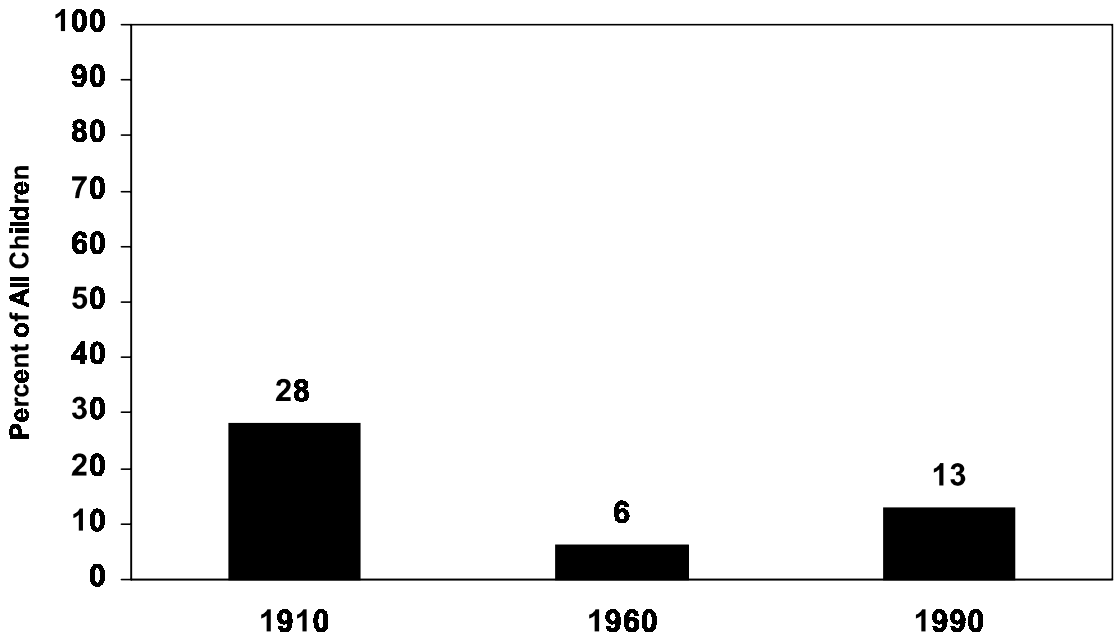
NUMBER, COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN, AND GENERATION

Immigrants from various countries of origin may differ enormously in their socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, their language and culture, and their racial and ethnic composition. The number and countries of origin of children in immigrant families have changed greatly during the twentieth century (Hernandez and Darke, 1999).

Children in immigrant families living with at least one parent dropped from 9.3 million in 1910 to 3.7 million in 1960, and then jumped to 8.2 million in 1990, nearly returning to the level of 1910. But the total population of children was rising as well; hence, children in immigrant families as a proportion of all children plummeted from 28 percent in 1910 to only 6 percent in 1960, and the subsequent rise to 13 percent in 1990 represented only one-half the level of 1910 (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Percent of Children in Immigrant Families: 1910, 1960, and 1990



Note: See Technical Appendix for description of variables.

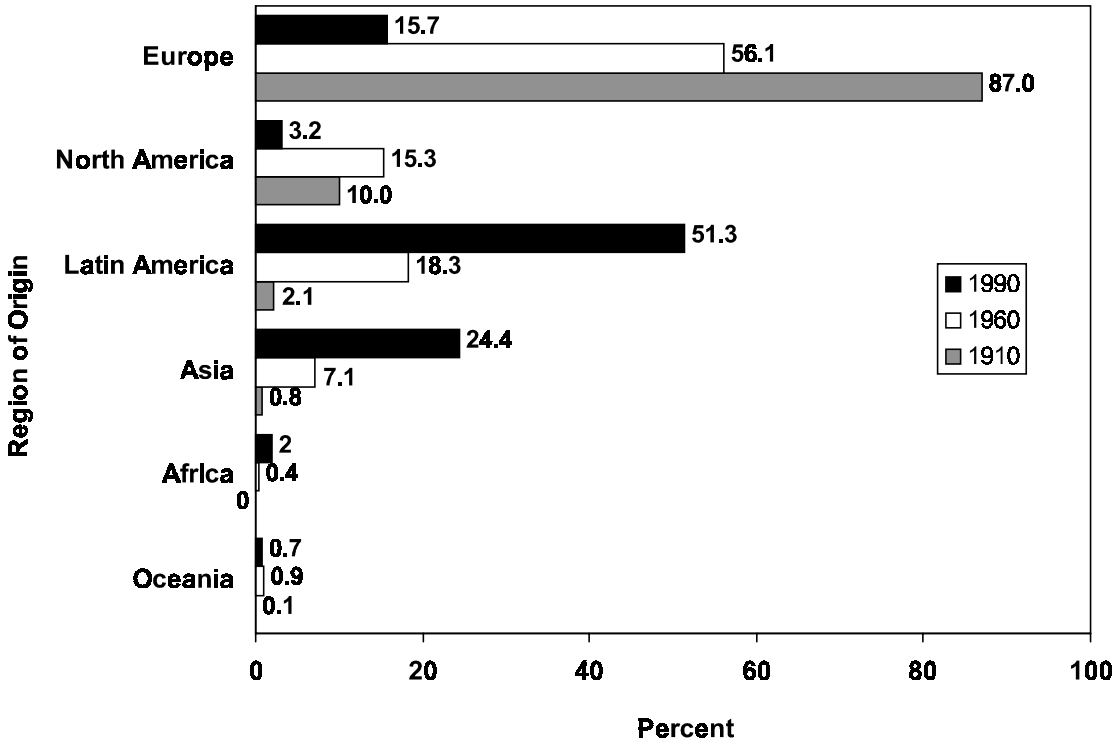
Source: Hernandez and Darke, 1999.

