The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience

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Introduction

International Migration and Immigration Research: The State of the Field

The last decades of the twentieth century have witnessed a revival of large-scale immigration to the United States. The rise in the number of immigrants and the dramatic change in their national origins are revealed in a simple comparison between the 1950s and the 1980s. More than two-thirds of the 2.5 million immigrants admitted during the 1950s were from Europe, while more than 80 percent of the 7.3 million immigrants who arrived in the 1980s were from Latin America and Asia (Rumbaut 1996, 25). At century’s end, the proportion of persons of foreign birth is inching closer to 10 percent of the total U.S. population (Schmidley and Alvardo 1998). More than 50 million Americans—one-fifth of the total population—are immigrants or the children of immigrants.

As high as these figures may seem to contemporary eyes, a high level of immigration is not an uncommon situation in American history. From the founding days of the republic to present times, international migration has been the defining attribute of American society. The language and political ideals of the early English settlers, as well as their land hunger and frequent disregard for Native American rights, set the stage for later arrivals. The eighteenth-century American economy was built with the labor of free immigrants, indentured servants, and slaves from Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean. During the nineteenth century, immigrants played a disproportionate role in settling the frontier and later contributed much of the labor and consumer demand that fed the industrial revolution. The twentieth century opened with a fierce political and cultural debate that culminated in the closing of the door to free immigration in the 1920s. The low levels of immigration during the following forty years, from the mid-1920s to the mid-1960s, were unusual in American history (Massey 1995). The last third of the twentieth century has seen a return of immigration to center stage in the American drama.

Although the popular version of American history emphasizes continuity from colonial times to the present, the lineage is primarily cultural, not genealogical. The simple fact is that the United States is largely populated by persons whose ancestors lived elsewhere two centuries ago. This country’s culture, as well as its politics and economy, has been continually expanded and remolded by successive waves of immigrants. It is hard to imagine any part of American history or popular culture that has not been touched by immigration. The Statue of Liberty is perhaps the most widely understood cultural icon of American society, both at home and abroad. The role of immigrants in American society and their cultural contributions are often celebrated in Hollywood movies. The notion that almost any person from anywhere can “make it in America” has had a powerful impact on the image of America abroad and at home.

As the renewal of immigration has reverberated through American society over the last thirty years—demographically, economically, politically, and culturally—there has been a resurgence of scholarship on immigration in every branch of the social sciences. Taking stock of this fast-moving field is the aim of this volume. In particular, the chapters in this compendium assess the state of theories of international migration, the incorporation of immigrants and their descendants into American society, and the economic, social, and political responses to immigration. Theories are interpretative frameworks that try to make sense of the many “facts,” often incomplete and confusing, that emerge from empirical research. Theories also offer conceptual maps that orient scholars to important research questions and modes of inquiry. By addressing the state of theories in the field of immigration research, our objective is to see the big picture—where we have been and where we are going.

In this introduction, we provide a glimpse of some of the significant issues that await the reader. We also explain how this volume came to be and compare the project with another Social Science
Many intellectuals were firmly in the anti-immigrant camp. In 1894 a group of young, Harvard-educated “Boston Brahmins” founded the Immigration Restriction League, a group that had a major influence on pushing Congress toward more restrictive immigration legislation (Bernard 1982, 93). Henry Adams, the nineteenth-century man of letters and descendant of two American presidents, frequently railed against the new immigrants, especially the growing numbers and prominence of Jews in American society (Baltzell 1964, 90–93). The fear of immigrants and hostility toward them during the earlier era of mass immigration were critically analyzed in John Higham’s classic book *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1865–1925* (1955/1988). In part III of this volume, Professor Higham reflects on the differences between the era about which he wrote and more recent history and considers the possibilities of going beyond an intellectual history of nativism to a social science analysis of the phenomenon.

The United States is once again in an era when opposition to immigration is rising (Espenshade and Huber, this volume). As the numbers of immigrants rose during the 1970s and 1980s, there was a renewal of the intellectual and political debate over immigration to the United States. Some people fear that immigrants will become just like other Americans, while others fear that they will not. Some fear for what the United States is becoming in an age of renewed immigration.

Although the current debate is less inflamed with overt claims about the inherent inferiority of the new immigrants, there are some striking parallels in the discussion over the immigration “problem” between the early and the late decades of this century. Peter Brimelow, a British immigrant, warned the United States that it was admitting an “alien nation” with the new wave of immigration from Asia and Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s (Brimelow 1995). In recent elections, several politicians have played “the immigration card” in hopes of riding into office on the underlying fear of immigrants held by many Americans.

The shifting rides of social and political responses to the new age of immigration are one of the major themes analyzed in part III of this volume (see the chapters by Espenshade and Huber, Mollenkopf, Rodriguez, Sánchez, and by Johnson, Farrell, and Guinn). There is some basis for claims that anti-immigrant sentiments are a persistent undercurrent in American society and rise to the surface whenever immigration rises to a noticeable
level. But a comparison with the past indicates that the American reaction to immigration in the late twentieth century is not simply a replay of the early decades of the century. There are significant variations from place to place, and notable changes over time, that defy a simple explanation of continuity. Nor does it appear that anti-immigrant pressures will be able to close the door to continued immigration in the near future.

One of the most important differences between the earlier era and our own time is that the contemporary debate includes more balanced and analytical assessments of the costs and benefits of immigration (see the chapters by Plotke, by Carter and Sutch, and by Friedberg and Hunt). Of course, the political claims of those violently opposed to immigration are generally unrelated to any careful assessment of the costs and benefits of immigration. Nativist appeals are typically framed in terms of moral claims and rights (who belongs and who does not) and of the cultural deficiencies of potential immigrants. These sentiments must contend, however, with a political environment in which 20 percent of the population are first- or second-generation Americans and with a culture that celebrates its immigrant ancestors.

Arguments about the contemporary progress of immigrants can draw on rather different interpretations of the past. When assimilation was thought to be the inevitable outcome for European immigrants, the model could be generalized to all immigrant groups (Gordon 1964). As doubts arose about the assimilation model as an accurate account of the historical immigration experience, the present and possible future scenarios were reinterpreted (Gans 1992a; Glazer and Moynihan 1970). The chapters in part II of this volume evaluate alternative theoretical frameworks with nuanced comparisons of the relative socioeconomic progress of immigrants in the present and the past.

Although the facts about the progress of immigrants and their children during the first half of the twentieth century are not so elastic as to fit any interpretation, there is room for differing emphases. One author may point to the struggles and sufferings of the first generation, while another author chooses to emphasize the socioeconomic mobility of the second generation. Does a narrowing of occupational differences between ethnic groups reveal an open-opportunity structure? Or does the persistence of bigotry in country clubs, college admissions at elite universities, and certain spheres of employment show the true nature of American society? The world is full of contradictions, and selected examples can point to opposite conclusions.

The socioeconomic progress of immigrant communities has been neither immediate nor universal, but the overwhelming weight of evidence is that the children of European immigrants experienced substantial intergenerational socioeconomic mobility. And through residential integration and intermarriage, the social distinctions, and even the ethnic identifications, between European national-origin groups have blurred (see the masterful review in Alba and Nee, this volume). The question that now haunts the field is: What lessons should be drawn for—or predictions made about—the children of the post-1965 immigrants to the United States? The final evidence is not yet in on this question, and it may not be in for several decades; thus, there is a lively debate across the chapters in part II of the volume.

In part I, the authors assess the state of theories of international migration, with a particular focus on explaining why people migrate across international boundaries, and to the United States in particular. For most Americans, the answer is self-evident—if the door is open, then they will come. And if the front door is closed but a back door is open, then they will still come. This perspective, which emphasizes the pulls of the American economy and the centrality of state regulation, is the major theoretical framework in the policy studies wing of the immigration field (Keely 1979; Papatheodorou and Hamilton 1995; Teitelbaum and Weiner 1995). It neglects, however, the determinants of international migration in the sending countries and assumes that the potential supply of immigrants is unlimited.

There is a plethora of theories on why people migrate, but relatively little agreement among them on the important causal variables. The problem has been that these theories “belong” to different disciplines or schools of research. Although the standard aim of social science research is to disconfirm theoretical expectations, this is a more difficult task if empirical tests are weak and the field is fragmented into different research communities that espouse independent theories. In such a situation, multiple theories can flourish with few incentives to move toward convergence.

In a very important chapter that could change the character of the field, Douglas Massey reviews and evaluates a number of propositions from different theories of international migration. He reports that the major theories of international migration are not mutually exclusive in their em-
empirical expectations, and indeed there is considerable support from the empirical literature for several of the theories. To our knowledge, this is one of the first efforts to synthesize theories that have been generally thought of as mutually exclusive in the literature (see also Massey et al. 1998).

Other chapters in part I illustrate the challenges of constructing theoretical frameworks and developing interdisciplinary approaches to the study of international migration. Alejandro Portes offers a classic statement on the uses and misuses of theory, citing clear examples from the research literature. Charles Hirschman provides a typology of the development of social theories across the social sciences. Other chapters point to critical gaps in the field, including the significance of gender theory (Pessar); the conceptualization of transmigrants, that is, persons who live and work in multiple societies (Glick Schiller); and the role and development of state regulation of migration (Zolberg).

IMMIGRATION STUDIES AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL

This book is the product of a conference titled "Becoming American/America Becoming: International Migration to the United States," which met in Sanibel, Florida, on January 18–21, 1996, and was organized by the Committee on International Migration of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). That committee was created in 1994 with funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to promote interdisciplinary scholarship and training in the field of immigration studies (for more background, see DeWind and Hirschman 1996).

The formation of the Committee on International Migration reflects both the academic and policy interests of contemporary scholars and the historical role of the Social Science Research Council as a forum for addressing important national issues by bringing together leading scholars from across the social sciences. This context has shaped the committee's assessment of the field, its planning for the Sanibel conference, and this volume.

Policy considerations have had a major influence on the development of the field of international migration and immigration studies over the last two decades. Indeed, academics from almost every discipline have addressed the current policy debates and the significant empirical questions underlying them (Bean, Edmonston, and Passel 1990; Borjas 1990; Hamermesh and Bean 1998a). Questions about problems of measurement of immigration and the consequences of immigration have led to several recent national commissions and National Academy of Science panels (Levine, Hill, and Warren 1985; Smith and Edmonston 1997; U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform 1994; U.S. Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy 1981).

The direction of the Committee on International Migration and the goals of the conference were framed more broadly than the current policy debates and popular controversies. This does not indicate a lack of interest in policy questions, but rather the belief that stepping back from the immediate debate will allow us to understand how and why migration patterns have developed as they have. With this logic, we asked the contributing authors to assess the theoretical status of research on international migration and contemporary immigration to the United States. Such an assessment, we believe, will contribute to better social scientific research, greater public enlightenment, and, in the long run, a more reasoned approach to public policy discussions. Our most fundamental goal is to contribute to the intellectual coherence of international migration studies as an interdisciplinary field within the social sciences. Social science research and theory can provide an understanding that is both a counterweight and a complement to the moral and sentimental voices speaking out in public debates.

