

Schools & the Diversity Transition

Richard Alba

Abstract: In the next quarter century, North American and Western European societies will face a profound transformation of their working-age populations as a result of immigration, combined with the aging of native majorities. These changes will intensify the challenges of integrating the children of low-status immigrants. Abundant evidence reveals that most educational systems, including that in the United States, are failing to meet these challenges; and sociological theories underscore these systems' role in reproducing inequality. However, the history of assimilation in the United States shows that native-/immigrant-origin inequalities need not be enduring. An examination of variations across time and space suggests educational policy changes and innovations that can ameliorate inequalities.

A turning point in the history of the West is at hand. During the coming quarter-century, wealthy Western societies will undergo what could be called a “diversity transition” or a “third demographic transition.”¹ Thanks to ongoing and irreversible demographic changes, spurred in substantial part by immigration, these societies will have to rely increasingly on young people of non-native and minority backgrounds to sustain their economic, cultural, and social vitality. With an imperative to integrate these youth, schools will form the crucible where the future of North American and Western European societies is forged.

The impending transition will be intensified by a demographic conjunction that links both ends of the age spectrum. At the lower end, the majority-origins population, however defined, will continue to decline, while the numbers of those from immigrant and minority backgrounds will increase. At the upper end, an especially large population of majority workers will soon retire, a consequence of the baby booms that followed World War II in most Western nations.² The retiring baby boomers are, on average, a well-educated group, including the first cohorts to experience mass higher education.

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They are also well positioned in the labor market, occupying a disproportionate share of the most skilled and highest-paying jobs. The critical question is: who will replace them?

This question underscores a major challenge for wealthy Western societies: how to integrate the children (and, in some cases, grandchildren) of immigrants so that they can participate in the labor force and in mainstream institutions on a par with native majorities. In most Western countries, a large fraction of immigrant-origin children face substantial disadvantages in reaching educational parity with children from native families.³ Although immigration has proven to be bimodal in most places, with a substantial share of the foreign born bringing with them high human and social capital, many children of immigrants grow up in homes where their parents have low levels of education (by the standards of the receiving society), hold low-wage jobs (or are unemployed), and speak primarily in their mother tongue. Moreover, these immigrants and their children may be stigmatized for their national origin (especially when it represents a former colony), phenotypic appearance, or religion. The combination of a low socioeconomic starting point and a stigmatized ethnoracial origin leads me to describe these groups as *low status* (according to the perceptions of the majority population).

The challenge of integration must be met head-on in schools, though given their current resources and structures, it is doubtful that they are equal to the task. The challenge exacerbates a tension at the heart of the educational mission: on the one hand, schools are expected to provide young people with an education appropriate for their future adult lives, which leads to sorting of students, presumably by ability but, as we know, also by social origin; on the other hand,

schools are charged with ensuring equal opportunity and the potential for social mobility for children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Most often, the first charge dominates because schools give primacy to the needs of children coming from the middle and higher classes of the native majority population.⁴ But all is not lost. We can see from the history of assimilation in the United States that massive educational catch-up by children from disadvantaged groups is possible. Through examination of educational systems across time, between past and present, and across space, in variations among countries, this essay begins to identify the innovations and policies that could ameliorate inequalities between students from immigrant homes and their peers from mainstream backgrounds.