Focusing on regions and countries of origin (Figure 2), among first- and second-generation children in 1910, most had origins in Europe (87 percent) or Canada (10 percent). The Northwest European countries of Germany, Scandinavia, Ireland, and the United Kingdom accounted for the largest proportions, at 20, 11, 10, and 9 percent, respectively. Southeast European countries of origin for many children included Italy, Poland, and Austria, at 9, 7, and 6 percent, respectively. Russia and Hungary each accounted for an additional 3 percent. Immigrants speaking Yiddish or Jewish have been a focus of recent research on immigrants using the 1910 census (Watkins, 1994). Adopting the same approach here, children identified as Jewish, based on their own or their parents' mother tongue, accounted for 7 percent of children in immigrant families in 1910, most in families arriving from Russia.

At the turn of the century, perceived differences in culture and race separating Southern and Eastern European immigrants from native-born Americans were viewed as enormous. In the massive government study of the time, the Joint U.S. Immigration Commission (popularly known as the Dillingham

Figure 2

Percent of Children in Immigrant Families from Various Regions of Origin: 1910, 1960, 1990



Note: See Technical Appendix for description of variables.

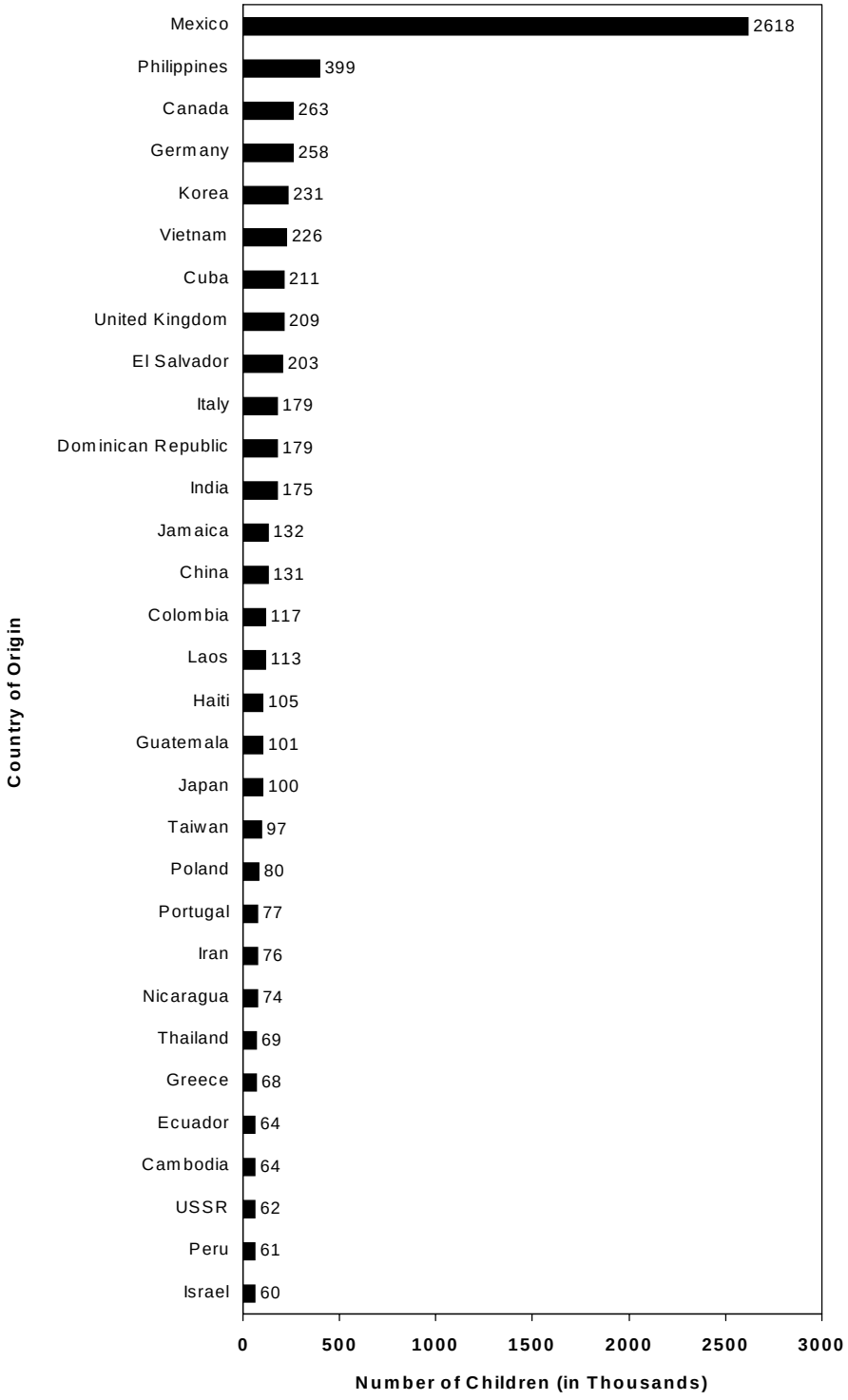
Source: Calculated from 1910 Census and 1960 Census IPUMS files, and 1990 Census 5% PUMS file.