Although this is not the only book to present an overview of contemporary immigration, our emphasis on the assessment of social science theories of immigration is probably unique. This priority grew out of the initial discussions among the members of the interdisciplinary SSRC committee. The committee members had to establish first a meaningful dialogue across disciplinary boundaries. Disciplines differ in their vocabularies, their research styles, and even their interpretations of evidence. But underneath the brush, we discovered that all social science disciplines share many of the same theories or explanatory frameworks. By focusing on an assessment of theories of international migration, we hope to enhance interdisciplinary communications and the development of a truly interdisciplinary field of international migration studies.

Although this book aims to provide a comprehensive account of the causes and consequences of international migration, the emphasis is on the
American experience, and in particular on the adaptation of immigrants to living in the United States, the impact of immigrants on this country, and the reactions of Americans to the presence of immigrants. Our initial plan was to address contemporary immigration to the United States from a broadly comparative and historical perspective, but we soon realized that the complexity and scope of such an effort would be too great a challenge. The rapid growth of research on immigration to the United States by scholars from many disciplines suggested that our primary goal should be the integration of this diverse body of scholarship. Putting the contemporary American experience into a broader historical and international context is a high priority for the future activities of the SSRC committee.

The other major goal of the SSRC committee is to strengthen the interdisciplinary field of international migration and immigration studies. The committee has established fellowship programs for predoctoral students and postdoctoral fellows whose research promises to contribute to "theoretical understandings of the origins of immigration and refugee flows to the United States, the processes of migration and settlement, and the outcomes for immigrants, refugees, and native-born Americans" (SSRC 1998). As part of these efforts to encourage a new generation of immigration researchers, the committee has organized workshops to assist students of minority social background to prepare research and funding proposals. We trust that the next assessment of the state of the field will include the work of some of the students whose career beginnings have been encouraged and supported by our committee's initiatives.

This is not the first time that the Social Science Research Council has drawn together scholars to advance research and understanding on international migration. Seventy years ago, from 1924 to 1927, the SSRC first mobilized social scientists to study immigration with the establishment of the Committee on Scientific Aspects of Human Migration. The earlier SSRC committee produced, directly or indirectly, an amazing range of significant books and research articles, including studies of Swedish immigration, Mexican immigration and labor in the United States, statistical compendia of international migrations, and original research on the cityward migration of African Americans (Gamio 1930, 1931; Janson 1931; Kennedy 1930; Kiser 1932; Lewis 1932; Ross and Trauxel 1931; Taylor 1930, 1932; Willcox and Ferenczi 1929, 1930).

There are some interesting parallels in the demographic and political contexts behind the founding of the two SSRC committees in 1924 and 1995. Both committees were formed after several decades of mass immigration, an acrimonious public debate on continued immigration, and changes in immigration legislation. The Social Science Research Council had just been created in 1923 with the assistance of private foundations to help bring social scientific knowledge to bear on important national issues. At that time, the social sciences were still trying to establish their scientific credentials, independent of efforts at social reform. The premise was that social science knowledge would have credibility in the public arena only if research conclusions were not seen as politically determined. The fledgling SSRC must have seen the study of immigration and the integration of immigrants into American society as a promising opportunity to demonstrate the importance of social science research as something more than fields of knowledge derived from the natural sciences (Merriam 1926, 187).

The field of international migration may also have been considered an important area by the SSRC because of the prior use, or misuse, of social science research by advocates of immigration restriction. The Dillingham Commission Report of the U.S. Senate, which contained forty-two volumes of papers and statistical analyses, provided a "scientific" base for restrictions on immigration from southern and eastern Europe (U.S. Immigration Commission 1907–1910). The lines between social science analysis and the expression of opinions and prejudices were frequently blurred. Leading American social scientists, including E. A. Ross, a major sociologist, and John R. Commons, a founder of modern economics, wrote books that supported the dominant prejudices of the era, namely, that the new immigrants were unlikely to assimilate into American society (Commons 1907; Ross 1914).

In retrospect, it is clear that the Committee on Scientific Aspects of Human Migration played a critical role in changing the character of social science research on immigration by tilting the field away from advocacy and toward a more scholarly approach. The 1924 SSRC committee, which used the word Scientific in its title, was actually an outgrowth of a National Research Council committee on the same subject that had a predominantly natural science orientation (Yerkes 1924). The process of selecting eminent research scholars for committee membership established an important
The Organization of This Volume

By all the standard measures of scientific progress, the field of international migration and immigration studies is thriving. In addition to a burgeoning literature of research articles and important monographs (Lieberson 1980; Massey et al. 1987; Portes and Bach 1985), new books for university courses (Daniels 1991; Jacobson 1998; Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Reimers 1992), encyclopedic surveys (Cohen 1995), and proceedings of conferences (IUSSP 1997) have been published in recent years. In spite of this enormous flurry of activity and attention, or perhaps because of it, there appears to be relatively little integration in the field. Scholars from varied disciplines and perspectives bring rather different research questions, assumptions, and analytical frameworks to their inquiries. The explicit goal of this volume is to bring these many strands of work somewhat closer together through the reassessment of theories in the field.

We do not intend to dampen the diversity of a dynamic field under the banner of a new all-encompassing theory. Rather, we set forth three questions—or sets of questions—that can serve to organize theories and research in the field of international migration.

1. What motivates people to migrate across international boundaries, often at great financial and psychological cost?
2. How are immigrants changed after arrival? (Responses to this question address such issues as adaptation, assimilation, pluralism, and return migration.)
3. What impacts do immigrants have on American life and its economic, sociocultural, and political institutions?

The chapters in part I address theories of international migration and some of the foundational concepts in the field. Although these chapters focus primarily on international migration to contemporary American society, the essential questions they raise could be addressed to other times and other countries. Part II focuses on the questions of immigrant adaptation and incorporation into American society. Two generations ago “assimilation” (admittedly defined in different ways) was considered an inevitable outcome for most immigrants, at least those of European origin. In recent years the inevitability and even the desirability of assimilation have been the subject of considerable political controversy and scholarly reassessment. In part III, the authors review how American society has changed and even been transformed with the absorption of immigrants.

The answers to these questions are not straightforward, and this is not simply because the empirical evidence is complicated and sometimes inconclusive. The empirical record can often be murky, but the ways in which questions are posed and embedded in theoretical arguments can matter even more. Theories serve to codify the received wisdom—what issues are important and why—and provide guidance for empirical research. If a theory is to be a useful guide for research, its core must be selective, emphasizing certain aspects of social reality. Assessments of theories, such as the essays in this volume, evaluate not only the empirical evidence associated with a theory but also the assumptions behind the questions.

For each of the three parts of the volume, we have written introductory essays that attempt to provide overviews of the issues, theories, and debates covered in the individual chapters and to assess their contributions to the field of international migration and immigration studies. These introductory essays are not meant to summarize the contents of the individual chapters, but to organize the themes that underpin a field of inquiry and to highlight issues of agreement and disagreement.
Alejandro Portes's pioneering scholarship has identified and explored the core issues in the study of international migration and the adaptation of immigrants to American society (Portes 1996b, 1998; Portes and Bach 1985; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). His essay, a revision of the keynote lecture he gave at the conference, is published as the lead chapter in the volume.

In addition to organizing the development of theory and the interdisciplinary research on international migration, we would also like to try to bring a small amount of conceptual order to the field based on common understandings. Perhaps the place to begin is with a few words on our perception of the scope of the field. Are theories of international migration distinctly different from general theories of migration? Should we distinguish between the fields of international migration studies and immigration studies? On these questions, and on many other conceptual issues, including the relationship between social science theories and research on international migration and the field of immigration policy (including refugee policy), there is no overarching consensus. We offer our own conceptual map on these matters simply to lay out the underlying issues that sometimes cause confusion.

Although international migration can be defined as migration across an international boundary, this does not resolve the question of whether general migration theories subsume international migration. Since well-defined international boundaries and the regulation of movement across them are relatively modern phenomena (and still not in force everywhere), there cannot be a historical division between the two fields. In an ideal theoretical framework of migration, we might wish to distinguish types of migration based on a number of criteria, such as distance, intention of permanence, duration of stay, voluntary or involuntary mobility, and mode of travel. In a framework that used such criteria, crossing an international border would be an important distinction, but hardly one that called for an independent theory.

Nonetheless, the research communities that study international migration and internal migration have taken shape as parallel fields of study rather than as one. In large part, this has happened because of the overriding focus on state policies, the single most important independent variable in studies of international migration, but one that is not meaningful for studies of internal migration. If we were studying internal migration in the former socialist bloc, where internal passports or travel documents were required for domestic migration, this distinction would be of less importance. Another major difference that has certainly influenced the nature of empirical research is the availability of data.

Conventional data sources, such as censuses and national surveys, typically include the universe of persons exposed to the risk of domestic migration. National data sources allow for the comparison of domestic migrants with nonmigrants in comparable places of origin and nonmigrants in the places of destination. There are no comparable data for the study of international migration. By definition, only migrants from other countries are included in censuses and surveys in the country of destination; we know nothing about the numbers and characteristics of nonmigrants in the countries of origin. Administrative data on border crossings are widely used in international migration research, but such data cannot be used to study immigrant selectivity or outcomes in the places of settlement.

International migration studies cover scholarship on the process of movement from one country to another. By definition, the field is comparative, and the units of analysis could be countries, specific international flows, or individuals. Immigration studies, another widely used term, covers generally the same phenomenon, but from the perspective of the receiving society (Jones 1992). Questions about immigrant adaptation and assimilation are central to immigration studies but may be secondary topics in the field of international migration research. One might also consider another subarc with a label of “emigration studies,” which would be issues in international migration analyzed from the perspective of the sending country—for example, diaspora studies.

Given that some of these terms are used interchangeably by other authors, we do not try to establish an orthodox vocabulary. In some instances, we refer to the field of “international migration and immigration studies” in order to be as inclusive as possible, although this is an overly long and inelegant phrase. The organization of the parts of this volume—by research questions—represents our vision of how the field should be framed and organized for cumulative empirical research.

LOOKING BACK AT THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The twentieth century has been distinguished by contradictory forces that have both accelerated and retarded long-distance migration. The accelerating forces have included the development of the
modern technology of transportation and communication and the integration of a world market. Information about opportunities for land, work, and freedom in distant places spreads more quickly than ever, and the costs of movement have been dramatically reduced. 1 At the same time, the incentives for migration have been spurred by the buildup of population pressure in agricultural regions with only limited capacity for additional labor absorption. The pressures occurred in a historical context in which the traditional feudal or semifeudal economies and the moral order that tied peasants to the land were eroding or collapsing entirely with the spread of the market economy. The net consequence has been a rise in rural-to-urban migration, but it should be noted that the overwhelming share of the movement has been internal rather than international migration.

It is not only proximity that directs the exodus from rural areas to national rather than international destinations. Throughout the twentieth century modern states have created new political bureaucracies to regulate national borders and to monitor those who cross them. These actions cannot be explained by the natural ethnocentrism in any society or the inherent fear of strangers, since these forces have always been present. The rise of modern states over the last century or so has been accompanied by the peculiar ideology that each state should be inhabited primarily by a single "nation" of people who share a common culture, language, and history. Empires rarely cared about the national origins of their inhabitants as long as they paid taxes and did not challenge authority. Many of the new "nation states," however, were created as national homelands for specific populations.

