

Annu. Rev. Sociol. 2019. 45:X–X
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073117-041335>
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www.annualreviews.org • The Second Generation in Europe and America

Assimilation and the Second Generation in Europe and America: Blending and Segregating Social Dynamics between Immigrants and Natives

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Abstract

The diversity induced by migration flows to Western societies has continued to generate scholarly attention, and a sizable new body of work on immigrant incorporation has been produced in the past ten years. We review recent work in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain. Despite differences between the United States as a settler society and Western Europe as a composite of classic nation states, we find an overall pattern of intergenerational assimilation in terms of socioeconomic attainment, social relations and cultural beliefs. We then qualify this perspective by considering sources of disadvantage for immigrants on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, the lack of legal status is particularly problematic; in Europe, by contrast, religious difference is the most prominent social factor complicating assimilation. We proffer several general propositions summarizing mechanisms embedded in purposive action, social networks, cultural difference, and institutional structures that drive the interplay of blending and segregating dynamics in the incorporation of immigrants and their children.

Keywords

immigration, second generation, assimilation, mechanisms, blending and segregating dynamics, institutions

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, international migration has led to unprecedented ethnic, racial and religious diversity within Western liberal societies. Comparative figures from national census bureaus and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) suggest that, as of the early 2010s, the proportion of foreign-born hovers between 10%, in France and Spain, and 20%, in Belgium (Alba & Foner 2015, OECD/Eur. Union 2015). Including native-born children with at least one immigrant parent, immigrant groups constitute 16% of the population in Spain, 19% in the United Kingdom, 20% in the Netherlands, 20% in Germany, 21% in Norway, 24% in the United States, 26% in France, 28% in Sweden, and 30% in Belgium (OECD/Eur. Union 2015, p. 17).

Whether or not these new immigrants and their children are achieving full membership in their country of settlement, however, remains an open empirical question. Is there or is not there an attenuation of differences based on ethnic origin over time and generations, leading to the erosion of social boundaries distinguishing immigrants from natives? In this article, we review recent empirical work on immigrant incorporation on both sides of the Atlantic—specifically, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Spain, and Belgium. Our aim is to synthesize research findings published within the past decade on the incorporation of immigrants across these national contexts. Our neo-assimilationist approach assumes that assimilation is a contingent evolutionary outcome that depends on the mix and balance between opposing social forces driving blending and segregating dynamics. Hence, we explore these dynamics, first in the United States and then Western Europe.

In both contexts, a credible commitment to the rule of law provides a common institutional framework for the incorporation of immigrants and their children. The United States' origin as an immigrant nation is reflected in its Constitution, empowering Congress “to establish a uniform rule of naturalization” for citizenship. In Western Europe, by contrast, conceptions of the national community have historically been more cultural in character, and their populations more homogenous. But there, too, large-scale immigration has led to accommodative efforts to extend citizenship rights to immigrants and their children. Our review of the literature shows that the overall observed pattern in both the United States and Western Europe is one of assimilation—the gradual erosion of ethnic, racial, religious, and other differences as determinants of life chances for immigrants and their children.

Comparing and contrasting immigrant trajectories in Western Europe and North America, however, we find that assimilation as a social process is contingent upon path-dependent mechanisms motivated and guided by cultural beliefs, formal rules, informal norms, and networks governing the incorporation of immigrants (Nee & Alba 2013). Regarding the United States, numerous studies point to legal status as a key institutional rule channeling immigrants and their children in specific incorporation pathways. For Western Europe, a new literature has emerged identifying religion—and specifically the Muslim/non-Muslim distinction—as a potent symbolic divide affecting assimilation.

Assimilation is a complex and multidimensional convergence process occurring at socioeconomic (resource distributions and socioeconomic attainment), relational (preference in marriage and friendship, extent of intergroup contact and trust) and cultural (subjective feeling of belonging, being considered “one of us” by the majority group, engaging in cultural practices identified with immigrant community at little or no social costs at all) levels (Alba & Nee 2003, Wimmer 2013) These dimensions are, of course, causally linked. Nevertheless, each dimension can be examined separately as a distinct signal of the incorporation process, involving a varying degree of blending or segregating dynamics.

Our definition of assimilation considers the agency of both immigrants and natives in the maintenance or the erosion of the distinctions between them. It designates a mutual process of convergence: immigrants come to resemble natives over time and vice versa. Cumulatively, the intermixing of people and cultures contributes to a self-reinforcing, evolutionary broadening of social groups included in the imagined communities of the nation state (Anderson 1983). Assimilation does not imply homogenization of immigrant identity and culture toward a specific core as a necessary endpoint, although such homogenization may occur. We rather conceive of assimilation as the declining significance of context-specific markers of difference—like race, ethnicity or religion—in the lives of immigrants and their children. We view assimilation as a possible outcome of the generic process of incorporation and prefer this term to the more one-sided and race-related (at least in the United States) concept of integration. The extent of intergenerational change in specific empirical measures between the first and the second generation remains a crucial yardstick to evaluate assimilation, and is the one we focus on in our review.

Wave-like sways in the balance between blending and segregating dynamics are recurrent in settler societies where surges in nativism and xenophobia routinely follow in the wake of sustained high-volume immigration. Yet, historically, unwelcomed immigrant groups have incrementally assimilated into mainstream institutional and organizational life in the United States (Alba & Nee 2003) and Europe (e.g., Noiriel 1996). In a period of revival of nativism, credible commitment to formal rules and laws governing immigration and naturalization enables institutionalized safeguards limiting the effects of racial intolerance and dislike of foreigners. Whether or not the current nativist moment will work to stall the overall assimilation pattern we document here depends on the stability of these safeguards—a point we revisit in the conclusion of our review.

DIVERSE ASSIMILATION TRAJECTORIES IN AMERICA

The Hart-Celler Immigration Act of 1965 has, in a 50-year period, cumulatively reshaped the American demographic landscape with high volume immigration flows from Asia, Central and Latin America, and, to a lesser extent, Africa and the West Indies.

