



Inheriting the City: The Children of Immigrants Come of Age

Philip Kasnitz, John H. Mollenkopf, Mary C. Waters, Jennifer Holdaway

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The United States is an immigrant nation—nowhere is the truth of this statement more evident than in its major cities. Immigrants and their children comprise nearly three-fifths of New York City’s population and even more of Miami and Los Angeles. But the United States is also a nation with entrenched racial divisions that are being complicated by the arrival of newcomers. While immigrant parents may often fear that their children will “disappear” into American mainstream society, leaving behind their ethnic ties, many experts fear that they won’t—evolving instead into a permanent unassimilated and underemployed underclass. *Inheriting the City* confronts these fears with evidence, reporting the results of a major study examining the social, cultural, political, and economic lives of today’s second generation in metropolitan New York, and showing how they fare relative to their first-generation parents and native-stock counterparts.

Focused on New York but providing lessons for metropolitan areas across the country, *Inheriting the City* is a comprehensive analysis of how mass immigration is transforming life in America’s largest metropolitan area. The authors studied the young adult offspring of West Indian, Chinese, Dominican, South American, and Russian Jewish immigrants and compared them to blacks, whites, and Puerto Ricans with native-born parents. They find that today’s second generation is generally faring better than their parents, with Chinese and Russian Jewish young adults achieving the greatest education and economic advancement, beyond their first-generation parents and even beyond their native-white peers. Every second-generation group is doing at least marginally—and, in many cases, significantly—better than natives of the same racial group across several domains of life. Economically, each second-generation group earns as much or more than its native-born comparison group, especially African Americans and Puerto Ricans, who experience the most persistent disadvantage. *Inheriting the City* shows the children of immigrants can often take advantage of policies and programs that were designed for native-born minorities in the wake of the civil rights era. Indeed, the ability to choose elements from both immigrant and native-born cultures has produced, the authors argue, a second-generation advantage that catalyzes both upward mobility and an evolution of mainstream American culture.

Inheriting the City leads the chorus of recent research indicating that we need not fear an immigrant underclass. Although racial discrimination and economic exclusion persist to varying degrees across all the groups studied, this absorbing book shows that the new generation is also beginning to ease the intransigence of U.S. racial categories. Adapting elements from their parents’ cultures as well as from their native-born peers, the children of immigrants are not only transforming the American city but also what it means to be American.

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