Commission) drew sharp distinctions between the "old" Northern and Western European immigrants and the "new" Southern and Eastern European immigrants (U.S. Immigration Commission, 1911). Anthropologists, scientists, and policy makers of the era shared the public sentiment that the new immigrants were likely to dilute both the racial and cultural purity of native-born Americans with a mainly Northwestern European heritage (Ross, 1914; Stoddard, 1920). Despite these concerns, however, a comprehensive assessment using 1980 census data found that, while white ethnic groups maintain some distinctive patterns, differences on many measures have disappeared, including fertility rates and socioeconomic measures such as educational attainments. The high degree of assimilation among white ethnic groups also is reflected in extensive intermarriage across ethnic lines (Lieberson and Waters, 1988: 250).

By 1960, children with European or Canadian origins accounted for a substantially smaller proportion of first- and second-generation children than they did in 1910, only 71 percent, at 56 and 15 percent, respectively. The largest numbers from Europe had origins in Germany, the United Kingdom, and Italy, at 10 or 11 percent each, followed by Poland, Scandinavia, Ireland, and the former Soviet Union, at 3 percent each. By 1990, only 19 percent of first- and second-generation children had origins in Europe or Canada, with only Canada, the United Kingdom, and the former Soviet Union accounting for as much as 2 or 3 percent each. Figure 3 presents estimates of the number of first- and second-generation children for the 62 countries of origin which each accounted for at least 15,000 children in immigrant families in 1990.

Figure 3 (Part 1)

Number of First- and Second- Generation Children from 62 Countries of Origin (in thousands): 1990



Note: See Technical Appendix for description of variables.

Source: Table A and Hernandez and Darke, 1999.

Figure 3 (Part 2)

Number of First- and Second- Generation Children from 62 Countries of Origin (in thousands): 1990

Note: See Technical Appendix for description of variables.

Source: Table A and Hernandez and Darke, 1999.

Corresponding increases have occurred since 1910 among sending countries in Latin America and Asia. The proportion of first- and second-generation children with origins in Central or South America or the Caribbean jumped from only 2 percent in 1910 to 18 percent in 1960, and then to 55 percent in 1990, with most having origins in Mexico, at 2, 13, and 33 percent, respectively, as of these years. Meanwhile, the proportion from Asia jumped from 1 to 7 percent between 1910 and 1960, and then to 25 percent in 1990. The Asian countries accounting for the largest number of first- and second-generation children as of 1990 were, in order of the number of children, (1) Philippines, (2) Korea, (3) Vietnam, (4) India, (5) China, (6) Laos, (7) Japan, (8) Taiwan, (9) Thailand, and (10) Cambodia, but each accounted for only 2 to 5 percent of first- and second-generation children (Figure 3).

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, then, the countries of origin of first- and second-generation children have become increasingly diverse, as reflected in the shrinking number of countries which account, individually, for substantial proportions of children, and in the broadening global distribution of these countries, with increasing numbers from Latin America and Asia. The exception to this generalization is that one country, Mexico, has rapidly increased in importance as a source of first- and second-generation children, accounting for one-third of all such children in 1990. In view of their large share, first- and second-generation children from Mexico receive special attention in this essay. Associated with historical shifts in country of origin are rising proportions of first- and second-generation children who are classified according to the racial and ethnic stratification system of the United States as minorities who are Hispanic or Asian. The diversity in countries of origin as of 1990 is also suggested by the fact that 34 countries each contributed at least 50,000 first- or second-generation children.