General and large-scale studies relying on survey data, such as White & Glick (2009) and Waters & Pineau (2015), describe an overall trend of assimilation in socioeconomic outcomes such as educational attainment, earnings, and occupations among contemporary immigrants in the United States (see Alba and Nee 2003, chapter 6 and Waters and Jiménez 2005). Echoing findings from an earlier study (Kasinitz et al. 2008) of the second generation in New York City, Waters & Pineau (2015) and Duncan & Trejo (2015) find that second-generation members of most immigrant groups reach or exceed the educational attainment of third-plus-generation White natives. Feliciano & Lanuza (2017) show that the second-generation advantage of children of immigrants typically reflects the class background of their parents, who transmit aspirations for high relative status in the country of destination based on their social position—measured in terms of relative educational attainment—in the country of origin. The most recent representative data from Census-sponsored surveys unambiguously confirm this overall trend of substantial intergenerational progress in educational attainment across all immigrant groups (Duncan & Trejo 2018, Tran 2018).

Beyond this general picture portraying the overall trend, there is of course a heterogeneous social reality. Hsin & Xie (2014) use nationally representative longitudinal survey data to

document a persistent academic advantage of Asian Americans over Whites, which they and others attribute to high stocks of human-cultural capital (Nee & Sanders 2001) and norms of academic achievement prevalent among selective immigrant groups from East and South Asia (Lee & Zhou 2015). Importantly, even the children of less well-educated working-class parents appear to benefit from spill-over effects of high academic achievement of middle-class Chinese immigrant and second-generation children (Kasinitz et al. 2008). By contrast, immigrants from Central America and Mexico tend to have much lower educational attainment levels and appear to lack organizational resources enabling information sharing and strategies for getting ahead in the public school system. Notwithstanding this, the second generation makes notable progress, completing on average three to four more years of education than their parents (Bean et al. 2015 chapter 4; Duncan & Trejo 2018; Waters & Pineau 2015, pp. 249–55) and massively enrolling in American colleges (Pew Hisp. Cent. 2013).

High average rates of educational attainment translate into white-collar occupations for a sizable proportion of the second generation. This is obviously the case among the children of Asian immigrants, whose widespread progress into benchmark occupations of socioeconomic success such as engineering, science, medicine, and law has been well documented (Lee & Zhou 2015, Sakamoto et al. 2009). Importantly, it can also be observed among the children of immigrant parents who arrived in the United States with relatively low educational and occupational attainments. At 28% and 32.5%, respectively, second-generation Mexicans and Central Americans—the descendants of the most socially disadvantaged groups—are approximately three times more likely to be in managerial and professional positions compared with their foreign-born peers (Waters & Pineau 2015, chapter 6). More generally, there is little evidence for Mexican or Latino stagnation or decline across generations. Although later-generation Mexicans are typically thought to be at a high risk of downward mobility, Luthra & Waldinger (2010) instead report that they are actually much less likely than their parents to cluster in low-paying and unstable jobs, while Tran & Valdez (2017) report important progress in occupational attainment from the immigrant to the second generation for all Latino groups. Such occupational mobility is matched by a strong pattern of mobility in earnings between the first and second generation across all major immigrant groups compared with third-plus-generation, non-Hispanic Whites (Duncan and Trejo 2018).

This general pattern of socioeconomic mobility is reflected in declining rates of spatial segregation across generations for most immigrant groups (Iceland 2009) and also in the emergence of middle-class residential neighborhoods inhabited by high-achieving immigrant minorities—the so-called ethnoburbs (Li 2009, Logan & Zhang 2010). This dynamic of spatial attainment is not limited to Asian immigrants. Using data from Los Angeles, Bean et al. (2015, chapter 6) show that the Mexican second generation's typical neighborhoods have higher levels of education and a lower percentage of coethnics and of poverty, and that this trend continues in the third generation. Recent work on the wealth accumulation of Mexican Americans and other Latinos similarly points to a cumulative pattern of upward mobility over the life course despite significant economic hurdles among the first generation (Keister et al. 2015).

Continuous large-scale migration may complicate the second generation's attempts to craft symbolic or optional forms of ethnic identity, as it may give rise to issues of cultural authenticity within the immigrant community (Jiménez 2010). There are negative externalities of public perception of high-volume illegal migration that spill over to legal immigrants and natives of the same ethnicity. Similarly,, public perception of high educational and socioeconomic attainment of legal Asian immigrants and the second generation spill over to benefit undocumented Asian immigrants, a sub-group that constitutes a small but growing proportion of the Asian immigrant population (Nee and Holbrow 2013). In the case of socially successful Mexican Americans, they commonly integrate middle-class and Mexican identities, thus experiencing upward mobility while also maintaining ethnic solidarity with less fortunate members of the community (Vallejo 2012). This produces a type of social capital based on ethnic organizations and middle-class role models reminiscent of the collective culture of achievement and mobility found in many Asian American communities (Lee & Zhou 2015). Although social mobility leads some to identify as White (Emeka & Vallejo 2011), middle-class members of immigrant groups often maintain hyphenated identities in which ethnic belonging and socioeconomic success are not mutually exclusive (Jiménez & Horowitz 2013, Vallejo 2012). The ethnic culture of Korean and Indian professionals, in particular, portends a broader pattern of assimilation wherein ethnic identity becomes largely unproblematic (Dhingra 2007).

Research on intermarriage similarly points to a blurring of ethnic and racial boundaries. Despite replenishment of the pool of marriageable coethnics through continued migration (Lichter et al. 2011, Qian and Lichter 2011), intermarriage rates have been rising steadily since

the 1980s (Alba & Foner 2015, chapter 9). A majority of native-born Asian Americans now intermarry, most often with Whites—a pattern reflecting their high socioeconomic attainment, which leads to opportunities to marry with the native majority group (Min & Kim 2010). Meanwhile, research on dating preferences among Latinos suggests inclusive attitudes rather than strong tastes for same-race partners, despite persistent exclusionary attitudes among Whites (Feliciano et al. 2011). Consequentially, there is an increasing number of children from mixed unions and individuals identifying as biracial (Alba et al. 2018).

