Interest in research on the educational experiences of immigrant students has increased dramatically in recent years. It is not surprising that this greater interest has coincided with the largest influx of new immigrants in U.S. history. It has also occurred at a time when communities outside America's large urban centers are grappling with how to adjust to the new immigrants. The Somalis in Lewiston, Maine; the Dinke in Fargo, North Dakota; and the Hmong in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, are just some of the groups whose experiences defy past generalizations and conventional wisdom on the relationship between immigration and education.

After considerable debate over how to explain and interpret the educational experiences of immigrant students, scholars in the field are approaching a consensus: Be wary of claims that are based on static categories and broad generalizations. To those who are not familiar with the field and how it has developed, this may not seem like much of a breakthrough. Others who have followed the debates that have influenced the development of scholarship in this area are more likely to appreciate the significance of this emerging consensus. As the immigrant population entering the United States has become more diverse with respect to culture, language, religion, race, and so forth, gross generalizations about the relationship between immigrant status and patterns of academic performance have lost their appeal and explanatory power. Today, researchers are less likely to make claims that are based on sweeping generalizations about groups, and professionals who work closely with immigrant communities are less likely to accept such claims.

Broad generalizations about the relationship between immigrant status and social mobility were once accepted as rock-solid principles of human behavior. Sociologists, such as Gordon (1964), suggested that as immigrants were assimilated into mainstream American culture, they or their offspring would gradually experience upward mobility. The logic of the argument was that by shedding their native culture and adopting American culture (especially the English language), immigrants would achieve social progress over time. Assimilation was viewed as the price of mobility, and social progress was regarded as inevitable for groups that successfully adapted to American society (Glazer and Moynihan 1963). This research was based, of course, largely on experiences of European immigrants, while the plight of nonwhite and non-Western immigrants received little attention.

By the 1970s, as awareness of and interest in the significance of race grew and as the diversity of immigrants to the United States became increasingly difficult to ignore, researchers offered theoretical perspectives on the educational experiences of immigrant students that were...
explicitly linked to analyses of race. The late John Ogbu was, without doubt, the most important and influential. Ogbu (1978, 1987) argued that the means by which groups were incorporated into American society—voluntarily or coercively—influenced the attitudes and orientation of groups toward education and social mobility. Ogbu's work has been criticized for the broad categories it relied on and the generalizations about students' behavior and culture that it fostered (Gibson 1997). But even Ogbu's harshest critics would concede that Ogbu's ideas had a far-reaching impact on the ways in which scholars thought about the relationship among race, immigration status, and education.

In the 1980s, other scholars drew on Ogbu's analytical framework but also extended and modified it. Research during this period attempted to move beyond the broad categories and concentrated instead on how social and economic circumstances influenced patterns of adaptation. Comparisons between first- and second-generation immigrants (see, e.g., Gibson 1988) brought new dimensions to existing scholarship. The comparative aspect of this research made it possible to challenge the notion that assimilation was the cure-all for the low status of new arrivals. It also opened up a focus on transnational individuals and families who developed hybrid identities and neither fully assimilated nor actively resisted the adoption of a new culture.

Despite growing awareness of the diversity of immigrant populations, some of the research that was conducted during this period contributed to new generalizations. Most popular among these generalizations was the so-called model-minority thesis, which was popular both in the social sciences and the mass media even though there was considerable evidence that not all Asians were succeeding. Critics of the thesis argued that it had gained credibility largely because it seemed to explain the relatively high enrollment of Asian American students at elite universities and served as an effective means of explaining the lack of success among domestic minorities, especially African Americans and many Latinos.

In response to the generalizations of the 1980s, a new generation began empirical investigations that challenged prevalent theories of immigrant status and education. Several important challenges to the thesis of the Asian model minority demonstrated that academic success among Asian American students was by no means uniform and that several subgroups, especially Southeast Asian refugees (Hmong and Lao, in particular), were not faring well (Lee 1998). Pointing, for example, to the high dropout rate among certain Chinese American students (the group that is widely regarded as the most successful) at several high schools in the San Francisco Bay Area, my research questioned the notion that culture could be used as an all-encompassing explanation (Noguera 2003). It also became increasingly clear that there was considerable variability in the academic performance of other immigrant students, many of whom entered the United States voluntarily, that could not be explained by broad generalizations about status, culture, or nationality.

