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Racial Minority Immigrant Offspring Successes in the United States, Canada, and Australia

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Summary

How well-off are second-generation immigrants in the US, Canada, and Australia? In this study, we examine the successes of immigrant offspring as compared to the respective mainstream populations (third- and higher-generation whites). We also ask whether cross-national differences in the successes of immigrants carry over to their children. We discover that the educational, occupational, and income achievements of second-generation immigrants are very similar for several ethnic groups across these countries. Each country shows common patterns of high achievement for the Chinese and South Asian second generation, less for those of other Asian origins, and still less for Afro-Caribbean blacks.

Key Findings

- Overall, cross-national differences in the successes of immigrants are largely eliminated for the second generation.
- For most immigrant origin groups, the second generation outperforms the mainstream population (third- and higher-generation white) of the same age group in educational attainment in all three nations. Asians in particular do significantly better.
- Occupational attainments for second-generation Chinese and South Asians are much higher compared to the mainstream in all three countries.
- The economic status of second-generation Chinese, South Asian, and other Asian groups is higher than for the mainstream population in all three countries.
- The difficulties of Afro-Caribbean blacks and, to some extent, other minorities, are common across all three countries. However, there is evidence of their greater upward mobility in the US compared to their Canadian counterparts.

Background

Previous studies of the second generation have shown a common theme of high achievement for second-generation Asians, particularly for Chinese and South Asians. Other common themes include disappointing results for second-generation Mexicans and other Latin Americans in the US, as well as second-generation Afro-Caribbean in the US and Canada. The widespread idea of "segmented assimilation" even suggests that the children of Afro-Caribbean immigrants in the US integrate within the black underclass and experience downward mobility.

We investigate whether such second-generation outcomes vary across countries, and if so, the extent and reasons for any such variations. Each country's different urban patterns of settlement and distinctive educational and labour market institutions shape the successes of immigrant parents, but the question is whether the cross-national differences in their successes carry into the second generation. Of particular interest today is whether there are differences for the offspring of relatively highly-skilled immigrants of non-European origins. For example, do the children of recent Chinese immigrants do equally well in each country?



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Data

The source of data for the United States is the Current Population Survey, with data from 1995-2007. For Canada and Australia, we use 2001 public use census files.

The second generation is defined as native-born persons in the age range between 25 and 39 with one or both parents who are foreign-born immigrants. We compare them with their counterpart in the mainstream population: third and higher-generation whites between 25 and 39. Since the parents of the second generation cannot be explicitly identified in the data, we make comparisons to immigrants aged 50 and over. These older foreign-born are compared to third- and higher-generation native-born whites in the same age group.

Since Canada, the US, and Australia each have large white, Chinese, South Asian, and other Asian immigrant populations, these immigrant groups are used for comparison. We also analyze the Afro-Caribbean second generation in the US and Canada; Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and other Hispanic groups in the US; and Arab, Middle Easterners, and North Africans in Australia. It is important to remember that there are variations within these categories. For example, Chinese from Hong Kong origins are more prevalent in Canada and Australia; those from Taiwan are more prevalent in the United States.

Results

Educational Attainment

For analysis of educational attainment we make a ratio between mean years of education of each ethnic group and that of third- and higher-generation whites. A ratio of 1.0 implies the groups have the same average years of education; anything less than 1.0

means the immigrant group has fewer average years of education than the mainstream group.

In the US, these ratios are less than 1.0 for all immigrant groups (aged 50+) except South Asians. In Canada, the ratios are 1.0 or higher for all immigrant groups, and in Australia, ratios are higher than 1.0 for all immigrants except the Arab, Middle Eastern, and North African group.

Analysis of the second generation shows more commonalities. In each country, education ratios are 1.0 or greater for second-generation whites, Afro-Caribbean, Chinese, South Asians, and other Asians. In the US, the Chinese second generation's ratio is a remarkable 1.15, meaning that this group's average years of education is about 15% above that of the mainstream population. In Canada their average is 20% higher, in Australia

Table 1: Average years of education, by generation, age, and origin

	USA 1995-2007	Canada 2001	Australia 2001
	Years of Education Ratio	Years of Education Ratio	Years of Education Ratio
Immigrant generation (age 50+)			
Third- and higher-gen. White	1.00	1.00	1.00
White	0.96	1.04	1.03
Afro-Caribbean Black	0.88	1.11	--
Chinese	0.92	1.00	1.05
South Asian	1.11	1.07	1.29
Other Asian	0.97	1.15	1.12
Second generation (age 25-39)			
Third- and higher-gen. White	1.00	1.00	1.00
White	1.03	1.07	1.02
Afro-Caribbean Black	1.00	1.10	--
Chinese	1.15	1.20	1.17
South Asian	1.18	1.21	1.14
Other Asian	1.08	1.18	1.08



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it is 17% higher. Similar results appear for South Asians and other Asians (see Table 1 for important figures). Analyzing bachelor's degree attainment shows similar results: most second-generation ethnic groups in all countries have bachelor degree attainment ratios greater than 1.0, in particular the Chinese and South Asians.