To a significant extent, human-cultural capital and family economic resources explain differences in socioeconomic mobility of the second generation across immigrant groups. In the present era, class has more explanatory power than do race and ethnicity. Taking such relative socioeconomic position into account, the contemporary, post-Civil Rights American immigrant story thus appears to be, overall, one of assimilation mediated by the selectivity of immigration law. Most Asian immigrant groups, whose demographic compositions have been drastically shaped by 1965 Hart-Celler Act, are thus assimilating into the American mainstream (Lee & Zhou 2015, Nee & Holbrow 2013; see Sakamoto et al. 2009 for a review), while the trajectories of Hispanic immigrants shows slow but significant progress (Bean et al. 2015, Luthra & Waldinger 2010, Morgan & Gelbgiser 2014, Tran 2018, Tran & Valdez 2017).

We find very little evidence in the recent literature for the pattern of downward assimilation that Portes & Zhou's (1993) segmented assimilation theory predicted for immigrant minorities in America's central cities. Of special importance here is the incorporation of West Indian and African immigrants. Rather than showing a dominant trend of downward assimilation toward a racialized underclass, empirical research describes an overall pattern of schooling success among the US-born children of Black immigrant families, especially compared with their native counterparts (Thomas 2009). This pattern is driven by class selectivity among Black (especially African) migrant families, resulting in high status aspirations and achievement norms in the United States (Imoagene 2017). More generally, we observe heterogeneous incorporation trajectories shaped by family economic resources and family structure (Elo et al. 2015, Kasinitz et al. 2008, Sakamoto et al. 2009, Thomas 2009).

This is not to say, of course, that race does not affect immigrant incorporation in America. For the first generation, there is strong evidence of racial disparities in earnings growth over time (Villarreal & Tamborini 2018) as well as a high rates of residential segregation of Black

immigrants (Iceland & Scopilliti 2008) despite overall trends of earnings and spatial assimilation. Although race undoubtedly impacts the subjective experience of belonging among second-generation Latinos (e.g., Frank et al. 2010, Vallejo 2012) and Blacks (e.g., Clerge 2014, Imoagene 2017), there exists no recent study systematically demonstrating that the life chances and incorporation trajectories of non-White members of the second generation are structurally shaped by race.⁵ Rather, within-group differences in such trajectories (see Alba et al. 2014; Elo et al. 2015; Waters & Pineau 2015, pp. 264–72 for substantial differences across national origins, geographic location, and gender) suggest that racialization and its associated socioeconomic straits are neither inevitable nor uniform for non-White immigrant groups. As further data on the second generation become available, and as the third generation comes of age, more research on the impact of race and racial difference on assimilation will be necessary. Such research will need, in particular, to disentangle race from other confounding factors, as well as effects of ethnic attrition in samples based on self-identification among children of immigrants as they undergo assimilation (Emeka 2018, Emeka & Vallejo 2011).

⁵ Three prominent studies published in the past ten years warrant closer discussion. In their impressive longitudinal study of Mexican Americans in Los Angeles and San Antonio, [Telles & Ortiz \(2008\)](#) argue that slow educational progress of Mexican immigrants beyond the second generation reflects a dynamic of racialization. Yet, their own analysis shows that skin tone has no effect. More importantly, variation in their respondents' occupational attainment reflects their endowment in human capital, while one would expect racialization to nullify the effect of human capital on occupational attainment. The second study, by [Haller et al. \(2011\)](#), uses survey data from Florida and California and argues that the Mexican and Black Caribbean second generations are experiencing downward assimilation due to their race. However, their analysis shows that ethnic and racial penalties for educational and occupational attainments largely vanish once school-level factors and educational aspirations are controlled for. Both studies provide relatively weak empirical evidence for a strong effect of ethnic or racial background on incorporation outcomes net of class and other characteristics. Finally, [Pager et al. \(2009\)](#), using experimental evidence, convincingly show that discrimination in hiring and job channeling affects Latinos as much as Blacks in the low-wage market. However, that study is not focused on immigrant groups. More evidence of this type focusing explicitly on the incorporation of immigrants—rather than racial groups—in labor markets and other institutional domains is needed to ascertain the effect of systematic ethn racial discrimination on progress towards assimilation.

THE COMING OF AGE OF THE SECOND GENERATION IN WESTERN EUROPE

The contemporary de facto multiculturalism in Western Europe is, in great part, the legacy of yesteryear's guest worker programs launched during the economic boom of the postwar period, particularly the 1960s. France, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands relied on their ties to their ex-colonies, while Germany, Belgium, Sweden, and Norway relied on bilateral treaties for supplies of labor. A system of temporary contracts thus brought large numbers of workers from Southern Europe, North Africa, Turkey, Pakistan, and, to a lesser extent, Southeast Asia and the Caribbean, to Europe. After the 1973 oil shock crisis, this recruitment of guest workers abruptly stopped. However, many of these migrants stayed on in the destination countries, and migration flows shifted, at once, to family reunification. Migrant workers and their families thus became permanent immigrants. Asylum seekers from Chile, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, and the Middle East also fed migration flows in the late twentieth century. The historical narrative for Spain is somewhat different: The immigrant population in Spain, while substantial, primarily dates back to the early twenty-first century; it has been fueled by immigrants from other European member states and from South America.

As in the United States, review of the recent literature regarding the status of immigrants in Western Europe points to socioeconomic assimilation across generations as the overall pattern (see Heath et al. (2008) for a review of earlier work). A crucial part of this story is intergenerational progress in educational attainment: Recent comparative studies report that the second generation is much more educated than their immigrant parents, who often came from countries with little compulsory schooling (Crul et al. 2012). In spite of this noteworthy progress, however, the children of immigrants in Europe typically lag behind their native peers in predictable ways. Turks and North Africans are surpassed by European-origin migrants, with Asian-origin students outperforming both and sometimes natives as well (Alba & Foner 2015, chapter 9). Does this indicate an immigrant-specific penalty representing systematic ethnic inequality? It does not seem so, as scholars have established that the gap in educational attainment is best accounted for as a gap in parental socioeconomic resources—especially parents' education—rather than an ethnic gap per se (Heath & Brinbaum 2014). A large array of new studies in Germany (Luthra 2010, Song 2011), France (Brinbaum & Kieffer 2009, Ichou 2013), Sweden (Jonsson & Rudolphi 2011), Norway (Støren & Helland 2010), Spain (Portes et al. 2016, Schnell & Azzolini 2015), and the United Kingdom (Ichou 2015, Wilson et al. 2011)