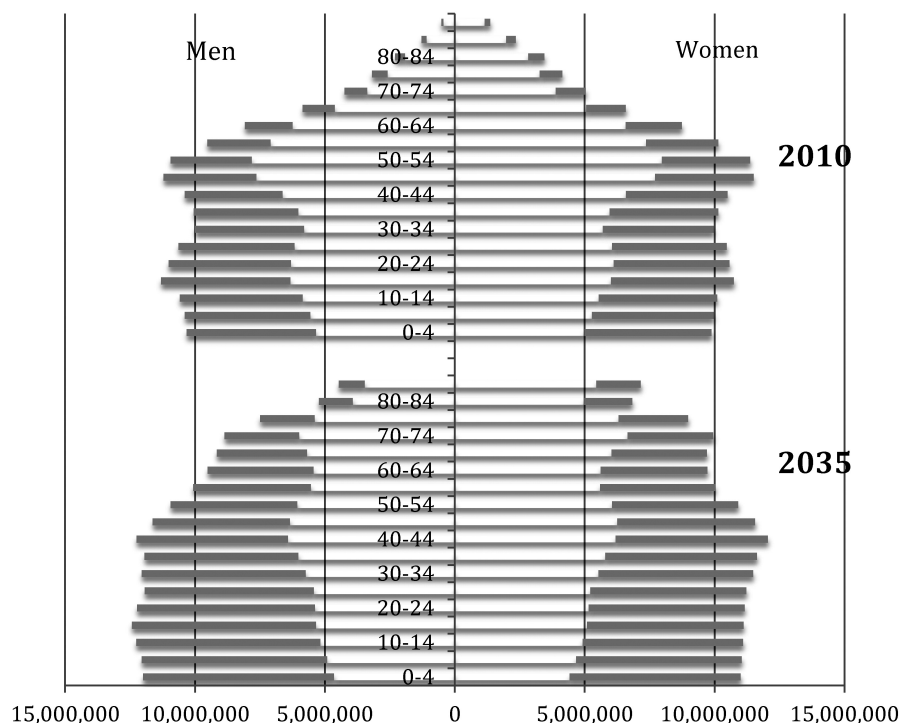
Figure 1 shows how the demographic transition is likely to proceed in the United States, according to the Census Bureau's 2012 population projections. The European-ancestry group (non-Hispanic whites) – the majority population from which most high-skilled workers and civic leaders have historically been recruited – is in decline. This group is largest in the baby-boom cohorts (ages 45 to 64 in 2010), and is substantially smaller in younger age groups. For instance, the number of European-ancestry whites from ages 0 to 19 is 23 percent less than in the baby-boom group. The Census Bureau projections for 2035 show that the shrinkage of the white majority population will continue well into the twenty-first century.

A little more than two decades from now, the number of whites aged 16 to 64 is expected to be about 110 million, down from 130 million today; and the working-age population of minority origins will be almost the same size. While the projection of the adult minority population relies on assumptions, chiefly about im-

Figure 1

U.S. Population in 2010, and Projected U.S. Population in 2035, by Age and Gender

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Non-Hispanic whites are represented by the blank portions of the bars, and minorities are represented by the shaded portions. Source: The 2010 data come from the decennial census; the 2035 projections are derived from the Census Bureau's 2012 population projections.

migration, that could turn out to be wrong, the projection of the adult white population does not. Whites could still potentially gain in number from an assimilatory shift across the minority/majority divide,⁵ but any such shift is quite unlikely to attain a magnitude great enough to significantly alter the projected decline. In short, the white "majority" will continue to shrink, both in absolute numbers and relative to the minority population, as the overall population grows.

Immigration plays a major role in driving these changes, as evidenced by the con-

temporary child (under eighteen) population. As of the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, non-Hispanic whites constituted a bare majority, at 56 percent of America's children, with Hispanics, non-Hispanic blacks, and Asians making up 22, 14, and 4 percent, respectively. The remainder belongs to other ethnoracial categories, including individuals of mixed race. Children growing up in immigrant homes make up a large part of the Hispanic and Asian groups, which are also the fastest growing segments of the U.S. population. Over 60 percent of

all Latino children are children of immigrants; among Asians, that number rises to almost 90 percent.

Some Latino groups correspond closely to the concept of a low-status immigrant-origin population. Immigrants from a number of Latin American countries, including Mexico and much of Central America, arrive with low levels of formal education (according to U.S. norms) and take low-wage jobs.⁶ A sizable proportion lack legal status, and even legal immigrants and their children are exposed to increasingly virulent nativism and oppressive police measures in some states and localities.⁷ For these and other reasons, the educational barriers faced by Latinos appear to linger into the third generation and beyond.⁸

In one demographic respect, the United States has an advantage over many comparable European countries: namely, the United States will not have a shortage of young people in the near future. By contrast, the Netherlands, like many Western European countries, will experience a shrinkage of its young-adult population. This future can be inferred from the population pyramid in Figure 2, which also shows that the baby boom lasted well into the 1970s in the Netherlands, longer than in the United States. As of 2010, therefore, the youngest Dutch baby boomers are only in their late thirties, and some will remain in the labor market for another three decades. However, the child population in Holland is substantially smaller than a comparable age band of adults, and is also more diverse, with the children of immigrants nearly one-quarter of the total. The majority of these children have parents who came from outside Europe, including former Dutch colonies (for example, Suriname), Morocco, or Turkey. Generally, these are socioeconomically disadvantaged groups within Dutch society.