Thus, in each country, most ethnic origin groups of the second generation outperform the mainstream population in educational attainment, and the significant cross-national difference in educational attainment that existed for the parental immigrant generation is largely eliminated. Asians do significantly better than the mainstream, Afro-Caribbean less so. However, it is worth underscoring that Afro-Caribbean do as well or better than those in the mainstream population of the same age.

These cross-national differences are also eliminated for the second generation. In all three countries, occupational attainment for almost all second-generation ethnic groups surpasses the mainstream, especially in Canada and Australia. In particular, second-generation Chinese and South Asians have a much higher score. In all three countries their proportions in managerial and professional occupations are nearly double that of the mainstream population of the same age.

In Canada and the US, the Afro-Caribbean second generation has a somewhat lower relative occupational status than what might have been expected based on their relative educational attainment. See Table 2 for summarized results.

Occupational Status

We summarize occupational status in a simple status score. Professional and managerial occupations score 100, service and manual score 0, and other occupations score 50. For instance, if all members of a group were employed in managerial or professional occupations, the status score would be 100. We make a ratio between the status scores of ethnic origins and third- and higher- generation whites.

In the US, all immigrant groups (aged 50+) have a ratio below the mainstream population except for South Asians. White and Chinese immigrants in Canada, and South Asian immigrants in Australia are the sole groups who score higher than their respective mainstream populations.

Table 2: Occupational status, by generation, age, and origin

	USA 1995-2007	Canada 2001	Australia 2001
	Occupational Status Ratio	Occupational Status Ratio	Occupational Status Ratio
Immigrant generation (age 50+)			
Third- and higher-gen. White	1.00	1.00	1.00
White	1.00	1.12	0.92
Afro-Caribbean Black	0.83	0.78	--
Chinese	0.94	1.02	0.97
South Asian	1.16	0.90	1.13
Other Asian	0.94	0.88	0.78
Second generation (age 25-39)			
Third- and higher gen. White	1.00	1.00	1.00
White	1.06	1.15	1.00
Afro-Caribbean Black	0.95	1.04	--
Chinese	1.39	1.46	1.27
South Asian	1.37	1.34	1.26
Other Asian	1.10	1.14	0.84



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Household Incomes and Economic Well-Being

In all three countries, the economic status of second-generation Chinese, South Asian, and other Asian groups is higher than that of the mainstream population in the same age group. The mainstream population aged 25-39 has average household incomes of \$56 000 in the US, \$50 000 in Canada, and \$47 000 in Australia. In comparison, the Chinese second generation household incomes are \$67 000 in the US, \$63 000 in Canada, and \$57 000 in Australia.

Chinese household incomes for the immigrant generation (aged 50+) are significantly lower in the US than in Canada and Australia, relative to the mainstream. The education-driven mobility of the Chinese second generation in the US eliminates the cross-national difference experienced by immigrants. South Asians and other Asians show a similar pattern.

Conclusion

Cross-national differences in immigrant success across the US, Canada, and Australia are largely eliminated for the second generation. Institutional differences which affected immigrant parents across countries appear to not affect their offspring similarly. In particular, the success of the Chinese second-generation is remarkable, especially since the Chinese immigrants we analyzed were less well-educated and worked in fewer

skilled occupations than third-generation whites of their age.

It is also notable that second-generation immigrants groups appear to experience great upward mobility in the US, especially considering that their parental generation did not do as well compared to those in Canada and Australia. Second-generation Chinese and South Asians in the US overcome obstacles of their parents' generation, including limited social welfare benefits and poor employment realities. Interestingly, the economic position of second-generation Afro-Caribbean in the US is lower than that of Afro-Caribbean in Canada, but when taking into account the position of the immigrant generation in each country, second-generation Afro-Caribbean in the US show greater upward mobility than their Canadian counterparts. These findings dispute the idea of segmented assimilation.

Our findings bring about the question as to why inheritance of social class does not apply to many of these immigrants. The answer may lie in the high educational levels of the immigrant parents, who impart the value of education to their children and try to ensure their children's employment success. The children, born and raised in their host society, have less difficulty with language, and thus employment, than their parents did.

Our study needs larger samples to examine individual economic outcomes in greater detail. Hopefully, future studies will include data across generations to allow analysis of true inter-generational mobility rather than the comparisons of groups at a single point in time.

About the study

This research brief is based on: Jeffrey G. Reitz, Heather Zhang, and Naoko Hawkins, 2011, "Comparisons of the success of racial minority immigrant offspring in the United States, Canada and Australia", *Social Science Research* 40, 1051-1066. The brief was written by Carmina Ravanera.

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