report that much of the gap stems from class rather than ethnic inequality. Some residual differences do remain for some groups, such as African youths from the Sahel region and Turks in France, possibly stemming from their low parental educational attainment within their country of origin (Ichou 2014). Nevertheless, few studies report large differences once social origins are controlled for (but see Borgna & Contini 2014). Some studies report an immigrant advantage compared with similar natives in terms of aspirations and achievement (Fernández-Reino 2016, Jackson et al. 2012, Salikutluk 2016, Wilson et al. 2011), as well as an attenuated effect of parental social background (Brinbaum & Kieffer 2009, Luthra 2010, Tucci et al. 2013). There exists variation in educational outcomes within groups: Turks, for example, do better in some educational systems (such as in France and Sweden) than others (such as in Germany), despite their general disadvantage (Crul et al. 2012). Across European countries, female students outperform their male counterparts – a pattern that holds among immigrant and native students alike (OECD 2018). Overall, immigrant children appear to benefit from comprehensive systems with early schooling encouraging language acquisition and with a range of options kept open in later stages of secondary education (no early tracking), thus allowing their higher aspirations to blossom (Alba & Foner 2015, chapter 8; Borgna & Contini 2014; Crul 2013; Crul et al. 2012; Jackson et al. 2012; Tucci et al. 2013).

The overall trends in the second generation's labor market outcomes are social reproduction in existing structures of inequality and moderate social mobility given prior family socioeconomic status, which is generally low due to the social origins of many immigrant families who first came through the guest worker programs. In France, the descendants of immigrants are overrepresented in the working class but show rates of upward mobility comparable to that of natives; thus, they occupy labor market positions, on average, more desirable than their parents' but less so than natives' (Meurs et al. 2009). In Norway, using registry data, Hermansen (2016) documents an overall convergence in socioeconomic status among the children of immigrants and natives. In Spain, Aparicio (2007) documents large increases in occupational attainments—away from nonqualified labor—among second-generation Moroccan and South American youths compared with their parents. In Britain, using longitudinal household surveys, Li & Heath (2016) find that the substantial disadvantage of the first generation in terms of occupational attainment vanishes in the second generation. Crucially, they find that the patterns of social reproduction in occupational attainment across generations

among natives are mirrored among immigrants. Class origins, in other words, trump ethnic origins for the life chances of the second generation in Europe. This important point is echoed in comparative work. Lessard-Phillips et al. (2012) show that the Turkish second generation experience relatively high social mobility in European cities and that the bulk of the gap in labor market outcomes with natives can be accounted for by human capital differentials. Pichler (2011) shows that the second generation as a whole reaches high occupational levels at roughly the same rate as the native majority in European countries, with similar or slightly better returns to education in the case of men. Other recent work (Crul et al. 2017) has studied the emergence of a new, highly educated elite among the children of immigrants, as would be predicted by this general dynamic of upward mobility.

Qualifying this picture, however, several studies report gaps in employment rates between natives and immigrants. In Norway, Hermansen (2013) finds that ethnic minorities do not suffer a penalty in terms of promotion once employed, but does find an unexplained residual in terms of access to employment. Echoing earlier work (Heath et al. 2008), an ethnic penalty in access to employment for some immigrant groups has been documented in other contexts (see Kalter 2011, Luthra 2013 for Turks in Germany, Tucci et al. 2013 and Aeberhardt et al. 2015 for Africans in France, and Algan 2009 for comparative evidence of a gap in the UK, Germany, and France). This gap can be the effect of several processes, including restrictions embedded in labor market institutions, lack of information about jobs among immigrant families, or discrimination. We revisit this point in our comparative review of segregating dynamics at work among the second generation.

In addition to studying socioeconomic outcomes, European scholars have been at the forefront of the study of network structures as they relate to immigrant incorporation, producing a dynamic new literature on immigrant social capital and relational integration with native populations. Representing a shift from the focus on intermarriage and residential segregation of American scholars of incorporation, this research suggests that contacts with natives like friendship and acquaintanceship are associated with better economic outcomes, such as higher income and chances of employment (Kanas et al. 2012, Lancee 2010), higher levels of acculturation in terms of identification with the host society, and host language use among immigrants (Ali & Fokkema 2016, Schulz & Leszczensky 2015) and increased tolerance among natives (Janmaat 2014, Savelkoul et al. 2011, Schönwälder et al. 2016).

Much recent research has logically sought to understand the predictors of such contact. Studies done in Germany, England, and the Netherlands suggest that the main predictors of contacts with the native majority among immigrants are generational status (second, third, etc.) and educational attainment (Damstra & Tillie 2016, Martinovic 2013, Martinovic et al. 2009, Platt 2014, Van Tubergen 2015). While Turks appear to exhibit both lower levels of contact and weaker advantages from contact with natives (Kalter 2011, Martinovic et al. 2009, Schulz & Leszczensky 2015), a blending dynamic of increasing social amalgamation across generations nevertheless appears to be at work. Research on preference in friendship among immigrant adolescents in Sweden, Germany, England, and the Netherlands shows that while sharing a similar ethnic identity is an important factor for some subgroups, it is trumped in magnitude by general principles of tie formation, such as gender homophily and network effects like reciprocity (Smith et al. 2014a). In Germany, Schönwälder et al. (2016) show that positive contact and acquaintanceship between natives and immigrants are commonplace in the diverse neighborhoods where immigrants live—an erosion of ethnic boundaries enabled by the positive attitudes of German natives towards immigration-driven diversity in everyday life. Meanwhile, research on generalized trust—the feeling that most people can be trusted, which signals social cohesion—shows that second-generation immigrants are adopting the trust patterns of native populations (Dinesen & Hooghe 2010). The general picture emerging from this new work on cross-group ties and trust is thus one of incremental amalgamation between natives and immigrants.