Part of what was missing from much of the earlier research was a careful analysis of schooling and an understanding of the ways in which processes that were related to the socialization and sorting of students in school influenced the academic performance of immigrant students. As the focus on the experience of immigrant students shifted to a more

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careful analysis of schooling practices, the concept of social capital, as developed by Coleman (1988) and others, took on greater importance. With its emphasis on the benefits derived from participation in social networks and relations of reciprocity, the focus on social capital encouraged researchers to examine relations between parents and teachers and students and teachers and among students themselves.

Instead of treating schools as neutral sites, the new research examined more closely how the social experiences of young people in school influenced their attitudes toward education and the development of their social identities. For example, although they did not make explicit reference to social capital, Phelan, Davidson, and Ya (1998) highlighted the role of peer groups in shaping social identities and orientations toward schooling; some peer relations promote school success while others undermine it. Other researchers, such as Stanton-Salazar (2001) and Valenzuela (1999), explored the roles of counselors and teachers as gatekeepers and brokers who can either expand or constrict access to educational opportunities. More recent research has also examined processes, such as tracking and other sorting practices, by schools and how they can influence the academic trajectories of different racial and ethnic groups (Noguera 2003). Of course, social class influences the ability of students and their families to use social capital to obtain valued educational goods. For this reason, in addition to social capital, much of the current research on immigrants and schooling, like earlier research in the sociology of education, has concentrated on themes of mobility, socialization, and social reproduction. In so doing, the new research has helped to create links between the field and other areas of scholarship in the social sciences, thereby strengthening the knowledge and scholarship that are generated.

Increasingly, immigration is recognized as a complicating factor in analyses of race and schooling because of the wide variability in the academic performance of immigrant students, but this recognition has not discouraged generalizations about the relationship between race and schooling. The so-called racial achievement gap is now widely regarded as one of the most pressing problems confronting American education (Jencks and Phillips 1998), and the presence of a large number of immigrant students (nearly one fifth of the U.S. school-age population) only complicates the search for understanding and solutions. Ideas that are rooted in simplistic analyses of culture find resonance and repackaging in new theories of victimology, oppositional identities, and unsupported allegations that the negative influence of rap music is pulling down test scores. Such theories provide little guidance for educational leaders about what schools can do to improve academic achievement or to ameliorate group differences in performance. They do, however, tend to reinforce the idea that race and intelligence are linked, not genetically but culturally. In too many cases, the cultural capital of immigrants - their strong work ethic and allegedly docile behavior - continues to be cited as evidence to support the idea that something is wrong with domestic minority students who are less compliant and disproportionately less likely to achieve.

An exception to this trend in scholarship on race, immigration, and school performance can be found in research that focuses on the role of social capital in education. This research has shifted attention away from a narrow focus on status to a focus on the structures that influence
educational opportunities (e.g., Stanton-Salazar 2001; Valenzuela 1999). Typically, social capital is used as an analytical tool to guide empirical investigations, while researchers are compelled to examine how social capital interacts with other factors (e.g., race, class, and nationality) to understand why some groups obtain greater benefit from social capital than do others. Although this research has in no way eclipsed the still-popular "blame the victim" studies that continue to influence the field, it has served as an effective counterbalance.

Although those who study immigration and education nowadays are less likely to engage in broad generalizations, there is a great deal that scholarship cannot explain and has not explained. For example, we do not fully understand the extreme variability in the academic performance of immigrants and why immigrants are both more likely to succeed and more likely to fail academically. We do not understand why girls outperform boys in most groups, but even more dramatically among some immigrant groups. And we certainly do not understand how the social identities and academic achievement of immigrant youths will be shaped in the long term by their intense interaction with racial minorities, particularly African Americans, in urban schools and communities.

Fortunately, a new generation of scholars has taken these and other questions on, and as their work produces new insights and analyses, most assuredly new debates will emerge. This is good for the field and, I hope, it will help our society to figure out how to respond to the needs of new immigrants. Despite the backlash against immigration, particularly since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and despite renewed efforts to strengthen the borders against the ongoing influx, America will undoubtedly remain a nation of immigrants. At the minimum, sociological research should strive to make it possible to understand the changes that will inevitably occur as a consequence of this transformation.