SUPPORTING COLLEGE STUDENTS OF IMMIGRANT ORIGIN

Over 5 million college students in the United States – nearly one-in-three students currently enrolled – are of immigrant origin, meaning they are either the children of immigrant parents or guardians and/or immigrants themselves. These students accounted for almost 60 percent of the growth in higher-education enrolment in the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, there is very little research dedicated to this student population's specific experiences of postsecondary education, with similar absences discernible within the realms of higher-education policy and practice. Although college campuses are making important progress in building more inclusive spaces, conversations about climate and student care rarely account for the journeys of students of immigrant origin. Featuring twenty chapters written by more than fifty contributors, this book addresses this glaring omission. The authors examine how students of immigrant origin experience the road to, through, and beyond higher education, while, simultaneously, speaking to evidence-based implications for policy, research, and practice.

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SUPPORTING COLLEGE STUDENTS OF IMMIGRANT ORIGIN

New Insights from Research, Policy, and Practice

EDITED BY

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For our students, colleagues, and mentors who are dedicated to supporting and advocating for college students of immigrant origin.

Contents

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-40825-7 — Supporting College Students of Immigrant Origin
New Insights from Research, Policy, and Practice
Edited by Blake R. Silver , Graziella Pagliarulo McCarron
Frontmatter
More Information

Figures

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-40825-7 — Supporting College Students of Immigrant Origin
New Insights from Research, Policy, and Practice
Edited by Blake R. Silver , Graziella Pagliarulo McCarron
Frontmatter
More Information

Tables

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Foreword

David Shuang Song and Brian Cabral

As immigrant-origin scholars, we are intimately familiar with the contradictory appraisals of immigrants in the United States. On one end, immigrants are positioned by American nativists as dangerous outsiders, threatening the livelihood of deserving White citizens. On another end, considering a patriotic inclusion that forges links between European settlers and migrants from multiple historical waves of migrations from other nation-states, the imagined immigrant is valorized and normalized as an American-universal subject, predominantly defined by the contours of specific colonial nation-building projects that produce an imagined singular Americanized population. Apparently, *all* citizens of the United States come from huddled masses. Or as Lin-Manuel Miranda proclaimed, "We immigrants get the job done!" And there is a third perspective, which is also fragile: Immigrants are simultaneously valorized and exceptionalized. This chaos of multiple narratives begins to make sense, however, when we consider not only the United States' organizing settler-colonial history but also its dominant disciplinary scholarship of immigrants.

Westernized scholarly interest in immigrants as an analytical category in the United States is pinpointed to the turn of the twentieth century with the Chicago School of Sociology, which applied a framework of the "melting pot" reliant on assumptions of assimilation into mainstream life in the United States (Gordon, 1964). This melting-pot assimilation was often assumed to require both social and symbolic changes of oneself that reflected rules, values, and practices (the ingredients) that aligned with colonial nation-state formation efforts (the product of the melted ingredients in the pot). This initial approach was continued and expanded with Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou's (1993) concern that some immigrants may assimilate into Whiteness and others into Blackness (referred to as segmented assimilation) and, more recently, with Tomás Jiménez's (2017) "relational assimilation." These perspectives understood various

immigrant groups as undergoing incorporation into the nation-state, even as they prompt native-born citizens to adjust to that incorporation. However, Richard Alba and Victor Nee (2003) argued that assimilation and Americanization processes are not analogous and must be distinguished: Assimilation should be understood as an opt-in process that immigrants participate in for the purpose of improving their and their children's life chances, while the processes of "Americanization" are part of a broader coercive nation-formation project (pp. 281–282): for example, the coerced enrollment of Indigenous youth into boarding schools as an Americanization project. This distinction is important for scholars of immigration, as it draws attention to the violences that underlie, directly or by implication, both processes.

Distinguishing between assimilation and Americanization does not negate the fact that they occur parallel to one another, meaning they are processes that are organized at the macrostructural level and impact immigrant people individually and interpersonally. For example, an Indigenous Mayan from Guatemala residing in New York City may experience the parallel structural processes of Americanization and assimilation that lead them to discontinue speaking their native language, to begin using Standard American English, and to then enroll in an English-dominant neighborhood public school. These processes thus intersect at various points, especially in community-based educational projects (Song, 2018), having material impacts on various immigrant groups' transition into a new nation-state.