The final dimension of assimilation that European scholars have heavily scrutinized in the past decade relates to culture, as conceived in terms of identity, cultural practices such as language and religion, and values. The trend here is broadly similar to the socioeconomic and relational aspects of incorporation. There is, on one hand, an important shift in the feeling of belonging to the national community between first- and second-generation individuals. In the United Kingdom, Platt (2014) finds that the overwhelming majority express a feeling of belonging in Britain. Portes et al. (2011) obtain substantively similar results when studying the second generation in Spain. In France, Maxwell & Bleich (2014) focus on Muslim immigrants and document lower levels of identification compared with other groups but find that most of this difference vanishes among those who were born in France and speak French. In terms of language more generally, there exists little evidence on fluency outcomes among members of the

second generation. Given they undergo compulsory schooling in the host country language, however, a relative absence of empirical studies suggests host country language fluency to be the overwhelming pattern. Meanwhile, studies in retention of the home language suggest rapid rates of decay unless parents explicitly emphasize it in the household context (see Soehl 2016a for France; Van Tubergen & Mentjox 2014 for Germany, England, Sweden and the Netherlands). Isolated studies on specific aspects of acculturation, such as name-giving (Gerhards & Hans 2009) suggest similar blending dynamics despite the initial cultural distance between the destination and home country.

The overall picture emerging from a comparative review of the literature in the United States and Western Europe is one of assimilation as a path-dependent process of social reproduction and moderate upward mobility. Despite differences within and between immigrant groups as well as variations in institutional and cultural contexts of reception, the fate of the second generation in Western liberal societies appears to be determined, first and foremost, by their initial stock in various forms of capital at the family level. As proposed by Nee & Alba (2013, p. 363),

If perceived opportunities are more extensive and plentiful in the mainstream than in ethnic enclaves, the purposive action of immigrants and their children will be aimed at optimizing returns to investment in human and cultural capital in the mainstream society, even in the face of opposition to their assimilation by individual members of the majority and minority groups.

This proposition builds on Merton's (1936) theory of unintended consequences of purposive action in its assumption that people striving for success often do not see themselves as assimilating per se. "Yet unintended consequences of practical strategies and actions undertaken in pursuit of the familiar goals—a good education, a good job, a nice place to live, interesting friends and acquaintances, economic security—often result in specific forms of assimilation" (Nee & Alba 2013, p. 362). Reviewing the recent literature, we see sizable intergenerational progress toward majority group levels on most outcomes and generally do not find the life chances of the children of immigrants to be considerably impacted by ethnic differences or immigrant status per se.

SEGREGATING DYNAMICS FOR THE SECOND GENERATION

Nonetheless, there remain significant barriers to assimilation. In the United States, undocumented status is a source of multiple forms of disadvantage for Mexican and Central American immigrant families. In Europe, meanwhile, religious difference affects the assimilation trajectories of Muslim immigrants and their children. Additionally, class inequality interacts with parental immigrant culture in maintaining or recreating ethnic and religious identities among the second generation, thus preserving the symbolic boundaries separating them from natives.

The Challenges of Undocumented Status in the United States

Undocumented status—not having legal rights that benefit legal immigrants—has a deleterious effect on socioeconomic outcomes (Massey & Bartley 2006).⁷ Studies comparing documented and undocumented immigrants from Mexico and Central America suggest a 7% and 4% net wage penalty for undocumented men and women, respectively, as well as lower returns to education (Bean et al. 2015 chapter 4; Hall et al. 2010); a higher probability of working physically demanding and repetitive jobs and generally worse work conditions (Hall & Greenman 2015, Massey & Sánchez 2010); and a lower likelihood of owning a home and higher probability of living in a low-quality neighborhood (Cort 2011, Greenman & Hall 2013). These empirical studies underscore and help to explain a broader pattern of declining wages and resilient poverty rates among Mexican migrants, over half of whom are undocumented in the United States, largely unable to return to Mexico due to border enforcement, and thus at the risk of descent into a new underclass (Massey & Gelatt 2010, Massey & Pren 2012, Massey et al. 2016, Pew Hisp. Cent. 2011).⁸

Undocumented status is consequential as regards other aspects of incorporation. There is evidence linking the share of undocumented Mexican migrants to higher rates of segregation from native Whites (Hall & Stringfield 2014). Menjívar & Abrego's (2012) ethnographic study reveals the perpetual fear of deportation among undocumented Central American migrants in

⁷ In general, undocumented immigrants come with the lowest level of formal education, while legal immigrants include a high representation of the college-educated, especially from Asia, who change their immigration status after completing their formal education in the United States.

⁸ An earlier study, however, shows labor market earnings of undocumented immigrants improving as they acquire specific skills through work experience in the United States (Tienda & Singer 1995).

California and Arizona—fear that translates into an avoidance of mainstream institutions such as social services or even schools (see also Asad & Rosen 2018). These qualitative approaches are particularly well suited to studying the cultural impact of the absence of legal status on identity and self-understanding. Massey & Sánchez (2010), for example, document the emergence of a panethnic Latina identity and a rejection of American culture among undocumented immigrants enduring the struggles associated with lacking papers and being barred from the American dream. In another ethnographic study, Menjívar & Lakhani (2016) vividly describe the “personal metamorphosis” and personal struggles associated with immigrants’ legal status, or lack thereof. For these individuals, being undocumented dictates work, marriage, and childbearing decisions; civic engagement; and, ultimately, their self-understanding as deserving individuals striving to become “legal.” In this narrative, the initial violation of immigration law at the border crossing casts a long shadow that motivates and guide path dependent social behavior focused on avoidance of institutions that administer the rule of law. Meanwhile, recent experimental evidence from Schachter (2016) convincingly shows that White natives consider undocumented status to be an unacceptable trait of potential neighbors or friends, while Florès & Schachter (2018) use similar methods to study perceptions of illegality and demonstrate that many White Americans hold a lack of legal status in close cognitive association with a propensity for sexual assault and murder. In other words, members of the White majority think of being undocumented as a profound breach of the social contract, one that may be associated with possible tendencies to commit other criminal offenses. These findings, which point to a culturalization of legal status as a vector of meaning and individual worth, are particularly important: As members of the White majority infer legal status based on outwardly visible characteristics, such as race and national origins, it is plausible for the stigma of being “illegal” to diffuse to entire immigrant groups regardless of actual legal status.