The problem for the United States, and other "settler societies," has been to define who belongs to the nation. The debates over immigration law are part of the larger question of national identity that influences almost every aspect of political, social, and cultural life. In the earlier decades of the twentieth century the forces that wanted American society and culture to be predominantly defined by its eighteenth-century ethnic stock—ignoring the substantial numbers of African Americans and Native Americans—won the political battle with the imposition of the national-origin quotas. From the 1960s through the 1990s, the political winds have been reversed, or at least modified substantially, with a broadening of the ethnic origins of new waves of immigration.

Many of the chapters in this volume report on the controversies and discrepant findings regarding the eventual outcomes of the late-twentieth-century immigration waves. We suspect that many of these debates may be a function of duration of residence or generation in the host country. Indeed, some of the variance in outcomes may be "noise" that results from modest fluctuations over short observation periods. Over the short term it is difficult to measure the net impact of immigration independently of other period effects. There are certain to be short-term problems of adjustment that follow from the initial shocks of arrival; these problems may depend on the characteristics of the migrants, the host community, and unique conditions at the time of arrival. These short-term problems may not, however, be indicative of the long-term impacts of immigration.

AN AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

Above and beyond the goals of greater interdisciplinary communications, clearer statements of theory, and more cumulative research, we also have some suggestions for the future research agenda of the field. Most important, we would argue for greater emphasis on the long-term outcomes of international migration on the receiving societies and on immigrants and their descendants. The close links between immigration studies and policy considerations pull the field to the study of short-term outcomes, particularly on issues that might be considered social problems. The initial problems of adjustment are important and should not be neglected, but the impact of international migration may appear to be quite different with a time horizon of fifty years rather than five years. In the balance of this introduction, we develop this argument in the context of a broader assessment of the field of immigration studies, and the social sciences more generally.

As noted earlier, the study of immigration has always been closely tied to considerations of immigration policy. This can be a major stimulus to research, but it can also be a potential liability. The link to policy contributes to considerable public interest in research results and additional sources of support for research and training. Too much attention on policy matters, however, can lead to an exclusive focus on the period immediately after arrival and an assumption that immigration is a "social problem." There is actually a very long list of perceived "immigration problems," including the uprooted migrants who must adapt to strange sur-
roundings and the consequences for the receiving society that must absorb the migrants. This last problem, it is generally assumed, has adverse financial implications and may endanger social integration.

These problems are not entirely imagined. Long-distance migration can be a traumatic experience, and adjustments to new environments are rarely smooth and entirely pleasant (Handlin 1973). The arrival of significant numbers of people from different backgrounds may be profoundly disturbing to those in the receiving society. Immigration probably creates short-term "shocks" to host-community institutions, including labor markets and schools. The sudden increase in population numbers can also add to pressures on the housing market and demand for other scarce community resources. Although these problems are real, the perceptions of policymakers (and perhaps of the broader public) can easily create biases for the research community. In the early decades of the twentieth century these pressures amplified the popular prejudices that marked the writings of social scientists on the dangers of continued immigration (Commons 1907; Ross 1914). At present, these pressures deflect attention from the study of the long-term consequences of immigration.

The study of earlier waves of immigration and the ways in which long-distance migrations have proven to be major pathways of social change are usually consigned to historians and practitioners in other branches of the social sciences (Davis 1989; McNeill and Adams 1978). A subtle bias often emanating from immediate policy perceptions is the assumption that the contemporary situation is unprecedented and that a substantial number of immigrants is a serious problem that requires strong actions by the state. The close study of history is the only guard against such potential biases (Lieberson 1996). Fears were strong at several points in American history that the presence of large numbers of immigrants and continued immigration posed significant problems for the broader society. A few examples might suffice to show that these fears were transitory—lasting less than a generation—and much exaggerated at the time.

At the time of World War I, there were fears that German Americans might have dual loyalties and be somewhat reluctant to join in the war effort against Germany. There was a very substantial German American presence in many midwestern cities, where German culture and institutions, including German-language schools, were a strong presence. With only modest resistance, however, the German American community completely acceded to pressures to "Americanize" during World War I, and almost all signs of an ethnic institutional presence were eliminated (Child 1939; Portes and Rumbaut 1996, 105–7). The same fears and prejudices were aimed at Japanese Americans during World War II, but with a much greater vengeance. In the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor, all Japanese Americans on the West Coast were rounded up and forced to live in "relocation camps" for several years (Daniels, Taylor, and Kitano 1992).

Contemporary accounts of these events would probably have rationalized these fears and stressed the problems of immigrant absorption. In retrospect, it is clear that the hysteria of potential disloyalty was largely, if not entirely, imagined and that the American government overreacted. Within a fairly short time span the events themselves have disappeared from the national memory, though not necessarily for the peoples whose lives were disrupted. Since there is very little current immigration from either Germany or Japan, these national-origin groups are no longer in the category of newly arrived threat to the social order. Indeed, the contemporary images of German Americans and Japanese Americans are extremely positive. What a difference a generation makes!

Joel Perlmann and Roger Waldinger (this volume) note that many southern and eastern European immigrants, and even the Irish, were not considered "white" by many Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The fear that the white race would soon be a minority in the United States was a major argument for the national-origin quotas introduced in the 1920s. Although these perceptions seem archaic today, the same fallacy is perpetuated with claims that continuing immigration from Latin America and Asia will lead to white Americans becoming a minority of the U.S. population by the middle of the twenty-first century (Bouvier 1992). With more than 30 percent of Asians and Hispanics marrying outside their community, the current boundaries of the race and ethnic populations are certain to change dramatically in the coming years (Smith and Edmonston 1997, 113–22; Hirschman, forthcoming). Any prediction of the future ethnic composition of the population is certain to be wide of the mark.

Another example of the fallacy of relying on short-term cross-sectional patterns to understand long-term outcomes is revealed with a recent comprehensive assessment of the fiscal impact of immi-
A point is simply that the pattern is consistent with our argument that measures of the short-term immigrant adaptation or adjustment do not reliably predict long-term (intergenerational) outcomes. Migrants are willing to endure the pains of migration, especially over long distances, only because they are highly motivated. We conjecture that the losses are immediately felt but the gains may be visible only over the span of generations. This means that cross-sectional evaluations, especially in the years immediately after migration, may reveal the costs of long-distance migration but not the gains that may result.

These examples suggest that the framing of research questions is critically important. Although the review and development of social science theory are sometimes derided as esoteric exercises, far removed from both the real world and empirical research, we hope that careful readers of this volume will conclude that there is nothing quite so practical and useful as a good theory. A good theory is one that not only poses a plausible causal argument but also suggests the spatial and temporal dimensions to which it applies. Theories that incorporate insights from different disciplines and develop in tandem with empirical research hold the power to illuminate the fundamental character and direction of human societies.

At century’s end, the United States is once again making fundamental economic, social, and cultural changes that could scarcely have been imagined only a few decades ago. Immigration appears to be one of the major forces of change and renewal. The authors of the chapters in this volume draw on the accumulated wisdom of history, the best of social science theory and research, and their own creative ideas to explain how immigration has shaped American society over the twentieth century and what it might become in the twenty-first century.

NOTES

1. Jeffrey Passel and Barry Edmonston estimate that about one-third of Americans in 1990 were descended from persons who arrived after 1900 and another one-third were descended from nineteenth-century immigrants (Passel and Edmonston 1994, 61). Interestingly, almost 90 percent of blacks were descended from families that had been here for at least four generations before 1900, only about one-third of whites (non-Hispanic) had such deep roots (67–69).

2. These reactions are not unique to American society, and indeed, they may be more moderate in the United States than elsewhere.
3. William P. Dillingham was a senator from Vermont and chair of the Senate committee that produced the report. According to William Bernard (1982, 94), the report "began with the assumption that the new immigrants were racially inferior to the old immigrants from northern and western Europe and manipulated mountains of statistics to provide a 'scientific' rationale for restricting their entry." See also the critique of the Dillingham Commission Report in Handlin (1957).

4. A fourth, perhaps equally important, question is: What impact does international migration have on the sending society? This question is beyond the scope of this volume, but we can note here that although sending countries lose, at least temporarily, the labor and capital of emigrants, in the long term they may receive substantial economic gains through remittances and return migration.

5. These technological and social changes may have led to more rapid increases in temporary movement than in permanent settlement. Just as the cheapening of transportation and the easier flow of information around the globe have allowed greater opportunities for international mobility, they also have allowed people to return to their native countries more easily than was the case for earlier waves of international migrants.

6. Although Stephen Castles and Mark Miller (1998, 4) observe that "international migration has grown in volume and significance since 1945, and most particularly since the mid-1980s," recent research shows that the absolute number of persons living outside their country of birth increased from 1965 to 1990, but the percentage of the world's population classified as international migrants remained at 2.3 percent (Zoltnik 1998).

7. Some immigrants may have come with the intention of making a temporary sojourn to earn money and then to return home. For such individuals, the return home may not be a statement of dissatisfaction with their original migration.
Part I

Theories and Concepts of International Migration

In the opening essay in this section, Alejandro Portes cautions scholars against attempting to formulate a “grand theory” of immigration to the United States. He asserts that a unifying theory, which presumably would seek to explain the origins, processes, and outcomes of international migration, would have to be posed at so general a level of abstraction as to be futile or vacuous. For example, he argues, “the theory that colonial capitalist penetration played a significant role in the initiation of large-scale labor migration from less developed countries says nothing about who among the population of those countries was more likely to migrate, nor can it be tested at the level of individual decisionmaking.” Although international migration may result from the connections between individuals deciding to migrate and the broader structural contexts within which they live, Portes argues that micro and macro levels of analysis are not “fungible.” Instead, he proposes that theory can be usefully organized around four topics, which encompass the international migration process: the origins, flows, employment, and sociocultural adaptation of immigrants. Although he recognizes that these different aspects of migration are interconnected, he proposes that midlevel theories limited to explaining specified areas of migration or relations between them are preferable to all-encompassing statements.

If formulating a unifying theoretical paradigm is not feasible, then a coherent overall understanding of the origins, processes, and outcomes of international migration to the United States must be based on the collective theoretical efforts of scholars who make the study of immigration a field of the social sciences by combining their diverse disciplinary trainings, research methods, and analytical approaches. The grouping of chapters by some of these scholars within the different parts of this book represents one way of organizing the field into separate and interconnected areas for theoretical analysis. Part I assesses the role of theory in shaping the field of immigration studies in general and more specifically in explaining the origins and processes of international migration and providing conceptual paradigms that link migration to immigrant incorporation. In turn, parts II and III examine theoretical explanations of the outcomes of migration, focusing on immigrant incorporation into American society, its impacts on native-born Americans, and their reactions.