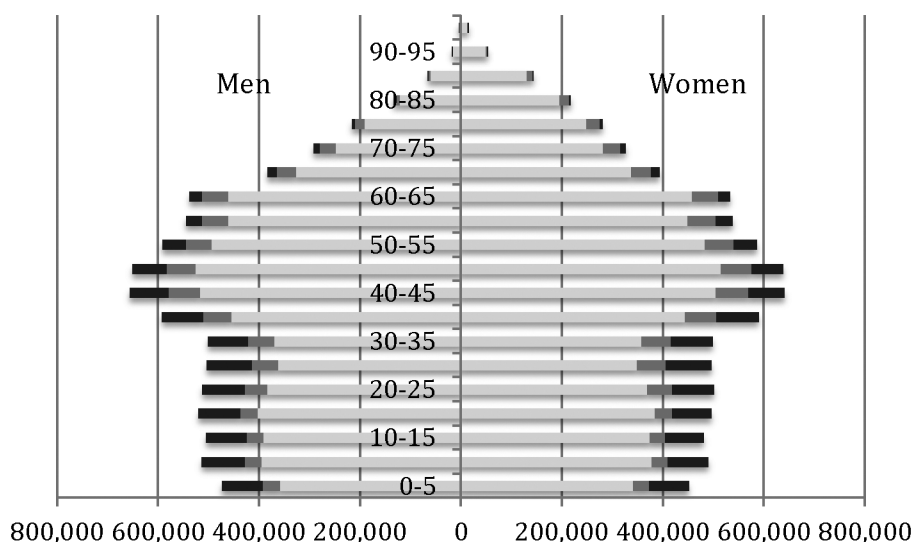
In virtually all wealthy Western countries that have accepted large numbers of immigrants since the mid-twentieth century, a substantial body of evidence demonstrates that major portions of the second and, in some cases, third generation lag behind mainstream norms of educational attainment. This finding suggests that, on average, the descendants of immigrants will not be equipped to fill many of the vacancies left in the labor market and in civic leadership by the retiring baby boomers.⁹ This is not to deny the bimodal nature of the educational distribution of the children of immigrants. Migration streams have introduced some immigrant professionals and other high-skilled workers, whose children generally do well in Western educational systems, often outperforming the children of the native majority.¹⁰

We can observe the educational disadvantages of children of immigrants in terms of either school-taught skills, such as literacy in the mainstream language and mathematical proficiency, or educational credentials. The two, though correlated, are not isomorphic, and their significance for adult status is somewhat different. While educational credentials determine which tier of the labor market individuals can enter, school-taught skills are a plausible predictor of workplace performance, especially in jobs that require more than a secondary-school credential, and thus they also indicate potential for advancement.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) conducts the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) surveys to test the literacy and mathematics skills (as well as scientific knowledge) of 15-year-olds from more than seventy countries. By surveying students nearing the end of the period of mandatory schooling, the PISA study helps us understand the dis-

Figure 2
Population Pyramid for the Netherlands, 2010

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Lightest portion is native Dutch; intermediate shade is first- and second-generation immigrants of Western origins; darkest shade is first- and second-generation immigrants of non-Western origins. Source: Statistics Netherlands.