At socioeconomic, relational, and cultural levels, the absence of legal status thus operates to channel immigrants away from assimilation. What does this imply for young children who immigrated with their parents—the so-called 1.5 generation—and the native-born second generation? Undocumented students are less likely to finish high school and go to college (Hall & Greenman 2013), and those in community colleges are more likely to drop out due to their ineligibility for financial aid (Terriquez 2015). More generally, Gonzales (2011) describes the process of “learning to be illegal” after high school for those who immigrated as children with

their parents and were protected from deportation while in school thanks to the *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) Supreme Court ruling. The lives of the high school dropouts and those who managed to go to college converge toward precariousness and work in the low-wage sector due to the lack of a Social Security number. For those born in the United States to undocumented families, there is a pattern of intergenerational transmission of social disadvantage. At age three, these infants tend to exhibit a lower cognitive development, as their parents' working conditions leave little time and energy to stimulate their children and scant resources to pay for child care (Yoshikawa 2011). Survey data from Los Angeles show that children growing up in families with both undocumented parents have, all else equal, a 1- to 1.7-year deficit in terms of years of school completed compared with similar children in families with one or no undocumented parent (Bean et al. 2015, chapter 4). Crucially, children—especially females—whose parents entered without papers and later regularized their status appear to catch up completely with those growing up in legally stable families (Bean et al. 2015, p. 87). This implies a causal effect of legalization on the second generation's educational attainment.

The Challenges of Religion and Cultural Difference in Western Europe

A large literature on the incorporation of Muslim groups has emerged within the sociology of immigration in the past ten years. This literature broadly documents the crystallization of social differences between immigrants and natives around religion, and the Muslim versus non-Muslim divide in particular. A secondary, related literature sheds light on the endogenous role of social inequality in reinforcing preexisting symbolic differences between immigrants and natives.

The persistence of a strong religious culture among Muslim immigrants long after having migrated and among the second generation is remarkable given the normative pressure toward secularism and lower religiosity levels in the European context. In Britain, Muslims' religious identity is demonstrably as salient among individuals who migrated fifty years ago as among those who were born in the United Kingdom (Bisin et al. 2008, Lewis & Kashyap 2013). In the Netherlands, Maliepaard et al. (2012) describe a religious resurgence among the Muslim second generation. In France, Drouhot (2018) shows that Muslims are, regardless of generation and demographic heterogeneity, substantially more religious than socially comparable natives. Substantively similar findings have been reported in comparative research across Europe (de Hoon & Van Tubergen 2014, Fleischmann & Phalet 2012, Torrekens & Jacobs 2016). A recurrent finding in this literature is that parental socialization and control among Muslim

families play a key role in the transmission of subjective religiosity to the second generation (de Hoon & Van Tubergen 2014, Drouhot 2018, Fleischmann & Phalet 2012, Maliepaard & Lubbers 2013, Soehl 2016c). This is also true of societal attitudes correlated with religiosity, such as attitudes toward homosexuality (Soehl 2016b) and gender equality (Diehl et al. 2009, Kretschmer 2018), which tend to be considerably more conservative among Muslim immigrants and their children due to their higher religiosity.

Meanwhile, native populations react to the vitality of Muslims' religious culture with increasing suspicion if not hostility, as reflected in the evolution of public opinion in Britain and France (Bleich 2009). Muslim religion is both a feature of shared identity and group-mindedness that elicit reaction of European natives similar in some respects to historic anti-Semitism. Experimental studies isolating religious affiliation from other confounding factors (e.g., race or national origins) convincingly confirm anti-Muslim bias. A survey experiment with 18,000 European voters in 15 countries explored perceived desirable and undesirable traits of asylum seekers (Bansak et al. 2016). The study finds that Muslim asylum seekers are 11% less likely to be accepted than Christians—a penalty comparable in size to being unable to speak the national language, net of everything else. Their analyses show that such a penalty can be offset only if the applicant is a highly trained professional, such as a medical doctor, or a victim of torture. Similarly, Adida et al. (2016) use a series of audit studies and experimental games in France to precisely measure the potential bias in hiring, association, and allocation preferences of natives, and show that a unique religious discrimination exists against Muslims, net of their regional, ethnic or racial origins. The authors argue that part of this bias can be attributed to statistical discrimination and to the belief among natives that Muslims have gender and religious norms that are incompatible with theirs (see also Helbling 2014). These studies are especially important insofar as a host of prior experimental studies (e.g., Van der Bracht et al.'s 2015 study of the housing market in Belgium, Kaas & Manger's 2012 study of the labor market in Germany, and Midtbøen's 2014 study of the labor market in Norway) that did not properly control for religion reported an ethnic bias against groups (e.g., Pakistanis or Turks) that are overwhelmingly Muslim.

Recent work on Muslim incorporation broadly depicts the social reproduction of religious culture in immigrant families, on the one hand, and the stigmatization of this culture by natives, on the other. There exists multiple consequences from this dual dynamic of cultural polarization.

First, there is a significant employment gap between Muslims and non-Muslims, the exact origins of which are debated. Some point to the role of discrimination in hiring (Connor & Koenig 2015, Lessard-Phillips et al. 2012), while others emphasize the role of high religiosity in moderating labor force participation, particularly among women (Cheung 2014, Khoudja & Fleischmann 2015, Koopmans 2016). It is likely that the employment gap is a product of both sides of the divide between Muslims and non-Muslims. In a rare study attempting to disentangle religious affiliation from other confounding factors, Heath & Martin (2013) find that ethnic penalties in economic activity and unemployment on British labor markets are largely religious in nature. These findings, along with the studies on religious discrimination mentioned above, suggest the need to reevaluate the role of religion and religious marginalization in the making of inequality and patterns of closure typically labeled as “ethnic” in previous work (e.g. Heath et al. 2008, Luthra 2013, Tucci et al. 2013, Aeberhardt et al. 2015).