Furthermore, the question of criminality is central to assimilation theory, for questions surrounding urban crime have been normatively associated with specific immigrant groups. For example, in *The Philadelphia Negro*, W.E.B. Du Bois (1899) studied various social mechanisms and institutional sites, such as education, employment, and crime and deviance, of Black Philadelphia *migrants* who moved to the industrialized North from the South. Anxieties surrounding crime in immigrant neighborhood enclaves are structured by surveillance, policing, and carcerality (Cabral & Bruno, 2023). For us in education, this has meant that as public educational institutions continue to welcome and include various immigrant groups, their matriculation into these spaces is met with carceral logics and ideologies that center punishment and control, that continually confine, contain, and exclude them via policies and practices (Cabral, 2023; Shange, 2019; Shedd, 2015). This also disavows maintenance of respective cultural or migrant personhoods, meaning that certain racialized or ethnic immigrant groups are unable to continue their linguistic use of

their heritage language, for example, without being punished, penalized, or marginalized for it. Thus, social issues such as crime or the maintenance of racialized and cultural identities that are relevant to nation-states such as the United States are often narrowly framed as immigrant problems when newcomers fail – or refuse – to "assimilate."

The common progressive response to this hostility consists of reversing it: applauding immigrants' material labor contributions and eagerly awaiting their or their children's contributions to a "new" multicultural society. In this respect, higher education is the principal site of what historian Vijay Prashad (2006) calls "bureaucratic multiculturalism," which he articulated as taking shape in the form of ethnic studies and diversity programs. Enmeshed in this multiculturalism, however contradictory, is that third appraisal of immigrants, where agents in higher education categorize immigrant-origin students not only as a pluralized group in need of institutional support in ways that recognize their funds of knowledge but also as a student cohort that culturally enriches campus life. Across the multiple appraisals of what it means to fit within the immigrant(-origin) category, from xenophobia to patriotic inclusion to valorized exceptionalism, the pity and rancor are palpable, as is the strange concurrent inclusion and exception. As researchers, how do we make theoretical sense out of this contradictory positioning, let alone do sound empirical work from it? What issues count as immigrant issues, and which do not? What exactly is an "immigrant" counternarrative or standpoint?

As readers engage with this volume on *Supporting College Students of Immigrant Origin*, we propose a reappraisal of the traditional epistemological foundations regarding the study of immigrants in the United States' education system. Paradoxically, one of the limitations of literature in this line of research is that it theorizes immigrants principally, and sometimes exclusively, *as* immigrants. Doing so returns one to that Pandora's box of simplistic and problematic terms such as "assimilation" and "cultural adjustment," once opened by the Chicago School. After all, the analytical category of "immigrant" implies the analytical category of "native," with the distinction between them based on a difference of content within a cultural grammar – that is, fundamentally a difference of language and symbolic life, which can be learned or unlearned, sustained or erased. But this distinction – just like the distinction between "native speaker" and "second language learner," or cultural insider and outsider – does not so easily delineate how marginalized students and their (ethnic, diasporic, and religious) communities imagine themselves, both as subject to power and capable of forming powerful collectivities.

In other words, young people placed within the "immigrant-origin" category are *also* racialized youth, Indigenous youth, youth targeted by carceral systems, multilingual youth, and youth among peoples on the move as a response to displacement and invasion. How can we possibly account for this multiplicity? We might consider four alternative paradigms: (a) racialization; (b) ethnicity; (c) transnationalism; and (d) borders. We suggest that these "new" approaches do not replace the "old" one of "immigrant-origin," but enhance it.

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Racialization is perhaps the most obvious paradigm. Today, most immigrants are also racialized, hailing from the Global South. Adopting this paradigm means circumventing the question of the "culture" of immigrants and instead attending to symbolic power: specifically, institutional processes that racialize people as threats, problems, outsiders, and model minorities. Recent critical perspectives in education research, such as Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa's (2015) essay on "undoing appropriateness," exemplify this paradigm: There is no amount of good behavior, linguistic or social, that will dissolve racializing perceptions. This is not a purely subjective or mental problem. Racialization, being ideological, has a material existence. It happens, as historian Nikhil Pal Singh (2019) has observed, not only through discourse but also through the material relations of academic tracking, deportation, incarceration, policing, and surveillance. Therefore, consider here the chapters in this volume that address the conditions of undocumented students.