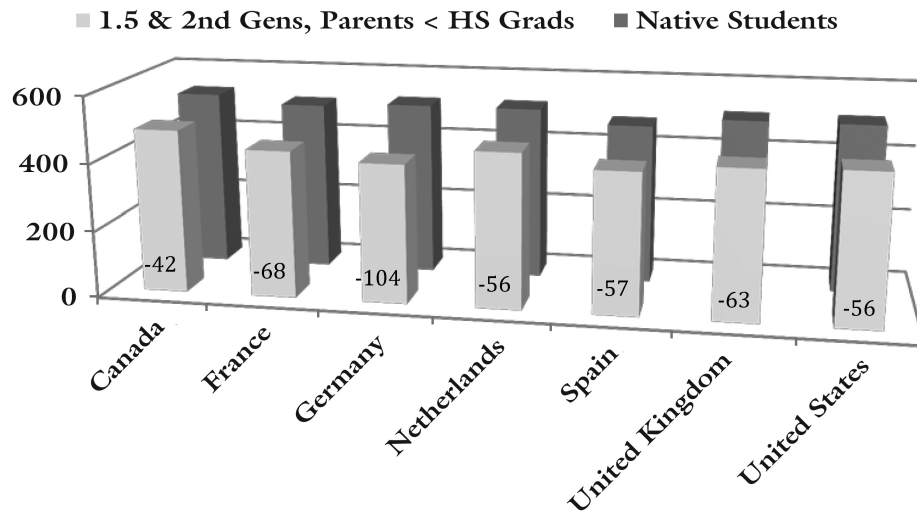
advantages of students from immigrant families. Analysis of the overall native-/immigrant-origin differences in mainstream language literacy and mathematics skills reveals that, on average, these gaps are about forty points on the PISA scales.¹¹ The OECD estimates that sixty to seventy points amount to a “proficiency level,” of which there are five on the literacy scale and six on the mathematics scale. By this measure, the average forty-point gap is sizable.

These averages are a lower bound of the disadvantages of children of low-status immigrants because they do not account for the bimodal nature of immigration – that is, the presence of children from professional and high-skilled immigrants. If we remove these children from the com-

parison, the gaps grow in magnitude. The PISA study does not collect consistent data on the national origin of immigrant families, but we can approximate this comparison by limiting the 1.5- and second-generation group to those whose parents have not earned an upper-secondary credential, such as the U.S. high school diploma. Admittedly, this restricts the immigrant-origin group to its most disadvantaged portion (in the United States, about 30 percent of children from immigrant homes would be included), so the results should be viewed as an upper bound on the skills gap.

Using this method, Figure 3 shows that for most of the major receiving countries of the North Atlantic, the gap is now on the order of sixty points in literacy (and

Figure 3
Average Reading Scores for Native Students and 1.5- and Second-Generation Students Whose Parents Do Not Have a High School Diploma



Differences between the two groups are indicated on the front bars. Source: Programme for International Student Assessment, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006 and 2009.

larger, in some cases, in mathematics). In Germany, it is one hundred points; in Canada, about forty. In the case of Germany, a highly stratified school system is implicated; in the case of Canada, a selective immigration system reduces the potential for academic-skills inequality. Overall, we can see that in a number of major receiving countries, including the United States, the literacy gap between the children from native families and children from disadvantaged immigrant families varies between fifty and seventy points on the PISA scale.

The credentials gap is, if anything, larger. In the United States, lagging educational attainment characterizes the second and later generations of Latinos, the largest minority group among America's children.¹² For instance, 2005–2009 American Community Survey data on individuals aged 26 to 35, a group whose educational record

is largely complete but also reflects recent life chances in schools, demonstrate that U.S.-born Latinos are much more likely than their non-Latino white counterparts to have left high school without a diploma. This is especially true for the young men of the group, who are also much less likely to have earned postsecondary education credentials (see Table 1). Young-adult whites have earned baccalaureate degrees at roughly twice the frequency of Latinos. Because comparable gaps in postsecondary education also separate black from white Americans, these data indicate problems for two groups that now make up more than one-third of U.S. children.