Second, recent work on intermarriage and friendship structures suggests that religion has also become a key relational divide in Western Europe, contributing to segregating dynamics. Using data from Belgium, Great Britain, and Germany, Carol (2016) describes low rates of religious intermarriage among second-generation Muslims, whose behavior does not significantly depart from their foreign-born counterparts. Through an emphasis on cultural maintenance, Muslim parents exert strong influence on intermarriage rates (Carol 2013, 2016) as well as friendship and romantic involvement with non-Muslim peers (Munniksma et al. 2012) among their native-born children. Meanwhile, using data on friendship patterns in German schools, Leszczensky & Pink (2017) show that Christian students discriminate against Muslims as potential friends while Muslim youths prefer to befriend other Muslims. This pattern of relational fragmentation maps onto attitudes towards religious outgroups among Christian and Muslim adolescents documented in earlier research (Verkuyten and Thijs 2010). Importantly, previous studies reporting a strong influence of ethnic background on homophily patterns in friendship among immigrant adolescents and natives (Smith et al. 2014a, Smith et al. 2016[**AU: This reference is not in the Lit. Cited. Please add there or remove from here.** ADDED, Smith, McFarland, Van Tubergen and Maas in AJS 2016]) did not properly control for religion and religiosity. In light of Leszczensky & Pink’s (2017) study, it is likely that religious homophily explains at least some portion of ethnic homophily in friendship networks involving Muslim-origin youths. Notably, social dynamics of religious segregation are reflected in larger patterns of residential segregation

of ethnic groups with large shares of Muslims such as Bangladeshis^{[**AU: Bangladeshis?]**} and Pakistanis in Great Britain, and North and Sub-Saharan Africans in Belgium, France and the Netherlands (Iceland 2014, McAvay 2018, Safi 2009).

In the case of Muslim immigrants in Europe, the causal arrow follows a Weberian trajectory from culture and religious affiliation to relational and socioeconomic outcomes. Parental influences aiming at cultural maintenance and discrimination from natives are the two sides of the predicament faced by the second-generation Muslim youths.¹⁰

Besides religion as an exogenous source of cultural difference imported from the country of origin, there is evidence for cultural decoupling from natives produced by high levels of inequality experienced by the second generation. Wimmer & Soehl (2014) use large-scale survey data across Europe to demonstrate that social and legal disadvantage leads to the maintenance of parental culture (measured as values) from the country of origin. Thus, inequality blocks acculturation—and does so with a substantial magnitude, as experiencing disadvantage has the same effect on acculturation as having 8.5 fewer years of schooling. Ethnographic research in Belgium by Van Kerckem et al. (2013) shows that low socioeconomic resources and limited opportunities for social mobility result in stronger involvement in the local immigrant communities among Belgian-born Turks. In turn, the preservation of parental cultural traits, such as traditional gender norms, is enforced through gossip and social control in dense and homogeneous networks making up the ethnoreligious community. Other ethnographic accounts show that socioeconomic marginality encourages cultural decoupling from parental as well as mainstream culture in response to relative deprivation. In Germany, Bucerius (2014) describes the lives of second-generation male migrants from Turkey who are legal and symbolic foreigners due to their lack of German citizenship. Perceiving their treatment as unfair, they reject what they perceive to be mainstream German culture in favor of the drug trade, which allows them to attain material signs of success. A critical aspect of the social trajectories of poor, second-generation Turkish men is the influence of early tracking in school toward vocational careers

¹⁰ These patterns appear widespread in Western Europe with the exception of Spain, whose migration streams are more recent and whose conception of the mainstream is politically and culturally contested. As such, it has not had a clear policy blueprint for immigrant incorporation, even though such absence seems to have resulted in successful incorporation overall (Portes et al. 2016). Isolated, attitudinal evidence on the Spanish case suggests that immigrant marginalization revolves around race rather than religion (Florès 2015).

with lower prospects for social mobility—an outcome largely explained by parental background (Luthra 2010) but often thought by Bucerius’s subjects to reflect anti-immigrant bias.

Ethnographic research in France has documented analogous perception of unequal treatment by public institutions such as schools and the police (Marlière 2008) and analogous cultural responses to perceived exclusion in the form of petty criminal enterprises regulated by autonomous and localized economies of honor (Sauvadet 2006).

Ethnographic accounts of the marginalized second generation in Germany and France describe a sharp symbolic divide between an emergent “us”—oppressed, poor, isolated, powerless, non-White, Muslim—and “them”: the powerful, well-off, well-connected, non-Muslim natives. In turn, the subjective experience of economic, spatial, and cultural marginalization provides fertile ground for oppositional worldviews and for illicit, alternative economic options such as the drug trade (Bucerius 2014, Lapeyronnie 2008, Sauvadet 2006). While affecting a very minor share of the second generation, these dysfunctional scenarios are widely publicized and tend to contribute to a nativist sentiment in the host populations by depicting certain immigrant groups as problematic—e.g., being more prone to crime and harboring norms and values that are incompatible with the mainstream. This is, in turn, a social condition for further stigmatization and segregating dynamics of social closure affecting the children of immigrants as a whole.

CONCLUSION: BLENDING AND SEGREGATING DYNAMICS IN EUROPE AND AMERICA

Overall, recent research on immigrant incorporation in the United States and in Western Europe tends to support the proposition of neo-assimilation theory cited earlier:

- **Proposition 1: Purposive action** (Nee & Alba 2013, p. 367)

If perceived opportunities are more extensive and plentiful in the mainstream than in ethnic enclaves, the purposive action of immigrants and their children will be aimed at optimizing returns to investment in human and cultural capital in the mainstream society, even in the face of opposition to their assimilation by individual members of the majority and minority groups.

As the recent and rapidly increasing literature on the deleterious effect of undocumented legal status in the United States makes clear, however, constitutional rules extending formal equality of rights to legal citizens are a crucial and enabling scope condition. Thus,

- **Proposition 2: Institutions and the law** (Nee & Alba 2013, p. 367)

If society's constitutional rules and their enforcement by the state extend formal equality of rights to all citizens and if political actors signal credible commitment to reinforcing cultural beliefs and formal rules of equality of rights, then immigrants and their children entitled to full citizenship are likely to choose a course of social action that increases their likelihood of assimilation.