The first and last chapters in part I, by Alejandro Portes and Charles Hirschman, respectively, address the general nature of theory and its relation to research that has and will continue to shape the field of immigration studies. The four chapters in between more specifically address theoretical explanations of immigration to the United States but seek to broaden the explanatory reach of their theoretical approaches in different ways. Douglas Massey and Aristide Zolberg evaluate and synthesize prevailing theories of the origins and process of international migration. Massey focuses on the complementarity of prevailing theories, which tend to emphasize—though not exclusively—the importance of economic factors, while Zolberg brings in an often neglected political perspective regarding the role of the state. Nina Glick Schiller and Patricia Pessar also seek to link different theoretical perspectives, but they do so on the basis of reconceptualizing prevailing understandings of “immigrants” as a basic category of analysis. Identifying immigrants who sustain international ties to their home countries as “transnational migrants,” Glick Schiller explores how the transnational activities of migrants and states have influ-
enced one another since the turn of the century. Pessar explores the implications of an “engendered” notion of immigrants for both migration and feminist theory. By showing how various theoretical perspectives can be linked with one another through synthesis and reconceptualization of basic understandings, each of these essays contributes to the intellectual coherence of immigration studies as an interdisciplinary subfield within the social sciences.

**Synthesizing Theory**

Theories that explain why international migration takes place have often been presented as based in competing and mutually exclusive perspectives and as having distinctive implications for state immigration policies. Assessing the contributions of these theories under the headings of classical economics, new economics, segmented labor market, world systems, social capital, and cumulative causation theories, Douglas Massey concludes in his chapter, “Why Does Immigration Occur?,” that, because they “posit causal mechanisms operating at multiple levels of aggregation, the various explanations are not necessarily contradictory.” In fact, he adds, the various theories that address different factors as causes of migration—ranging from those considered in individual calculations of advantages to those connected to the transformation of local and regional social, political, and economic structures—are best understood as complementary to one another. Drawing to varying extents on the different insights offered by these distinct theoretical perspectives, Massey provides a synthetic explanation of international migration, its perpetuation, and the cumulative processes that bring migration flows to an end.

Massey’s synthesis is based not only on the analytic complementarity between the different theoretical perspectives but also on empirical evidence that supports the validity of each approach. This empirical evaluation, which is not fully described in his chapter, is the result of two projects, the first of which is an exhaustive, five-year review of post-1960 empirical research on population movements in the world’s five principal immigrant-receiving areas—North America, Western Europe, the Persian Gulf, Asia and the Pacific, and the Southern Cone of Latin America—undertaken by the Committee on South-North Migration of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (Massey et al. 1998). The second tests each theory against a single database of the life histories of immigrants to the United States from thirty-seven-hundred households and twenty-five communities in Mexico (Massey and Espinosa 1997). This empirically grounded approach to testing and synthesizing theory provides something of a model for other efforts at theory building within the field of immigration studies, notably the efforts of Richard Alba and Victor Nee on immigrant assimilation and of others in parts II and III of this book.

Though more inclusive than any other attempt to date to overview migration theory, this synthesis is still somewhat incomplete in relation to the full range of types of international migrants and factors generally considered part of international migration studies. First, the synthesis targets the migration of wage earners, who make up the majority of international migrants. No doubt this synthetic account can also be applied to the migration of salaried professionals and entrepreneurs, but how it might be amended to do so has yet to be specified. Second, this synthesis examines movements that are relatively voluntary compared to the forced migration of refugees and others who flee social or political conflict and human or natural disasters. Finally, as Massey points out, this synthesis neglects the impact of states in controlling migration flows. Raising doubts about just how effectively states are able to regulate immigration, Massey concludes: “They must develop policies that recognize the inevitability of labor flows within a globalized economy.”

In his chapter, “Matters of State,” Aristide Zolberg takes issue with Massey’s view of limited state control over migration and argues for a theoretically grounded account of state agency in shaping emigration and immigration flows. After reviewing the evolution of U.S. immigration legislation and its impact on the rising and falling numbers of immigrants legally admitted to the United States since the late nineteenth century, Zolberg concludes that “international migration theories will be woefully incomplete so long as they fail to take into account the positive and negative roles of states in shaping international population movements.” Even illegal immigration to the United States from Mexico, he contends, reflects less a failure of state control than the ambivalence built into U.S. immigration policy and its implementation as a result of the conflicting goals sought by different segments of American society.

Zolberg proposes that a measure of the impact of state immigration policies would be neither to-
Reconceptualizing Theory

Although states may shape the actual flows of international migrants, to what extent should the categories that states use to control migrants also be used as analytical categories by social scientists? For example, should immigrant and refugee flows be conceived as having distinct causes for purposes of explanation in the same way that states separate them into mutually exclusive legal categories for purposes of management? What about the very category of "immigrant"? Does the exit from one nation-state and entry into another, as conceived and controlled by immigration law with categories of temporary and permanent residence or naturalization, reflect the actual social life of international migrants for which scholars ought to seek explanation? States influence not only how migration actually takes place but also how it is analyzed.

In "Transmigrants and Nation-States," Nina Glick Schiller argues for the recognition of a "new paradigm for the study of migration"—an alternative to the conception of immigrant-state relationships underlying Zolberg's and Massey's analyses. In pointing to state agency in shaping international migration flows, Zolberg reminds readers that by definition international migration is "inherently a political process" in that "it involves the transfer of a person from the jurisdiction of one state to that of another—in whole or in part—and the eventuality of a change of membership in an inclusive political community." As a result, migration policies regulate not only cross-border movement but also the "acquisition, maintenance, loss, or voluntary relinquishment of membership" in all of its aspects. Approaching migration and national membership from the perspective of migrant as well as state agency, Glick Schiller argues for the recognition of a different conception of migration, one that she and her colleagues have defined as "transnational." Unlike immigrants, who have been conceived from a state administrative perspective as persons uprooted and transplanted from one nation-state to another, transnational migrants "extend networks of relationships across international borders." "Transmigrants," like immigrants, "invest socially, economically, and politically in their new society," but unlike immigrants, they also "continue to participate in the daily life of the society from which they emigrated but which they did not abandon.”
ties that distinguish transmigrants from immigrants, the transnational paradigm has been formulated so recently that there is much still to be learned about the nature and variety of those ties from empirical research. Researchers have identified these ties with a variety of terms, including “transnational migrant circuits,” “transnational communities,” and “dense networks across political borders.” The limitations of these concepts in capturing the full variety of transnational ties have led Glick Schiller and her associates to adopt the more inclusive term “transnational social field” in order to encompass the full range of social, economic, and political processes in which transnational populations are embedded (Glick Schiller et al. 1992b). Further, in the absence of empirical research that might indicate what proportion of international migrants create or live within transnational social fields, the full extent and impact of transnational migration is difficult to assess.

Glick Schiller addresses two fundamental questions about transnational migration: first, whether it is a new form of human settlement or a new analytical paradigm; and second, what is the relationship between transnational migration and nation-states? Tracing the relationship of migrants and the United States through three stages, Glick Schiller concludes that migrants have been involved in transnational activities at least since the end of the nineteenth century and that these activities have been closely linked with the creation and development of nation-states. In each stage, she finds, transmigrants took different roles in the nation-state-building projects of their home and host countries as they adapted to evolving processes of global capital accumulation. Such ties were sustained even when the “triumph of nation-state ideology” made them “invisible” to social scientists during the post–World War II period.

If transnational migration has been happening for a long time, why is it only now becoming recognized and defined by scholars and political leaders? Glick Schiller suggests that transnational migration was not recognized as such until recent transformations of the relations between states and the global economy made the transnational activities of migrants of interest to both political actors and researchers. Glick Schiller concludes that transnational migrants do not signify a weakening of the authority or significance of states, as claimed by some analysts, but rather “have been and continue to be important to the construction and imagining of states . . . and legitimate nation-state-building processes.” Rather than celebrate transnational migration for supposedly eroding state hegemony, she adds, scholars have a responsibility to “think our way out of our entanglement within and our commitment to our national narratives” that today are linked to the construction of transnational and multicultural nation-states and sustain the inequalities of capitalism.

In documenting how transmigrants’ social fields have been “shaped and transformed by nation-state-building in both sending and receiving states,” Glick Schiller has also sought to explain why migrants decide to establish and maintain lives in two or more countries. Her considerations connect a transnational perspective to discussions of economic, racial, and gendered aspects of immigrant incorporation that are taken up in parts II and III of this volume. “Grim living and working conditions” and the “racialized politics of incorporation,” more than patriotism, says Glick Schiller, led turn-of-the-century migrants to “keep a foothold back home” and to participate in transnational political activities. Today, she contends, migrants are motivated to establish transnational ties by economic conditions similar to those of the past and by the racialization of their identities (for example, as Asian, Hispanic, or black), which threatens to place them at the bottom of the U.S. social hierarchy. But, she adds, well-incorporated and prosperous migrants have also built transnational networks when doing so has enabled them to achieve or maintain status back home, though with differential rewards for men and women.

In her chapter “The Role of Gender, Households, and Social Networks in the Migration Process,” Patricia Pessor evaluates the contribution that research on households and networks has made to theoretical explanations of international migration. The broader contribution of such “mediating units” of analysis has been to help social scientists analyze the relation between structure and agency on global and local levels. But, she contends, the explanatory power of these theoretical perspectives can be enhanced by their reconfiguration with regard to gender.

In Pessor’s view, studies of households and social networks have enabled social scientists to explore the role of “contingent agency” in understanding linkages between the extremes of structural determinism and pure choice. In responding to the macrostructural transformations that are understood to create migration pressures, households and social networks can be seen to guide and constrain the decisions of individuals and determine who actually migrates and who does not.
Research focused on these issues has enabled scholars to analyze how "the local" is in a constant state of resistance and accommodation to "the global." Pessar identifies a number of ways in which this mediating perspective has been incorporated into and contributed to the development and refinement of new economics, network, structural, and transnational theories of international migration.

Pessar explores the contributions that a "gendered perspective" makes not only to advancing understandings of households and networks but also to migration theory. Examining the different and often conflicting experiences of men and women, she argues, has enabled scholars to critique earlier and seemingly idealized notions of immigrant households as being based on egalitarian "moral economies" and as unconstrained in maximizing economic gains in adapting to structural inequities. In fact, continuing research has shown that migrant households are also divided by power hierarchies, disciplined by kinship, gender, and class ideologies, and riven by government legislation and policies. Similarly, recent research demonstrates that, in the context of patriarchal family norms, men and women even in the same families may be permitted unequal access to social networks. Further, migrants once assumed to be benevolently assisting one another have been found to have imposed exploitative relations that resulted in the subordination of women—reflected, for example, in the lower income of women compared to that of men within immigrant enclaves. But engendering migration studies, Pessar recognizes, will require going beyond the earlier focus on the gender-based experiences of women to include those of men and to examine the impact that migration has on relationships between men and women.