In most other Western countries, the credentials gap for children from disadvantaged immigrant families is also large, though not always as large as in the United States, as my colleagues and I have found

Table 1

Educational Attainment of 26- to 35-year-old, U.S.-born Whites and Latinos, by Gender

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	Whites %	Latinos %
MEN		
No high school diploma	8.0	19.1
High school diploma	28.2	33.7
Some college, no degree	23.0	24.6
Associate's degree	8.4	7.5
Bachelor's degree	24.2	11.6
Post-bachelor's degree	8.3	3.5
WOMEN		
No high school diploma	5.8	14.7
High school diploma	21.1	27.7
Some college, no degree	23.0	27.5
Associate's degree	10.3	9.2
Bachelor's degree	27.7	15.3
Post-bachelor's degree	12.1	5.6

Source: 2005–2009 American Community Survey.

in the Children of Immigrants in Schools study.¹³ In the Netherlands, for example, gaps between native Dutch children and the children of Moroccan immigrants are large at both ends of the educational distribution.¹⁴ In France, the failure of the children of North African immigrants to complete secondary school is at least as common as it is for Latinos in the United States, but the gap at the upper end, in postsecondary credentials, is smaller.¹⁵ In Great Britain, however, the youngest cohorts of the children of Bangladeshi and Pakistani immigrants have caught up to their white British peers in terms of university credentials, though they are concentrated in lower-status universities.¹⁶ Nevertheless, this parity is remarkable and remains to be fully explained.¹⁷

Despite these variations and the British exception, the disadvantage of young people who have grown up in low-status immigrant families is generally consistent and sizable. Remarkably, this disadvantage appears in educational systems that

differ fundamentally from one another. Whether we consider such features as the degree of internal stratification, the inequality among schools, or the division of educational labor among schools, families, and communities, we observe marked variations among the school systems of the receiving societies.¹⁸

For instance, in some Northern European school systems, such as in the Netherlands and Germany, the students are steered into separate tracks (often in different school buildings) at early ages; tracking begins after the fourth year of primary school in most German states. Such early tracking places students from immigrant backgrounds at an extreme disadvantage. Because they begin school behind students from native families, they typically require more time for their academic abilities to manifest themselves. In the French and American educational systems, which also track students (though in less rigid ways), students are educated for much longer periods in comprehensive

contexts, giving immigrant-origin youngsters more opportunity to shift tracks.

There is also considerable variation in the degree of inequality among schools. The U.S. system stands at one extreme, where school funding depends heavily on locally and state-raised taxes, and spending per pupil can vary from one district to another by as much as a two-to-one margin.¹⁹ Consequently, there are substantial inequalities among schools in physical facilities, teaching resources, and teacher qualifications – inequalities that correlate with the social origins of students.²⁰ By contrast, in France, the national Ministry of Education controls the bulk of school budgets, including, critically, the budgets for teachers. There is even modest supplementary funding for schools that serve large numbers of socially disadvantaged students, provided by the Priority Education Zones (ZEP) program. There are still inequalities among French schools, but they are less pronounced than in the United States. Nevertheless, apart from the large skills inequality evident in Germany, the variations in the native-/immigrant-origin educational gaps do not seem to align closely with the differences in educational structures. What then is going on?

The gaps separating young people of low-status immigrant origins from the majority population are unsurprising in light of the role of educational systems in transmitting inequalities from one generation to the next. The gaps are, moreover, predicted by theories of inequality now prevalent in the sociology of education, including the theories of “maximally” and “effectively” “maintained inequality.” These theories assert that educational systems function in ways that preserve, on average, the cumulative advantages of middle- and upper-middle-class majority-group students.²¹ Such theories do allow for individual mobility by students of dis-

advantaged origins, so long as this movement is not so widespread that it threatens the aggregate advantages of privileged students.

According to these theories, even when public policy alters educational systems to enhance opportunities for students from humble origins, the imbalance of educational opportunity is quick to reassert itself. The processes that, like a social gyroscope, preserve inequality according to family origins are not entirely clear. However, we can observe that in democratic societies, native middle-class parents are better equipped than working-class or immigrant parents to enlist the collaboration of school administrators and teachers to influence their children’s educations. They are also in a better position to move their children between school districts, or to opt out of or supplement public provision through full- or part-time private education. Typically, their privileged position is maintained by the “normal” workings of the educational system. The influence of these parents, therefore, remains largely invisible, manifesting itself only at moments when they intervene to ensure that their children retain advantages in spite of efforts to level the playing field.

