to cover a vast number of topics. However, because the authors attempt to cover such a vast array of topics—from demographics of the new second generation, to the modes of incorporation to parents' economic achievement and their outlook on America, to bilingualism and issues of identity, family relationships, and educational achievement—many topics were not sufficiently explored in depth. For example, when one looks closely at the numbers of people from Miami–Ft. Lauderdale who took their first survey in 1992, there were only 8 Vietnamese, 1 Laotian, 1 Cambodian, and 0 Hmong, compared with the numbers from San Diego: 362 Vietnamese, 154 Laotian, 94 Cambodian, and 53 Hmong. I wonder if the experiences of the Southeast Asians in southern Florida were vastly different than the experiences of those in southern California. This attention to detail is important because Portes and Rumbaut attribute the paradox of Southeast Asian achievement to the strong social capital provided by their ethnic communities. However, for those in southern Florida, I would argue that the ethnic communities were probably not very strong if there were only a handful of families—so how would Portes and Rumbaut account for the success of those families and the success of the second generation children in school? Although this study is one of the largest surveys to date, it is somewhat dated since the data come from the 1990 U.S. Census and estimates from the 1997 Current Population Survey, and there is the constant influx of immigrants every year.

I think that Portes and Rumbaut have started a good foundation of research for others to build on to learn more about this new generation of immigrants. I think it is very helpful that they included the follow-up questionnaire and parent questionnaire in the Appendix for those who might want to build upon their research. There are many questions left to be answered, such as, “What is the rate of language loss and shift with this new generation?” Many researchers have stated that language loss is occurring more rapidly—but how rapidly? Within one generation? Two?

Lastly, Portes and Rumbaut's findings of the Southeast Asian immigrants' academic success should be read with caution because it too easily seems to reinforce the myth of Asians as the “model minority,” since other studies have noted that not all Asians fit this stereotype (Lee, 2001). Although Portes and Rumbaut argue that this notion of Asians working hard and doing well in school cannot be linked to the Confucian ethic because the majority of the families are not Confucian, one question that might be asked is: “Can the

academic success of Asians be linked to Asian culture, which places a high value on education?” But one might argue if there really is an “Asian culture” since all the cultures are so different. In conclusion, perhaps what is most telling among the findings in this book is that Portes and Rumbaut show that one policy does not fit all immigrant groups—even immigrants within the same nationality.

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