Inheriting the City

John Mollenkopf for Phil Kasinitz, Mary Waters, and Jennifer Holdaway
Conference on Immigrant Intergenerational Mobility
University of Southern California
October 18, 2009
With Thanks To

• The Russell Sage Foundation
• The Ford Foundation
• The Rockefeller Foundation
• The Mellon Foundation
• UJA-Federation of Greater New York
• The MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood
• National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health
The Aim of the Study

- The children of immigrants, born here or arriving as children, make up one eighth of the nation’s population – far more in the gateway cities – and they (you) are our future.

- Leading scholars (Herbert Gans, Alejandro Portes, Min Zhou) gave us reason to worry many would be compressed into urban underclass.
What We Did

• Random sample telephone survey of 3,415 respondents aged 18-32 in city and suburbs
• In-person, in-depth follow-up interviews with 330 of the telephone survey respondents
• Six targeted ethnographies
• Post 9/11 follow up interviews with 150 in-depth respondents
Sample Groups

- Second Generation Main Sample
  - Chinese 607
  - West Indians 407
  - Dominicans 428
  - South Americans 402
  - Russian Jews 309
  Total 2,153
Native Comparisons

• Native Comparison Groups
  – Whites 408
  – Blacks 421
  – Puerto Ricans 433
Subtotal 1,262
Grand Total 3,415
Findings

• No evidence of second generation decline
• Chinese and Russians second generations are achieving striking success by exiting parental enclaves and assimilating into mainstream institutions
• West Indians doing markedly better than African Americans; South Americans and even Dominicans doing better than Puerto Ricans
• Third generation Puerto Ricans and African Americans face persistent disadvantage
Social Incorporation/Racial Exclusion

- Young New Yorkers truly live in a pluricultural world which accepts cultural diversity.

- They are not “torn between two worlds” – use of parents’ language and transnational ties decline quickly. Those who can still speak their parents language are proud of their ability to translate.

- Yet race still matters. Skin color and race strongly affect socioeconomic outcomes and the experience of discrimination.
Educational Attainment
(Age 22-32, Grew up in Metro NY)

Cases weighted by INGRPWT
Determinants of Educational Attainment
Entering the Labor Force

- Many mix school and part time work for a long time, delaying full entry
- Russian Jews and Chinese earn as much as native whites
- West Indians, South Americans, and Dominicans earn less than native whites, but more than African Americans or Puerto Ricans
Where they work

• The second generation works in the same jobs as other New Yorkers their age. Unlike their parents, few work in distinct “ethnic niches”

• Two-fifths of our Chinese respondents had fathers who worked in restaurants, but only three percent of our Chinese male respondents did
Earnings:
Of those who grew up in New York…

Russians and Chinese earn more than natives whites
West Indians, South Americans and Dominicans earn about as much
African Americans and Puerto Ricans still earn less (even after controlling for education)
Political Engagement

• General model (based on native whites) that higher SES leads to more civic engagement does not hold across groups.

• The most ‘successful’ groups, Chinese and Russians, are least politically and civically engaged.

• Blacks and West Indians are most politically engaged.
Arrest Rates

• Arrest rates are much lower for Russian and Chinese young men than for native white males
• While higher than those for native whites, West Indian, South American, and Dominican arrest rates are much lower than for African Americans
Less Assimilation at Home

- Groups vary a lot in the timing, combination of marriage and child bearing
- ALL second generation groups are more likely than ANY native group to live with their parents well into their mid 20’s – long after entering labor force
- Becoming a parent, especially a young one, slows progress for all groups
The Second Generation Advantage

- Many second generation parents are positively selected.
- Their multi-generational families have many workers in relation to children supported.
- Being in a class-differentiated group provides more ‘bridging social ties’ is better than being in a homogeneously poor group.
- The children of black and Latino immigrants are taking advantage of civil rights institutions designed for native minorities.
- They creatively combine parents’ and American cultures and social networks.
Policy Implications

• The relative ease of *these* immigrant parents’ ability to adjust to legal status paid many dividends for second generation

• Second chance mechanisms – both formal (CUNY) and informal (social networks) – play a key role

• High levels of political cynicism and group detachment deter political mobilization