The thesis of maximally maintained inequality argues that expansion of the higher tiers of an educational system, which is intended to create room for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to move upward, also allows some students from privileged families to improve their educational outcomes – hence, on net there tends to be little change in the differentials separating students of different origins.²² In complementary fashion, effectively maintained inequality claims that as quantitative differences in students’ educational outcomes (for example, the number of years of education attained) level off, the qualitative differences be-

come more consequential.²³ Qualitative disparities that maintain inequality in the aggregate, even as opportunity ostensibly expands, include secondary school tracks, along with the status tiers among universities in Great Britain and the United States.

These theories arose as an effort to explain the persistence of social class-based inequalities in education. But the theories may also be applied to native-/immigrant-origin inequalities, which are similarly widespread and resilient. Admittedly, the theories might seem to foreclose any further consideration of ameliorating inequalities. If educational systems by their very nature work to maintain the advantages of privileged groups, then native-/immigrant-origin inequalities may be unyielding, and it may be impossible to conceive of educational policies that make much of a dent in them. But a study of assimilation history in the United States suggests otherwise.

The historical cases of educational catch-up by disadvantaged groups indicate that, under favorable circumstances, maximally and effectively maintained inequality yield to other forces. For example, consider the mass assimilation of the children and grandchildren of Southern and Eastern European immigrants from 1945 to 1970.²⁴ During the first half of the century, these groups were denigrated and excluded by native, middle-class white Americans, who sought in various ways to maintain their advantages. Two of these groups, Italians and Jews, stand out for the lessons their experiences yield about educational change. The children of immigrants from Southern Italy lagged far behind native white norms of education, while Jews, far more educationally mobile, experienced discrimination in admission to elite colleges and social exclusion when they did gain entry. Quantitative gaps from main-

stream norms characterized one group, *Richard Alba* qualitative differences the other.

The Italian case bears some resemblance to the situation of low-status immigrant groups today. Italian immigrants came from the economically backward regions of the Mezzogiorno, the Italian South, and brought with them few skills of value in an industrial economy, apart from construction trades. The school system of the Mezzogiorno was very limited in 1900, and many of the immigrants were illiterate.²⁵ These were among the first transnational immigrants, some of them migrating back and forth between Italy and the United States on a seasonal basis. A large proportion hoped to return permanently to their hometowns, and many eventually did.²⁶

Consistent with ideals held by the immigrants at the time, children were kept close to the family; and in many families, children were expected to make an economic contribution as early as possible. These expectations created a series of clashes with American schools.²⁷ Consequently, Italian children had high rates of truancy and frequently left school as early as the law allowed. Even as late as 1930, only 11 percent of Italian Americans who entered New York City high schools earned diplomas, at a time when over 40 percent of all the city's high school students graduated.²⁸ The obvious consequence was low educational attainment for second-generation Italians and the channeling of this group toward jobs in which educational credentials were unimportant. This is the situation in which sociologists Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan found this population at mid-century.²⁹

Yet during the quarter-century following the end of World War II, the Italians' educational attainment accelerated, and they caught up to native white Americans in the key areas of college attendance and

graduation. An analysis of educational attainment by generation and birth cohort suggests that the critical shifts occurred across cohorts, and thus reflect the historical evolution of the group's life chances.³⁰ For the second-generation Italian children born during the period of mass immigration, the gap separating their educational attainment from that of mainstream white Americans, typified by British ancestry, was very large: two-to-one in terms of college attendance, and even wider in terms of college graduation. The gap narrowed substantially for the cohort born during the late 1930s, a group whose education took place mainly after World War II. For those born after 1950, the gap vanished permanently.

The Jewish case was different, but also instructive with regard to contemporary theories of educational inequality. In contrast with the Italians, Eastern European Jews represented an immigrant population unusually well supplied with skills valued by the industrial economies of Northern U.S. cities.³¹ Jews by and large did not intend to return to Europe, and they quickly established themselves in the United States by learning English and acquiring citizenship. Their children found rapid success in the public school system and soon applied for admission to colleges, including top-tier universities.