After reviewing recent research literature, Pessar concludes that despite high expectations based in early feminist theory that immigration would motivate women to seek greater emancipation, in fact their modest gains have only "nibbled at the margins of patriarchy." These findings have led Pessar to abandon the view of immigrants, based in feminist theory, that gender hierarchy is the most determinative structure in their lives. Immigrant families, she explains, are buffeted by external forces and injustices linked to class, race, ethnicity, and legal status that make poor immigrant women unwilling "to lose the benefits derived from some patriarchal marital unions" and anxious "to defend and hold together the family while attempting to reform the norms and practices that subordinate them." Faced with similar discrimination, if not threats of economic deprivation, upwardly mobile women hold on to "a more enduring and apparently valued notion of the family and the sexes that features the successful man as the sole breadwinner and the successful woman as the guardian of a unified household." In other words, studies of immigrants reveal that their "unilinear and unproblematic progression from patriarchy to parity is by no means assured."

Although household and network analyses have gained respect in migration studies, Pessar concludes that "the analytic power of these constructs might prove even greater ... if researchers would recognize that gender organizes both the composition and organization of migrant households and social networks, and that gender also infuses the cultural, social, and political-economic forces acting on both structures." Now that migration scholars have overcome an earlier male bias, she says, "we are moving toward a more fully engendered understanding of the migration process."

But in doing so, gender must not be assigned too much weight. "Rather, we must develop theories and analytical frameworks that allow us to capture and compare the simultaneity of the impact of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class, and legal status on the lives of different immigrants."

**THEORY AND RESEARCH**

The contribution of these chapters to the intellectual coherence of the field of international migration studies will come no doubt from the clarity of their critical syntheses and analytical reconceptualizations of immigration theory and the implications of their perspectives with regard to immigrant incorporation. But the persuasiveness of their views will also depend on the guidance they provide to, and the reconfirmation or disconfirmation that they receive from, empirical research.

In his essay, Alejandro Portes describes what he sees as "common pitfalls" regarding the development of theory, characterizes the intellectual building blocks of theoretical propositions, and illustrates what he sees as their proper application in analysis and explanation. Extending this discussion, he then describes a "sampler" of topics for a future research agenda that he believes could advance the field's theoretical development. Portes uses a discussion of "misunderstandings about the ways that we go about developing theory" to pro-
provide a clear description of the conceptual building blocks that together constitute theory. These intellectual constituents include delimiting a topic, identifying what aspect of the topic is to be explained, positing explanatory factors, and linking the theory with other similar propositions. To provide illustrative examples of the components of theory, Portes draws on the results of research about immigration to the United States, ranging from descriptive case studies and empirical generalizations to typologies of similarities and differences and predictive statements. Portes reserves the label of theory for "those interrelated sets of propositions that not only 'travel' in the sense of being applicable to different spatial and temporal contexts but also tell a coherent story about certain finite aspects of reality."

In describing the nature and fundamental components of theory, Portes touches on but does not address directly the analytical process by which scholars' understandings progress from basic concepts of empirical reality to more abstract and generalized explanatory understandings. Theory building is integrally tied to research that can contribute to new ideas through inductive generalization leading to new propositions or through deductively designed tests of existing propositions. Yet such intellectual processes are rarely so simple, because the development of ideas that become theories also takes place through the influence and assimilation of positions taken in debates between scholars about one another's research methods, findings, and interpretations. Examples of this complex relationship between research and theory building are provided by the chapters in part I.

The basis of Massey's theoretical synthesis in empirical research provides a model for evaluating and linking theoretical propositions. By employing a common statistical test to correlate empirical research findings with causal factors emphasized in different theories, Massey identified the contributions of each theory as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. This method is based on a debatable epistemological assumption that the analytical concepts constituting different theoretical paradigms, which have been developed in relation to the historical, ethnographic, and survey research methods emphasized differently within each social science discipline, can be translated into factors susceptible to statistical analysis. Massey's synthesis would seem to present a challenge to Portes's contention that micro- and macrolevel theories are not "fungible."

The persuasiveness of Zolberg's argument that "states matter" is based on a theoretical synthesis of structuralist economic and political perspectives that rest on historical examples and international comparisons not easily reduced to factors susceptible to statistical analysis. Could his argument be incorporated into Massey's synthetic approach, or are their theoretical perspectives, as well as their differences regarding the importance of state controls, epistemologically distinct? Zolberg suggests a method of determining the impact of states on international migration by measuring the ratio of potential to actual emigrants. Although such factors may be conceptually consistent with Massey's approach to synthetic analysis, Zolberg points out that these numbers would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to determine through empirical research.

Glick Schiller claims that, within a transnational perspective, "the study of international migration becomes transformed into research into conditions under which migration becomes and is sustained as a transnational process." The extent to which this conception of international migration will actually transform the field depends not only on its analytical contributions, such as the connections that this chapter makes between migrant and state transnational activities, but also on the proportion of international migrants whom research shows to be transmigrants, as opposed to immigrants, in both first and subsequent generations. For example, does the "invisibility" of immigrants' transnational ties in the post-World War II period reflect only the dominance of nation-state ideology, as Glick Schiller argues, or could it also be a result of the severing of homeland ties among a growing proportion of second- and third-generation immigrants as they assimilated into American society? The extent to which scholars reconceive of immigrants as transmigrants will probably be determined by future research findings regarding the breadth and persistence of international migrants' transnational ties.

Pessar's argument that engendering migration and incorporation theory enhances its explanatory power would seem to be a proposition whose pay-off will be demonstrated through new research findings and interpretations. To the extent, however, that engendered studies focus on patriarchy and, like feminist perspectives, are oriented by the goal of women's emancipation, such studies, and their explanatory power, may have limited appeal to some male scholars in the field. In this case, the influence of a gendered perspective on the field will probably be affected by the gender of the scholars as well as by findings regarding the migrants whom they study.
THEORY AND RESEARCH IN DEFINING THE FIELD OF IMMIGRATION STUDIES

Consistent with his point that topics central to immigration studies require the separate attention of midrange theory, Portes proposes particular topics for future research that have implications for the field as a whole: households and gender, the new second generation, states and state systems, transnational communities, and cross-national comparisons. In the context of describing the importance of research that focuses on units on a higher level of social organization than individuals, such as households, Portes echoes Pessar’s call for engendering immigration studies. He describes gender as a “master dimension of social structure,” one that can produce novel insights when applied not only to households but also to other immigration phenomena. A similar recasting of research and analysis must take place when researchers shift their focus from first-generation immigrants to their children, who grow up and become part of American life with backgrounds, interests, and opportunities that may differ from those of their parents.

Portes’s discussions of transnational communities and states point to the advantages of placing U.S. immigration in a wider international context. Understanding immigrants’ transnational ties can shed light on processes and the extent to which they become incorporated into American economic, social, and political life. Domestic incorporation must be viewed as an international process that extends research and theory beyond the traditionally national borders of immigration studies. Comparing U.S. immigration policies with those of other advanced industrial countries, for example, points to similarities and differences that might otherwise seem idiosyncratic to the United States and of limited theoretical import. (For example, why, in the face of widespread public opposition, are governments in receiving countries unable or unwilling to prevent large-scale immigration? Why does immigration legislation often have consequences that are unintended and contrary to their purpose?) Finally, Portes proposes that placing each of these proposed research topics into an international comparative perspective will contribute to the construction of “concepts and propositions of broader scope” and to understanding “how the specific characteristics of national societies condition the validity of the set of midrange theories that structure the field of immigration.”

A comparative perspective focusing on international migration would be broader than the primary focus on U.S. immigration in this volume. That few of the chapters take up international comparisons reflects the decision by members of the Social Science Research Council’s Committee on International Migration to take stock of the theoretical coherence of U.S. immigration studies—an undertaking complex and demanding in and of itself—before venturing further afield to develop a wider international or global perspective. There was no doubt that theoretical understandings of U.S. immigration would benefit both from making comparisons between countries and from looking at migrant flows between countries and regions as components of a worldwide migratory system. The assessment of U.S. immigration studies provided in this volume, the committee expected, would provide an intellectual basis for pursuing wider international and global perspectives in the future.

Charles Hirschman’s essay on “Theories of International Migration and Immigration,” which concludes part I, offers a complementary point of view regarding not only the relationship between theory and research but also the contribution that the essays in this volume make to immigration as a field of study. Reviewing four “ideal types” of theory, he proposes that “understanding the elements of theory construction can, along with substantive knowledge and some inspired thinking, sometimes lead to the greater integration of knowledge and interpretive frameworks that stimulate cumulative empirical research.” His discussion of the first type of theory, “social science as ideology,” touches on the uneasy relationship between theoretical research and public policy. He describes the separation that immigration scholars have sought to place between social science theory and policy since early in the century, when policymakers used social science research to justify restrictive immigration legislation; this boundary is drawn by focusing on explanations of, rather than prescriptions for, immigration problems. The other three aspects of theory that Hirschman discusses are related to the contributions that research can make to the explanatory goals of the social sciences: going beyond the accumulation of facts to arrive at wider understandings, establishing the superiority of one theory over another by building on “normal science,” and developing models that can represent the complexities of society beyond the limitations of midrange theory.

Hirschman’s point with regard to ideology is
not that all bias—the personal and social interests that frame research questions and answers—can be eliminated, but rather that distortions from narrow interests can be checked by the social sciences "as a public forum where ideas, evidence, and interpretations are presented for other scientists to review and challenge." Despite a separation of social science explanation from national policy making, one of the most powerful social biases in the study of immigration—one that Hirschman does not particularly pursue—comes from the dominance of a nation-state perspective. The most obvious nation-state influence on understandings of international migration is the categorical separation of immigration from other types of migration, including domestic migration and forced immigration.

Although similarities and direct connections exist between domestic and international migration, U.S. immigration has been studied in isolation from the "Great Migration" of African Americans from the South to the North and the migration of Puerto Ricans to mainland urban centers. U.S. internal migration and immigration studies now constitute "different literatures" and are pursued, for the most part, by different sets of scholars.

State administrative practices, more than the analytic goals of social science, shape the categories of international migrants that are the focus of immigration research. The study of refugees and other forced migrants is generally separated from studies of immigration. Is this not in large measure because nation-states treat the two groups according to different sets of laws, a legal rather than theoretical distinction between "economic" and "political" migrants that reflects the U.S. government's distinct foreign policy toward immigrant- and refugee-sending nations? State categories are similarly embedded in the data on which social scientists depend for their research about U.S. immigration, such as the U.S. census and the reports of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). To what extent does the fact that, for constitutional reasons, neither the U.S. census nor the INS report immigrants' religious affiliations account for the neglect of research about the role that religion plays in the social incorporation of immigrants and the omission of this topic from the essays in this book? Why are the flows not only of refugees but also of nonimmigrant business men and women, foreign students, and tourists omitted from international migration studies if not, in part, because states' interests, more than social science explanations, place them in separate visa categories and distinguish them in legal status from citizens and permanent residents?