Agency is the necessary flip side to racial oppression. Immigrant-origin peoples are not only transformed through racialization from above but also reposition themselves in relation to others during and after migration. This leads to our second paradigm of ethnicity. By this, we do not simply refer to applying the bureaucratically counted ethnic categories that are typically subsumed within racial ones: Hmong within Asian; Salvadoran within Latino. This is simply a finer-grained racialization. Rather, by "ethnicity" we mean how immigrant-origin young people forge profane friendships, solidarities, and identity with each other *despite* dissimilar points of departure: the seed of what cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1996) calls "new ethnicities." This model of ethnicity is often overlooked in race-oriented institutions but has been long captured through ethnographic education research on multilingualism, panethnicity, and youth culture. Consider, for example, how refugee-origin Cambodian- and Hmong-diasporic youth both petition for inclusion in the category of "Asian American" and unsettle its presumptions of panethnic unity (Lee, 1996, 2005; Rampton, 1995;

Reyes, 2006). Likewise, consider the chapters in this volume that attend to ethnic orientations as an analytic.

So, migrant routes matter as much as migrant roots. But how are routes normalized and abnormalized within higher education? It is here where we raise our third paradigm of transnationalism. Transnational studies point to the reciprocal, two-way character of migration that generates hybrid practices, dissolves geographic boundaries of communities, and recognizes that for some migrants, home is not in the United States but halfway across the world – and yet also easily accessible through telephones and the Internet (Boccagni, 2012; Vertovec, 2009). This paradigm reveals the route that is perhaps most offensive to the political narrative that the United States is constituted of immigrants who have come from numerous points of origin: the refusal to be "U.S.-citizens-in-waiting," the countervailing assertion that one's stay is indeed temporary. What does institutional inclusion mean for someone who has not asked for inclusion in the first place? What non-American futures await college students? It is in this paradigm that we might conceptualize international students as well as students whose presence in the United States is restricted by visas or money. However, diaspora and transnationalism extend across generations, and remain meaningful for US-born "immigrants" oriented to their homelands in search of new – or rather, renewed – social relations.

Our final paradigm of the border may be the most conceptually difficult one, for border and borderland studies challenge not only the immigrant-native distinction but also the conventional concept of national boundaries (Naples, 2009; Wilson & Donnan, 2012). As Etienne Balibar (2002) has remarked, "borders are everywhere." They consist not only of physical boundary stones but also government agents, technologies, and applications of power/knowledge. This paradigm orients us to borderland- and refugee-origin college students, who are often *at* the border and not past it. For the former, crossing borders is regular, yet surveilled and threatened. For the latter, their migration has been initially framed as involuntary (Kunz, 1973), but this framing has been challenged as too simplistic: Like other migrants, they are pushed and pulled (Erdal & Oeppen, 2018; Richmond, 1993). When either is regarded as a problem of territorial murkiness to be solved through assimilation or repatriation, the institutional imposition of borders is left unexamined. This includes the university campus inasmuch as its agents reproduce national, racial, and settler-colonial logics of outsider and insider. It is in this light that we might consider Tara Yosso's (2005) influential concept of community wealth, which draws from Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) borderland and *mestizaje* perspectives and is used by several scholars in this volume.

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Evidently, the image of immigration is complicated by both US political imaginaries and scholarship. This means that we who study immigrant-origin students in pK-12 and higher education cannot be easily satisfied by a strictly empirical "state of the union," as if the task were simply to identify numerical inequalities in the object of study and relevant policy levers. However, a strictly theoretical project of reconceptualizing this category of students would be restricted in another way, since empirical "troubling" – findings that resist dominant explanations and invite new perspectives – is vital to theorizing. Fortunately, we do not have to settle for either alternative, for Silver and Pagliarulo McCarron's volume here provides readers with robust theoretical and empirical contributions for making sense of immigrant-origin college student experiences and ways to equitably continue reorganizing higher education well into the twenty-first century.

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