Elite native white Protestants in the United States responded by reinforcing the boundaries separating them from Jewish newcomers. Quotas were imposed on the admission of Jews to elite colleges during the 1920s, and they lasted, in disguised forms, until the late 1950s.³² Jews still attended college, but they were confined largely to less prestigious campuses, such as the public colleges of the New York City system. By imposing a qualitative restriction on the educational careers of academically talented Jews, Protestants attempted to achieve monop-

olistic closure: the exclusion of outsiders from, or at least the restriction of their entry to, arenas where privileges are forged and bestowed.

But this system of exclusion collapsed in the postwar period. For example, at Princeton, "long a bastion of anti-Semitism" according to sociologist Jerome Karabel, the enrollment of Jews reached 6 to 7 percent in the late 1940s, double the proportion of a decade earlier, and continued to climb to about 14 percent by the late 1950s.³³ Jews also joined the faculties of elite schools, including the Ivies.³⁴ These educational changes were tied to other societal changes that occurred in the postwar period, such as greater residential integration, especially in suburbs, and eventually intermarriage across ethnic and religious lines.

Together, these changes diminished the once bright boundaries that separated Jews and Catholics from what had been a white Protestant mainstream. How did such profound changes take place in so short a span of time? Why did these ethnic groups become acceptable to white Protestants, who during the first half of the century feared growing Catholic political power, as well as the social and economic challenges posed by rapid Jewish mobility? An answer to these questions must also explain why white Protestants became willing to share their once-exclusive advantages with these immigrant newcomers and their descendants.

The postwar changes took place during a period of what could be called "non-zero-sum mobility"—an extraordinary period of prosperity that opened the sluices of mobility for working-class, ethnic whites without washing away the perches of advantaged white Protestants. The social ascent of previously disadvantaged ethno-religious groups, then, required little sacrifice by their privileged predecessors. The magnitude of this non-zero-sum

mobility is indicated by the changes in the postsecondary portion of the educational system.

State and municipal colleges and universities expanded rapidly in the quarter-century following the war. During this period, college education became a mass phenomenon, as the number of students in institutions of postsecondary education quintupled between 1940 and 1970. Because of the educational non-zero-sum mobility generated by this expansion, groups like the Southern Italians were able to catch up to mainstream educational norms in only a few decades. By 1970, the groups of young adults emerging from the educational system contained ample representation of the white ethnic groups that had lagged behind through the middle of the century.³⁵

The coming demographic changes, and in particular the shrinkage of the privileged youth population, such as children from middle-class non-Hispanic white families in the United States, suggest emergent conditions for a new period of non-zero-sum mobility, though not on the scale of the postwar period. Nevertheless, there will be opportunities in the coming quarter-century for the children of disadvantaged groups to move up without appearing to threaten the position of children of advantaged ones. Although middle-class native families play influential roles in maintaining educational systems, the demographic changes suggest that their grip could relax, and openings that favor more opportunity for immigrant-origin students might become possible.

Thus, the coming changes may create a situation in which the reproduction of educational inequality described by the theories of maximally and effectively maintained inequality will not be as ironclad as it now seems. For children coming from disadvantaged immigrant back-

grounds to take advantage of any new openings, however, policy changes and innovations in educational systems must occur. To reflect on the nature of these modifications for the American system – the focus for the rest of the essay – we can look either across time, searching for relevant differences between the postwar educational system and the current one, or across space, looking for features of systems in other countries that might ameliorate American inequalities.

Undoubtedly, there are many differences between the big-city schools of the postwar period, where the children of Italian and Jewish immigrants were educated, and the urban and suburban schools attended by the children of today's immigrants. But two of these differences seem especially relevant at first glance: the first relates to "quality," including the academic skills and proficiencies of teachers; the second concerns public investment in educational opportunity.