The point here is not that the nation-state bias that shapes immigration studies should be eliminated. After all, the crossing of state borders, the sovereign role of states in seeking to control people who do, and differences in political rights and obligations between immigrants, permanent residents, and citizens are essential facts of modern life that in and of themselves demand empirical recognition in the data collected and in theoretical explanation. Nation-states make the distinctions between different forms of migration significant, and recognition of that influence needs to be part of theoretical explanations of immigration. Nevertheless, in drawing boundaries that define immigration studies as a field of the social sciences, the similarities and differences between domestic, international, refugee, transnational, and other forms of migration also need to be defined and recognized, as does the role of the international system of states in shaping them, in order for social scientists to arrive at broader and more powerful theoretical explanations of immigration. The calls by Portes and Hirschman for the field of immigration studies to develop an international comparative perspective and to recognize the ideological biases that frame research challenge social scientists to extend the development of theoretical explanation to include migration both within and beyond national borders—a challenge not taken up by this volume.

In sum, the contribution that the chapters of part I make to the unity and cohesion of the immigration and international migration studies will depend not only on the intellectual synthesizes and reconceptualizations that they make of different theoretical propositions but also on the confirmation of their explanatory significance in research. But theory and research will increase field coherence, these chapters suggest, not by leading toward the encompassing uniformity suggested by the notion of a grand theory, but rather by continuing to engage social scientists of diverse disciplines and perspectives in a variety of intellectual relationships that raise new questions, clarify issues, and stimulate new debates. Ultimately it will be the theoretical engagement of scholars, such as that in part I of this volume, that will define and constitute immigration studies as an interdisciplinary subfield of the study of migration within the social sciences.
Part II

Immigrant Adaptation, Assimilation, and Incorporation

What happens to immigrants and how do they and their children become part of American life? These are the questions that motivate the chapters in part II of this volume. The fundamental concept in the field is assimilation, but it has hardly been a unifying concept. Indeed, the debates over assimilation theory sometimes obscure the many common points of reference for researchers in the field. And as immigration to America has shifted from primarily European roots to more diverse geographical origins, immigration scholarship has increasingly drawn from a broader range of alternative theories and models—from race and ethnic studies in particular. The consequence has been the creation of a more diffuse and eclectic field of immigration studies than was the case during the first half of the twentieth century.

In the earlier era, immigration research not only focused on European immigrants and their children but usually carried the assumption that immigrants could only move up the socioeconomic ladder through acceptance and adoption of Anglo-American middle-class cultural and social standards. In the contemporary research literature, however, there is a greater recognition that American society no longer has a single core culture and that immigrants encounter a much more diverse society. The shift in vocabulary from research on “assimilation” to immigrant adaptation and incorporation reflects these changes in perspective. The key ideas of both the old and new research literatures on immigrant adaptation, assimilation, and incorporation are reviewed and analyzed in the essays in part II.

In their essays, the authors reexamine the core concepts and theories that have shaped the study of immigrants in American society—past and present. Although there is no consensus on a single paradigm or model for the field, there is a remarkable dialogue from one essay to another, especially in comparing the experiences of early-twentieth-century immigrants with the post-1965 immigrant stream. Questions about history are central to contemporary research since almost every researcher, implicitly if not explicitly, frames the present as a contrast with earlier times.

In the first essay in part II, Richard Alba and Victor Nee reassess the state of assimilation theory, beginning with an insightful comparison of Milton Gordon’s *Assimilation in American Life* (1964) and Tamotsu Shibutani and Kian Kwan’s *Ethnic Stratification* (1965). Alba and Nee laud Gordon’s contribution of conceptual clarification but lament the absence of a comprehensive statement of a causal theory in his book. Reading Shibutani and Kwan’s work, Alba and Nee point to the possibility of an ecological theory of ethnic change that emphasizes changes in technology, economic institutions, social movements, and new ideas as forces that can change the balance between majority and minority groups. Nevertheless, generating specific and testable hypotheses on ethnic change from these very broad and general institutions and social conditions is sure to be a major challenge.

Alba and Nee assess the state of empirical research and conclude that assimilation has been the master trend among the descendants of European immigrants who arrived during the era of mass immigration (roughly from 1880 to 1924). In support of this conclusion, Alba and Nee note trends in the reduction of socioeconomic inequality and in increasing levels of intermarriage across white ethnic groups over the last half-century. For the post-1965 immigrants and their children, Alba and Nee see many parallels with the past but caution that it is too soon to draw strong conclusions.
about the eventual fate of the new immigrants to America.

Several of the subsequent chapters also address the uncertainty and debates over comparisons between the descendants of the immigrants from the era of mass European immigration and the experiences of recent immigrants and their children. Herbert Gans notes that many of the classic studies of European immigrant communities were based on the second generation and conducted by "outsiders" who emphasized evidence of strong and rapid acculturation. Much of the research on the contemporary period focuses on the recently arrived first generation and is often conducted by "insiders" from within the ethnic or immigrant community who may be more observant of the social and cultural barriers encountered by immigrants and their children.

The most compelling theoretical account of how and why the new second generation might not follow the path of earlier waves of immigrants is the "segmented assimilation hypothesis." In her chapter, Min Zhou reviews the central elements of this hypothesis and the relevant literature pointing to the increasing socioeconomic diversity within and between new immigrant groups. According to the segmented assimilation hypothesis, there are three potential trajectories of second-generation adaptation. The first trajectory is the traditional path of acculturation and upward mobility by the second generation into middle-class American society and culture. This path is often facilitated by the relative economic success of the immigrant generation. The second trajectory is acculturation into the underclass of American minorities in the inner cities. Second-generation youth in this group adopt "oppositional" attitudes to middle-class society and do not aspire to upward mobility (see also Gans 1992a). The third trajectory is retention by immigrant families of their ethnic culture and identity to protect their children from assimilation into an inner-city culture that may lead to downward mobility. According to the theory, the second generation in this trajectory will aspire to be educationally and economically upwardly mobile but to retain their ethnic culture. This provocative theory has attracted considerable interest, but the empirical evidence is mixed. Most members of the second generation of the post-1965 immigrant wave are still too young to provide a sufficient empirical base for detailed analysis.

Joel Perlmann and Roger Waldinger review the literature on European immigrants and their children during the first half of the twentieth century and conclude that there is probably much more continuity in the experiences of immigrants than might be assumed by some of the pessimistic accounts of the present era. Indeed, they observe that the diversity of socioeconomic outcomes among contemporary immigrants and their children may well be an improvement over the overwhelmingly proletarian lives experienced by most of the immigrant groups of 1890 to 1920. Perlmann and Waldinger also provide the important reminder that many European immigrant groups were often seen as nonwhites in the early twentieth century and that upward mobility was a long and slow process that may have taken two or three generations.

Rubén Rumbaut discusses several anomalies in the study of assimilation. He reports on recent research into several dimensions of immigrant outcomes—including health status and ethnic identity—that shows results opposite to what might be predicted from conventional assimilation theory. On the other hand, he finds, there is considerable evidence for linguistic assimilation: English fluency is all but universal for the second generation, a finding that is confirmed by David López’s fine survey of immigrant and ethnic adaptation in southern California.

Marta Tienda and Rebeca Rajman cogently survey the complex array of social forces and conditions, including the political and economic context of reception, that shape the economic outcomes of contemporary immigrants. Their essay highlights several potential avenues for the refinement of assimilation theory. Although "time in the system" may well be correlated with outcomes, including economic advancement, there is a need to specify proximate conditions, historical eras, and the attributes of immigration flows as explanatory variables in the process. One of the most important, and neglected, topics in the study of assimilation and adaptation is the immigrant family. In her chapter, Nancy Foner provides an insightful overview of the cultural and structural dimensions of immigrant family life. Immigrant families often provide the necessary resources to launch the second generation on their path of socioeconomic mobility.

**The Ambiguity of Assimilation**

There are few words in contemporary academic social science that arouse more negative valence than **assimilation**. It was not always this way. In-
Indeed, assimilation has historically been one of the foundational and far-reaching concepts in American social science. Robert Park and Ernest Burgess, who defined the emerging discipline of sociology with their textbook *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1969), first published in 1921, offered a more sophisticated perspective on assimilation than has been evident in many popular and academic discussions—then or now. Assimilation, defined by Park and Burgess (1921/1969, 360) as the sharing of a common historical memory and cultural life by different peoples, was posited to be the likely outcome in the long run, perhaps the very long run. Park and Burgess did not claim that ethnic assimilation was just around the corner. In the short to medium term, the more likely pattern was accommodation, which was an organization of social relations to control conflict and competition (between groups) in order for society to function.

One of the important traditions of the "Chicago School" of sociology, of which Park was a central intellectual leader, was the study of Chicago. Indeed, the city became the social laboratory for much of early American sociological research. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Chicago was a polyglot city with a bewildering diversity of ethnic and immigrant neighborhoods that showed few signs of assimilation. The vision of Park and Burgess was to be able to see beyond the intense degree of intergroup separateness fostered by different languages, churches, ethnic newspapers, and local organizations and to identify the forces that would eventually lead to change. Their primary thesis was that social interaction in primary group settings could erode cultural differences among populations.

Assimilation naturally takes place most rapidly where contacts are primary, that is, where they are most intimate and intense, as in the area of close relationship, in the family circle, and in intimate congenial groups. Secondary contacts facilitate accommodations, but do not greatly promote assimilation. The contacts here are external and remote. (1921/1969, 361–62)

It is interesting to note that the Park and Burgess assimilation hypothesis was framed entirely within a scholarly, almost antiseptically scientific, discourse without any reference to the virulent debates over Americanization campaigns and immigration restrictions and the other political and intellectual battles that raged in the early decades of the twentieth century. The analytical insights of Park and Burgess offered a vision of the promise of social science to understand the long-term processes that underpin complex industrial societies—almost the opposite of the frequently heard claim that assimilation theory was part of a societal conspiracy to force immigrants to abandon the cultures and customs of their homelands. Alba and Nee's essay provides a valuable clarification of the early Park and Burgess statements on assimilation.

The ambiguity of the concept of assimilation was simultaneously its major virtue and its central liability. The simple idea that different groups (immigrants and natives) might become more similar over time (across generations) provided a clear direction for empirical research on immigrants and their descendants. The concept provided no clear specification, however, of how the varied dimensions of assimilation (or non-assimilation) were linked to each other, nor was it supported by a fully developed theory of the social conditions that promote (or retard) assimilation of whatever type.

Gordon (1964) provides a cogent statement on the separate dimensions of assimilation with a compelling argument that these dimensions do not always move along the same historical path. Gordon claimed that primary group interaction (structural assimilation) is the linchpin that leads to assimilation in other dimensions. (This is pretty much the essence of the Park and Burgess thesis.) Beyond noting that ethnic prejudice and class divisions were major impediments, Gordon did not provide a general theoretical statement on the conditions that might lead to primary group interactions between the descendants of immigrants and the native population.

In the 1960s and 1970s the assimilation perspective came under attack for empirical and political reasons. The empirical reasons (to be explored later) were based on the persistent subordination of some groups, African Americans in particular. The most visible critique was Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1970), which concluded that ethnicity remained an important point of reference for urban politics. Since assimilation research lacked a theory that could account for anomalous findings, the simple evidence of any remaining intergroup differences could be taken as prima facie evidence that the theory was proven incorrect.