The institutional apparatus of modern polities such as the United States can outlaw racial discrimination and increase its social and economic costs in nontrivial ways (Alba & Nee 2003, pp. 54–56). In reviewing the recent literature, we do not find the incorporation trajectories of immigrant groups to be structurally shaped by their racial difference from the native majority in the contemporary, post–Civil Rights era. We do find, however, a profound influence of their legal status and mode of entry into the United States. Both the central role of legal status, on the one hand, and the relatively marginal place of race, on the other, constitute a testimony to the influence of the law—the formal rules of the game shaping incentives and defining legitimate social action among natives and immigrants—in the incorporation process.

While the most emphatic sources of segregating dynamics in the United States involve immigration law, in Western Europe the primary sources of segregating dynamics involve cultural—specifically religious—differences. Put differently, hurdles to assimilation involve the state and belonging in a political community, in one case; in the other, they involve the nation and belonging in a cultural community. Our comparative review of recent European research prompts us to consider the analytic link between perceived cultural difference among immigrants and their life chances. Regarding the role of initial cultural difference in triggering segregating social dynamics between immigrants and natives, we therefore propose:

- **Proposition 3: Cultural difference**

If certain cultural beliefs and associated symbols are integral to community cohesion among immigrants but generally stigmatized among natives, cultural difference and social closure between immigrants and natives are likely to coevolve.

When immigrants face strong institutional or cultural barriers, how does assimilation occur? Reliance on collective action among immigrant groups is a standard response to societal hostility but commonly works to reinforce segregating dynamics of the majority group, as Bonacich & Modell (1980) discuss in their study of the Japanese enclave economy in California of the early twentieth century. However, ethnic collective action can also be linked to blending dynamics, as in the Chinese community effort to gain entry of the second generation into White public schools in the same period in Mississippi (Loewen 1988). Neo-assimilation theory maintains the following:

- **Proposition 4: Immigrant collective action** (Nee & Alba 2013, p. 364)

In general, when discriminatory barriers block an individualistic pattern of social mobility, assimilation when it occurs, depends on ethnic collective action mobilized.

In the United States, the mobilization of ethnic collective action has become more common following Civil Rights–era legislation that outlawed racial discrimination and extended equal legal rights to immigrant minorities.¹¹ In Western Europe, meanwhile, progress toward assimilation will remain limited in the absence of a better political organization among Muslim minorities in their respective national fields. The institutional integration of Islam, however, and the establishment of religious organizational bodies to further dialogue between state and religious institutions, seem to be well underway (Laurence 2013). This represents an encouraging step toward further assimilation for Muslim minorities in Western Europe.

Our review of the burgeoning literature on incorporation of immigrants in the United States and Europe points to promising directions for future research. While experimental evidence on racial groups in the United States convincingly shows that discrimination in hiring and job channeling affects Latinos as much as Blacks in the low-wage market (Pager et al. 2009), there is presently a relative scarcity of systematic studies on phenotypical discrimination and its effect on

¹¹ For example, immigrant entrepreneurs from Taiwan, South Asia and China gained a secure footing in the mainstream technology economy in Silicon Valley by reliance on immigrant professional associations for social capital to secure advice, training, resources and entry as founders of start-up firms in Silicon Valley (Saxenian 2006)

the incorporation of the second generation. Shedding light on such pattern of discrimination, and establishing how it relates to segregating dynamics triggered by the absence of legal status and religious difference, will be important. Conversely, the isolation of other factors at work in ethnic penalties, such as unequal access to social capital, also represents an area for future work. In sum, a key analytical challenge for future studies of assimilation consists in disaggregating the production of ethnic inequality into distinct, competing causal processes revolving around specific domains of social difference, such as race, legal status, religion, language, and class.

How are immigrants remaking the mainstream in their host society? Assimilation involves decreasing social costs to the expression of cultural difference. Through assimilation, immigrants may transform the norms and meaning surrounding core aspects of the mainstream. In the United States, for instance, the meaning of educational success is being redefined by high achievement norms found among Asian families (Jiménez & Horowitz 2013). In Germany, Schönwälder et al. (2016) describe a variety of responses from natives to the new cultural diversity they witness in their everyday life, ranging from appreciation to distancing. As our review has made clear, perceived cultural difference can be a ground for rejection from natives, who act as gatekeepers (Schachter 2016). Describing changes in the mainstream that result from immigration, as well as the scope conditions for such changes to take place, represents an important area for future work. This likely will involve research on the third generation: on socioeconomic outcomes, relational integration, and patterns of acculturation for these individuals as their social experiences induce a reworking of the imagined communities in their respective nation-state contexts.

What triggers blending or segregating social dynamics in intergroup relations? Exploring this question in greater depth is a key challenge for future research. A blurring of ethnic boundaries facilitates gradual assimilation by larger numbers of second-generation immigrant minorities, contingent on periods of nonzero-sum mobility of sustained economic growth (Alba & Nee 2003). Inter-group competition for resources, in contrast, triggers segregating dynamics (Olzak 2006). In the present decade, ongoing international migration, new inflows of refugees, and a general decline in social mobility (Chetty et al. 2017) have activated a latent nativism manifest in populist politics. In the United States, nativist social movements of the early 20th century culminated in the passing of the Immigration Act of 1924. The effect of this anti-immigration law was to end mass immigration, which ironically opened the way for the gradual assimilation of the children of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe and Asia. In both the United

States and Europe, populist politicians once again are mobilizing anti-immigrant sentiment, possibly ushering in a new era of restricted immigration. The rise of nativist racial politics in the United States (Abrajano & Hajnal 2015) is mirrored by the backlash against multiculturalism in European political discourses (Vertovec & Wessendorf 2010), although the latter has had limited policy effects so far. Whether or not the current nativist moment will work to durably shift the balance toward segregating dynamics primarily revolves around changes in immigration law. This, in turn, is predicated on voting behavior among native and immigrant voters, demographic shifts shaping the electoral balance between them, and the capacity of civil society and immigrant organizations to produce credible alternative narratives and policies. It is likely that this nativist moment will come to pass in favor of another period of gradual assimilation, as has been the overall pattern in the past among Western countries of immigration.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors are not aware of any affiliations, memberships, funding, or financial holdings that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank Richard Alba, Douglas Massey, and Filiz Garip for their thoughtful comments on earlier versions of this manuscript.

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