There is compelling evidence that the quality of teachers matters – that students learn more when their teachers have better credentials, more teaching experience, and higher levels of verbal skills according to standardized test scores.³⁶ And a substantial body of research shows that, at least in terms of academic skills, the average quality of teaching has declined during the last half-century – despite the evident abilities of many in the profession – as occupational opportunities for women have expanded and the prestige and working conditions of teaching have declined.³⁷ However, the turnaround of educational achievement in Finland, which has benefited from upgrading the professional status of teachers and consequently recruiting more selectively into the occupation, demonstrates that gender equality and high teacher quality are compatible.³⁸

Another distinguishing feature of the postwar period was the growing invest-

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ment in education, especially in the postsecondary sector. The investment began with the GI Bill of 1944, which spurred higher levels of attendance at colleges and universities. The increased participation in higher education was sustained in the postwar decades by the enormous expansion of the postsecondary educational sector, most of which was publicly funded.

Compared to the other receiving societies of the contemporary Western world, one prominent feature of American society appears to undergird educational inequality: high levels of residential segregation by ethnicity/race and by income level.³⁹ Because students usually attend schools in their vicinity, residential segregation leads to high levels of school segregation. American schools, as noted earlier, are very unequal, with a strong correlation between their social composition and their overall quality, as reflected in physical facilities, resources, and teacher preparation. Residential segregation enables this correlation.

The selectivity of teacher recruitment and the residential segregation of ethnoracial groups are the consequences of complex processes that are not easy to change. If these were the only available levers of change in the United States, then any hope of meeting the challenges of integration in the coming quarter-century would seem remote. Fortunately, there are other avenues to ameliorate educational inequality. Consider the division of educational labor among schools, families, and communities, a factor that influences the correlation between social origins and educational outcomes. Education is never conducted solely in schools; from the very first day of class, students enter the classroom with predeveloped differences in school-relevant skills, some as simple as the ability to sit still. These differences are brought from homes

and communities, outside agents that continue to play a crucial role throughout a child's school career.

This division of responsibility is an important source of the disadvantages that children of immigrants face in educational systems. Immigrant families lack familiarity with the host society and its institutions, and if parents themselves have limited education, the combination is potent. Immigrant parents may not understand the ramifications of the decisions that must be made by them and their children (for example, choices regarding urban high school selection in the United States⁴⁰); they cannot help their children with their homework; and they cannot provide their children with the linguistic and cultural foundations for school success. To the degree that the burden of educational labor falls on them and communities of people like them, their children are likely to be handicapped.

Indices of the division of educational labor include the age at which children first enter school or school-like settings and the annual amount of time they spend there. In neither of these respects is the United States well positioned to counteract the powerful inequalities among families and communities. In France, for instance, participation in the *maternelle* system is more or less universal among children by the age of three. In the United States, by contrast, the use of early childhood educational programs is lower in general and lowest of all for the children from some major Latino groups, including Mexicans.⁴¹ Further, young Americans spend fewer hours in school in an average year than do most of their Western European counterparts; and during the unusually long summer vacations in the United States, the children from disadvantaged backgrounds lose ground compared to their more advantaged classmates.⁴²

Community institutions can sometimes compensate for the lack of educational resources in families, but here, too, the low-status immigrant communities in the United States experience disadvantages. As sociologist Min Zhou has shown, Asian immigrant communities have developed supplementary educational institutions that share benefits across class lines, but Mexican and Central American communities lack equivalent facilities.⁴³ In the United States, such institutions depend chiefly on community resources. In the Netherlands, by contrast, municipal governments subsidize programs credited with narrowing the skills gap between immigrant- and native-origin students, thereby distributing organized resources more equitably.⁴⁴

This brief survey of cross-national variations in the division of educational labor suggests some points of leverage for ameliorating the disadvantages faced by students growing up in low-status immi-

grant homes – by increasing the role of schools, on the one hand, and augmenting the educational resources of communities, on the other. More generally, it is unrealistic to expect a wholesale reorganization of educational systems to facilitate the successful integration of immigrant-origin children. But more modest policies also promise significant improvement. In this respect, all of the different educational systems can learn from each other to better adapt to the coming period of demographic change. Each system has features that disadvantage students of low-status immigrant families, but each also has some features that can benefit these groups. Students from low-status immigrant families will be as critical to the labor forces of the advanced economies as those with mainstream backgrounds. The United States, like other Western countries, must profit from experiences elsewhere to meet the looming challenges of integration.

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ENDNOTES

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