Probably more important in the long run was the political attack against assimilation in an era (the 1960s and 1970s) that rebelled against the politics of conformity and celebrated differences. Some scholars and many students assumed that the sociological hypothesis of assimilation was part
and parcel of the majority group’s disparagement of the unique contributions of minorities and immigrants. In the past there had been a strong dose of nativism in American society, and some leading academics had been allies of the anti-immigrant forces in American intellectual and political life in the early decades of the century. There were, however, few obvious connections between the nativist intellectuals of this earlier era and the academic scholars who conducted research within the general assimilation framework in the post–World War II era.

In retrospect, it seems that provocative ideas without deep theoretical roots, such as assimilation, can be uncritically accepted and used to organize empirical research, but they can also be too easily and uncritically dismissed when intellectual and social fashions shift. Since the concept of assimilation is multidimensional, has many empirical referents, and was not linked to a clearly defined theory, there has been considerable room for ideology and fashion to shape the academic understanding and use of the concept.

**Immigrants and Socioeconomic Mobility in the United States**

For most of its early history, the United States was a frontier society with more opportunities than people. These conditions attracted, induced, and compelled millions of immigrants, indentured servants, and slaves to make the voyage to North America from the seventeenth through the mid-nineteenth century. The ending of the frontier in the late nineteenth century coincided with the rise of the urban-industrial revolution, which fueled an even greater demand for labor migration. From 1880 to 1920 millions of new immigrants from eastern and southern Europe (and a smaller stream from Asia) changed the ethnic balance in almost every major city (outside of the South) in the United States (Bodnar 1985; Muller 1993).

These geographical and historical conditions that made the United States an immigrant society were not unique in the modern world, but the scale of international migration and the emerging ideology of upward mobility were truly of epic proportions (Handlin 1973; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). The growth of the population of the United States from 4 million in 1790 to 275 million in 2000 has primarily resulted from the influx of more than 62 million immigrants and their descendants (Passel and Edmonston 1994; U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 1997, 27). Moreover, immigrants found that the conditions for socioeconomic mobility were particularly favorable in the United States.

Nonetheless, American society has harbored a persistent fear of immigrants and widespread beliefs that they will not adapt to American society, become American citizens, or adopt local ways (Jones 1960). Part of the fear was simply the rhetoric of nativism. The accompanying beliefs reflect a continuity from the antipathy expressed toward Germans and Scotch-Irish early in the eighteenth century (Lieberson 1996) to the fears of “mengrelization” that greeted the southern and eastern European immigrants in the early twentieth century (Higham 1988) and the fears that contemporary immigration from Latin America and Asia will create an “Alien Nation” (Brimelow 1995).

However, immigrants have “made it” in America. (Indeed, it could be claimed that immigrants have made America, but that is another story.) Although some Americans of European heritage may still be sentimentally attached to their ancestral place of origin—“symbolic ethnicity” (Gans 1979), most of them are virtually indistinguishable on most economic and social criteria. This conclusion is based on empirical research showing convergence in socioeconomic status, life chances, residential integration, and intermarriage between the descendants of European immigrants and “old-stock” Americans (Alba and Golden 1986; Duncan and Duncan 1968; Hirschman 1983; Lieberson and Waters 1988; Neidert and Farley 1985; Smith and Edmonston 1997, ch. 8). This conclusion is one of the “established facts” in the research literature and is reported in several of the chapters in this volume.

What is less conclusive is the evidence on the progress of racial minorities, and African Americans in particular. Although there has been a decisive shift away from the “apartheid” structure of state-mandated segregation (or “herrenvolk democracy”; see van den Berghe 1967) that prevailed in the United States prior to the civil rights era, the socioeconomic gains of black Americans have lagged far behind those of white ethnic groups. Although African Americans and most Latinos are not “immigrants” in the conventional sense, the comparison of immigrants and minority groups with native whites has been a common theme of much of the earlier literature of assimilation as well as the newer literature on ethnic diversity in America. In some popular accounts, all “persons of color” are considered disadvantaged
because of current or past discrimination, but most studies show that blacks and American Indians encounter greater disadvantages than other groups (Hirschman 1983; Snipp 1989).

Stanley Lieberson’s classic A Piece of the Pie: Black and White Immigrants Since 1880 (1980) showed that the socioeconomic progress of African Americans in northern cities slowed (or stopped entirely) in the 1920s and 1930s as the second generation of southern, eastern, and central European immigrant groups were closing the socioeconomic gap with native-born white Americans. Although there has been some narrowing of the gap from the 1940s to the 1980s, blacks remain profoundly unequal in almost every dimension (Duncan 1969; Parley and Allen 1987; Jaynes and Williams 1989; Massey and Denton 1993; Wilson 1987).

The situations of Asian Americans and Hispanics do not fit neatly into either model: the gradual assimilation of European ethnics or the persistent disadvantage of African Americans. Historically, they were disadvantaged racial minorities, but self-employment and education, especially higher education, has been a greater channel of social and spatial mobility for Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans than for African Americans (Barringer, Gardner, and Levin 1993; Bean and Tienda 1988; Featherman and Hauser 1978, ch. 8; Hirschman and Wong 1984; Light 1984). Mexican Americans face a critical educational deficit, and some recent Asian immigrants are trapped in low-wage sectors of the economy, but for those with higher education, there seem to be much greater opportunities for economic mobility as well as higher rates of intermarriage and residence in integrated neighborhoods (Parley 1996; Frey 1995a; Harrison and Bennett 1995; Massey and Denton 1992).

There is still much uncertainty about the eventual socioeconomic position of the post-1965 immigrants and their children (Chiswick and Sullivan 1995; Hirschman 1996; Massey 1995). Min Zhou reviews the segmented assimilation hypothesis, which suggests the possibility of downward mobility for the second generation of some new immigrant groups. Joel Perlmann and Roger Waldinger, however, are skeptical of this interpretation and see more similarities than differences in the life chances of the contemporary second generation and those of the early-twentieth-century second generation. Tienda and Rajman’s finely gauged review points to increasing heterogeneity among recent immigrants: “For Asian, African, and other highly educated groups, the future looks bright; for Central and South American immigrants, and Mexicans in particular, the future looks bleak.” Tienda and Rajman also emphasize the importance of U.S. receptivity on the progress of immigrants; the increasing wage differentiation by skills in the U.S. labor market penalizes all lowly educated workers, including a disproportionate number of immigrants.

INTEGRATION AND MULTICULTURALISM

In most societies with long-standing cultural divisions, there are parallel ethnic societies with cultural divisions reinforced by geography, employment, family and kinship organization, and other institutional networks. Although there may be some institutional spheres in which there is common participation (for example, the market economy), cultural differences usually require separate institutional frameworks if they are to persist across generations. A close look at most multiethnic societies around the globe reveals that regional concentrations and separate economic spheres (sometimes enforced barriers) reinforce historical ethnic divisions in politics, language, and culture (Horowitz 1985).

The United States and a few other settler societies have had a different history, one characterized by ethnic mixing and cultural blending among immigrants from European origins (Dinnerstein and Reimers 1987; Lieberson and Waters 1988). It is not that Americans are more tolerant or open-minded than other peoples, but simply that the frontier, the factory, and labor demand, in general, have pulled migrants from different origins and cultures into common settings and neighborhoods. These common environments create possibilities for interethnic contact and exchange and common socializing experiences. Over the long haul these new settings have broken down some, but not all, of the initial cultural divisions among newcomers, and especially for their descendants in American society.

Although this scenario captures some of the essential aspects of the American immigrant experience, there are some important exceptions and qualifications. Most important, non-white immigrant minorities have almost always faced color bars of one sort or another. Second, this is a long-term process: it occurs over the course of two or three generations. In the short to medium term, many immigrants settle in neighborhoods where fellow kinsmen already live, prefer to socialize with
persons who share a common language and herit-
age, and often find employment through ethnic
networks. Although some immigrants move easily
in the broader society, it is generally the children
of immigrants who acquire language fluency and
develop new aspirations for economic mobility in-
dependent of their ethnic roots (Lieberson 1996).

Many natives see, however, the contingency of
ethnic concentrations in certain neighborhoods;
the intergenerational dynamics of socioeconomic
mobility and cultural absorption are less visible. If
immigration continues at moderate levels, ethnic
neighborhoods can be maintained almost perma-
nently as the home for the immigrant generation
even if most of the children of prior waves of im-
migrants grow up and leave. Ethnic concentra-
tions can also survive for generations even if only
a relatively small minority of each generation re-
 mains behind.

There are other conditions that can maintain
the primary features of the residential concentra-
tion of the immigrant generation and its dis-
tinctiveness for longer periods of time. Depres-
sions or long periods of slow economic growth
can reduce labor demand in the overall economy
and lead to a piling up of the second generation in
ethnic enclaves and related sectors of self-employ-
ment (Bonacich and Modell 1980). In some set-
tings immigrant groups are incorporated into the
political networks of patronage and redistribution
if ethnic leaders can deliver voting blocs (Glazer
and Moynihan 1970). Other institutions, churches,
unions, and voluntary associations concerned with
ethnic celebrations can also help to keep alive the
vestiges of ethnic distinctiveness. Finally, hostility
from the external community, rather than internal
pulls of ethnic solidarity, can enforce segregation
and other barriers. More than any immigrant
group, African Americans have suffered from the
last obstacle (Massey and Denton 1993).

These processes are intergenerational and, like
the glacier that moves only a few inches every year,
may well be largely invisible to contemporary ob-
servers. It is only by following the time line of de-
cades or generations, and by following immigrant
generations (not the community as a whole), that
integrative processes can be observed. In the
meantime, it is common for members of the im-
migrant community and those on the outside to
emphasize the cross-sectional differences in culture
and inequality.

These long-term dynamics of ethnic change are
usually missed in debates over multiculturalism.
Those with an investment in ethnic distinctiveness
imagine that cultural pluralism is a viable option in
a society in which there are neither wide socio-
economic differences by ethnicity nor ethnic bar-
riers to geographic or social mobility (Kallen
1924). On the opposite side are those who fear
that open recognition of multiple ethnic cultures in
schools or other settings will lead to social frag-
mentation (Schlesinger 1991). Both sides of this
debate assume that current differences in lan-
guage, civic values, food preferences, music, and
other cultural traits can be maintained indefinitely
in an open society in which individuals have fre-
dom about where to live, whom to marry, and
where to work.

Cultural differences can be transmitted across
generations, however, only if ethnic groups live in
different neighborhoods, attend separate schools,
and have different socioeconomic life chances. Al-
though some religious communities may be ex-
ceptional, most white immigrant or ethnic groups
in the United States have found that the second
and third generations retain little more than sym-
bolic attachments to their ancestral origins (Alba
1990; Waters 1990). For some groups of recent
immigrants (and long-resident minorities), how-
ever, ethnic identity is not optional because of
their race or national origins. Whether these
groups will eventually have greater freedom and
be able to exercise optional ethnicity is a question
of great significance.

THE MEASUREMENT OF RACE AND
ETHNICITY AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY

The popular belief in the United States (and in
many other societies) is that every person has a
racial or ethnic identity that can be defined by de-
scent or origin. In everyday interactions, there are
some cues, such as physical appearance, dress, sur-
name, and speech, that may help to identify the
ethnic identity of persons who do not already
know each other. In many situations, however,
these cues may be inadequate or misleading, either
because some individuals do not fit the expected
ethnic stereotypes or because ethnic identities in
general have become blurred beyond the point of
social recognition.

Social science research on race and ethnicity
faces the same problem of sorting people into cat-
ergories, but with the advantage of responses to di-
rect questions from each person on their racial or
ethnic identity (for an overview, see McKenney and Cresce 1993). In U.S. censuses, two measures have been widely used for this purpose. The first is “race”—a relic of nineteenth-century biological classification, but still one of the core census items. Originally, the race question in the census was used to identify blacks, American Indians, and whites. But over the years a number of additional race categories were added, including a number of Asian national-origin groups such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and many more. The other census item was the birthplace of the respondent and the birthplace of the respondent’s parents. The questions on birthplace allow for the tracking of the first and second generations, but the grandchildren of immigrants were “lost” into the residual category of “native-born of native parentage.”

Because of the interest in tracking those ethnic groups not defined by the race question beyond the second generation, and because of the nature of ethnic politics in America, additional questions on Hispanic identity and ancestry have been included in recent censuses (Choldin 1986). The Hispanic question, first added in the 1970 census, is intended to identify persons of Latin American or other Spanish-language origin. In the 1980 census, a new question on ancestry or ethnic origins was added, but the historical questions on the country of birth of the respondent’s mother and father were dropped. Although the richness of these new questions might be considered a major stimulus research on race and ethnicity, it has unexpectedly created a crisis of sorts: the ambiguity and uncertainty of the measurement (and the meaning) of racial and ethnic classifications that were partially disguised with limited data are now painfully evident (Farley 1991).

With a significant and increasing level of intermarriage across racial and ethnic divisions, the assumption of race and ethnicity as ascribed statuses is no longer tenable. The ethnic identity of the offspring of these unions often does not fit neatly into the standard census categories (Xie and Goyette 1997). Comparison of persons along the three dimensions of race, Hispanic origin, and ancestry shows that there are significant numbers of black Hispanics, persons who are white (by race) and American Indian (by ancestry), and other persons of blended and mixed ethnic origins. Although the numbers are not so large as to change the findings based on the conventional ethnic comparisons (del Pinal 1992) and ad hoc rules can be devised to classify inconsistent cases, there is a major crack in the conceptual framework of the mutually exclusive and exhaustive racial and ethnic categories commonly used in research that examines interethnic inequality and change.

A major research issue in the field is whether there has been a narrowing of socioeconomic inequality and cultural differences across immigrant generations and ethnic divisions. If the categories are not consistent over time and persons can change their ethnic identities, or if ethnic identity slips across generations, then the measurement and analysis of ethnic stratification becomes much more complex. The problem is akin to a shift in the boundaries of geographical units or a revision of the occupational classification without a map to translate the old categories into the new system.

The problem is evident in the contentious task of revising “Statistical Directive 15,” the Office of Management and Budget set of rules that define racial and ethnic categories for data collection and presentation by government agencies (Edmonston, Goldstein, and Lott 1996; Lott 1998; Office of Management and Budget 1997a, 1997b). Some groups cannot locate the ethnic identity or race that is the major source of their group identity in any of the census questions (for example, some religious groups). A growing number of persons either do not answer the questions or write in that they are “just Americans.” Some persons who are of mixed ancestry (and their families) insist on having categories that reflect their multiple identities. With classifications that reflect a variety of criteria (physical appearance, language, treaty status, national or regional ancestry) determined solely by individual subjective choice, it is not too surprising that some persons find the questions difficult to answer and that government agencies have difficulty explaining the logic behind them (Perlmutter 1997a).

After deliberate study and efforts to bring representative stakeholders into the process, the Office of Management and Budget has completed the task of revising Statistical Directive 15, which will govern the collection of data in the 2000 census (Office of Management and Budget 1997b). The major change is the designation of five major race categories (American Indian or Alaskan native, Asian, black or African American, native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and white) and two ethnic categories (“Hispanic or Latino” and “not Hispanic or Latino”). In the 2000 census, respondents will be able to check that they are members...
of one or more racial categories. In the 1980 and 1990 census question on "ancestry," respondents could write in multiple national-origin responses, but opening up the race question to multiple responses is a dramatic new change in government statistical data collection.

The short-run problem for government statisticians and for researchers will be to handle the complexity of multiple responses on race in addition to the other dimensions of Hispanic origin and ancestry. The analysis of trends over time (or across immigrant generations) in socioeconomic inequality between racial and ethnic populations is enormously complicated when there is individual or group mobility across ethnic lines. In the long run, however, these new data may well recast our thinking about race and ethnic change in America. Intermarriage and identity choice may well become more central questions in studies of ethnic stratification. Although these factors have been important factors in the past, our ability to study the phenomenon has been limited to small-scale studies. With these changes in the measurement of race and ethnicity in census data, we may be able to chart patterns in ethnic change as well as changes in socioeconomic change by ethnicity.

Theories of Change in Integration and Ethnic Stratification

Theories of immigrant progress, and of ethnic stratification more generally, require the identification of social mechanisms that lead to change (or retard change). The so-called straight-line assimilation hypothesis, which is typically presented only as a straw-man thesis to be debunked, posits no independent variables beyond the passing of time leading to inevitable assimilation. If assimilation has not yet occurred (or assimilation of a certain type has not reached a certain benchmark), we cannot be sure whether the theory is wrong or not enough time has passed. In this critical sense, the hypothesis cannot be falsified.

Milton Gordon (1964) posited that participation in primary group relationships with persons from other groups ("the area of touch relationship," in the words of Park and Burgess [1921/1969]) is the key causal mechanism that leads to assimilation in other dimensions. But how and why do ethnic groups come into close contact with others? Do some groups want to become more integrated and others to retain their separate niches and institutions? Or is it the preferences and prejudices of the dominant group that determine who is allowed to move into integrated neighborhoods and social circles? And how can the preferences of both insiders and outsiders change or be changed? A useful theory will try to frame these questions in ways that allow testable hypotheses to be generated.

In their chapter, Alba and Nee note the very important contribution of Shibutani and Kwan's (1965) comparative historical theory of race and ethnic change, which posits the reduction of subjective "social distance" between groups as the key dependent variable. The important independent variables in Shibutani and Kwan's ecological framework are changes in the demographic balance, the introduction of new ideas, and technological change. Another classical hypothesis of ethnic change is drawn from the thesis of industrialism, sometimes known as "modernization" theory (Kerr et al. 1964). The central thesis is that competitive economic pressures, and the search for profit in particular, leads employers to try to hire and promote the most-qualified employees. The desire for the most-qualified employees (an indicator of potential productivity) should override traditional hiring practices based on ascriptive criteria such as family, social class of origin, and ethnic origins.

Many critics discount the modernization hypothesis with the obvious empirical observation that many industrial societies with competitive economies have high levels of racial and ethnic discrimination and segregation in employment (Blumer 1965). It is certainly true that competitive capitalism (as well as other comparable institutional frameworks) is not a sufficient condition to eliminate immediately ethnic divisions in society. Indeed, competitive capitalism, with its search for cheaper labor, may have been an important social force maintaining coercive labor systems, including slavery and indentured labor (Bonacich 1972). But the important issue for the development of social theory is to frame the question, not as one of absolutes, but in terms of a relationship between variables that can be tested with longitudinal data. Instead of assuming that modernization is a ubiquitous global force, it might be more useful to posit that tight labor markets (indexed by low levels of unemployment) in a competitive economy with free labor lead to more rapid economic integration of immigrants and their descendants. This is an exceedingly important hypothesis
that requires more theoretical elaboration and empirical testing.

Another dimension is political incorporation—the absorption of immigrants (and their children) into political participation and thereby using governmental influence to moderate some of the societal discrimination in contemporary societies. If democracy is widened to allow immigrants to vote and engage in politics more generally, office-seekers will be motivated to win their support. Immigrants and other ethnic groups are not monolithic voting blocs, but they often have some common interests in reducing formal barriers to employment, education, and residential mobility.

One plausible interpretation of twentieth-century American politics is that immigrants and minorities played strategic roles in shifting the electoral balance to Franklin Roosevelt in 1932 and to John Kennedy in 1960. In both cases, the political response was to open political doors even wider to groups that had not been particularly welcome before. This opening also stimulated a backlash. Over the last thirty years, the so-called southern strategy has been to woo whites from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party as blacks and other minorities have become increasingly active in the Democratic Party. Although the backlash strategy has been successful, especially in the South, there has been some moderation in the overt antiminority message as blacks have become an important political constituency in many places, including the South.

Over the long term, how does greater political democracy lead to changes in interethic relations and integration? As noted earlier, this is a complex question that requires considerable conceptual clarification before appropriate empirical tests can be designed. If politics becomes an arena for competition between ethnic political parties and social movements, then every societal issue will be framed as a “zero-sum” struggle between mobilized ethnic communities. Political leaders who seek interethic compromises will probably be rejected by their electoral support base as “sellouts.” If, on the other hand, members of an ethnic group are courted by political brokers who wish to build electoral coalitions, it may well be that democratic institutions will become an important force for societal integration.

There are other possibilities for developing social theories and hypotheses to organize research on the fate of immigrants and ethnic groups in contemporary societies. The key is to develop propositions that are general enough to identify the central elements of modern institutional change (economic, political, and social) that are likely to affect the internal dynamics of racial and ethnic groups, as well as the nature of the boundaries between them.

**American Society as an Experiment in Process**

American society has been defined by massive immigration from almost every part of the globe. In addition, the histories of domestic minority populations, including American Indians, African Americans, and Latinos, with native roots have been central to the development of the country. Questions of intergroup relations and ethnic inequality are generally the most salient political issues in American society.

American society is also different from many other societies in that American identity is not defined exclusively in cultural terms. Although the English language and certain political ideals of the early English settlers have special status as the foundations of the society, citizenship and political participation have generally been available to newcomers on relatively egalitarian terms. There are, of course, many raw facts that would challenge this benign interpretation of American society. A short list would include the removal of American Indians from their lands (not once but many times), the enslavement of African Americans until 1863 and the subsequent creation of legalized segregation until the 1960s; the bar against Chinese immigration in 1882; and the national-origin quotas from 1924 to 1965. These historical episodes (and many more could be cited) contradict any claim that American society has treated all racial and ethnic groups equally (Baltzell 1964; Daniels 1991).

Nonetheless, in comparative terms, American society has been more open than many other countries, or at least, it has become more open in terms of immigration laws and citizenship opportunities for those who are allowed to enter. And even if imperfectly practiced, American ideals about individualism, liberty, and equality of justice have become important symbols for immigrant groups and other outsider groups that are trying to make their way into the system and fight discriminatory treatment.
In this sense, American society is an experiment in process. The experience of the massive wave of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe in the early twentieth century and the relatively successful incorporation of their children and grandchildren into the mainstream of American society set the stage of study of contemporary immigration from Asia and Latin America. The chapters that follow wrestle mightily with these issues as they seek to understand whether the course of America's future can be understood through the development of social science theory and the close study of the past.