Throughout the century, the vast majority of children in immigrant families have been second-generation children born in the U.S. with at least one foreign-born parent. In 1910, the second generation accounted for 89 percent of all children in immigrant families, and this declined to 83 percent in 1960, and still further to 77 percent in 1990. Hence, only one-fourth of children in immigrant families in 1990 were themselves foreign-born; three-fourths were U.S. citizens by virtue of birth in this country.

SOCIOECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC RISK FACTORS AMONG CHILDREN

The extent to which the risks and needs of children in immigrant families differ from their third- and later-generation peers depends, at least in part, on the extent to which they are similar or different in family circumstances that have been found to influence outcomes among children generally. These circumstances include experience with poverty, parental educational attainments and paid work by various family members, living in a two-parent or one-parent family, living with a small or large number of siblings, and exposure to overcrowded housing conditions (Hernandez and Darke, 1998).

One of the best-documented relationships in epidemiology and child development is that social and economic inequality has negative consequences for health and other important outcomes for persons of low socioeconomic status, that is, persons experiencing poverty, job insecurity and unemployment, and limited educational attainments (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1981; Starfield, 1982; Hill and Duncan, 1987; Newacheck and Starfield, 1988; Starfield, 1991; Starfield, 1992; Montgomery and Carter-Pokras, 1993; Newacheck, 1994; Newacheck and Jamison, 1994; Montgomery, Kiely, and Pappas, 1996; Wilkinson, 1996; Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, 1997). Children living in poverty have comparatively limited access to economic resources required to purchase necessary goods and services, such as housing, food, clothing, and health care.

Parental educational attainments are important because they influence current parental values in socializing children, as well as parental occupation and income, but also because they influence the levels of education and income that children achieve when they, in turn, become adults (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Kohn, 1969; Sewell and Hauser, 1975; Featherman and Hauser, 1978; Sewell, Hauser, and Wolf, 1980; Kohn and Schooler, 1983; Alwin, 1984); thus, children whose parents have completed relatively few years of school are disadvantaged, compared to children with more highly educated parents, because their parents are less likely to have paid jobs which provide access to health insurance and to income

required to buy important goods and services, and because these children are less likely to complete high school or college and, hence, are less likely to achieve economic success in adulthood.

Because paid work by parents is the primary source of family income for most children, the number of parents who work for pay and whether they work part-time or full-time are key determinants of whether children live in poverty or in middle-class comfort or luxury. Father's paid work has been the primary factor determining trends since the Great Depression in child poverty, but mother's paid employment has become increasingly important (Hernandez, 1993; 1997).

Children who live with only one parent are at risk for a variety of current and long-term negative life outcomes because children with two parents in the home have greater access, potentially, to parents as personal care givers and as economic providers than do children living with one parent, and because children in one-parent families often experience greater personal or parental stress (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Kohn, 1969; Sewell and Hauser, 1975; Featherman and Hauser, 1978; Heatherington, Cox, and Cox, 1978; Sewell et al., 1980; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Furstenberg, Nord, Peterson, and Zill, 1983; Kohn and Schooler, 1983; Alwin, 1984; Hernandez, 1986; Kominski, 1987; Wallerstein, Corbin, and Lewis, 1988; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1989; Cherlin, Furstenberg, Chase-Lansdale, Kiernan, Robins, Morrison and Teitler, 1991; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994).

Many children in one-parent families live in poverty, partly because father's incomes may not be available in the home, and partly because low socioeconomic status strongly influences both family disruption and out-of-wedlock childbearing. Poverty has major effects on child outcomes that are independent of family structure; but children living with only one parent are also at risk of negative life outcomes beyond the effect of poverty (Elder, 1974; Elder, Conger, Foster, and Ardelt, 1992; Conger, Elder, Lorenz, Conger, Simons, Whitbeck, Huck and Melby; Hernandez, 1993; Conger and Elder, 1994; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994).

Most children live not only with one or two parents but also with one or more brothers or sisters who are potential sources of life-long loving companionship, but who also are potential competitors for the scarce time and economic resources parents can devote to their children. Although research has found the number of siblings to have little effect on a child's psychological well-being later during adulthood, children in large families with five or more siblings do tend to complete fewer years of schooling than children from smaller families, and they are, therefore, less likely to enter high-status occupations with high incomes when they reach adulthood (Featherman and Hauser, 1978; Blake, 1981, 1985, 1987, 1989; Glenn and Hoppe, 1982; Hernandez, 1986).

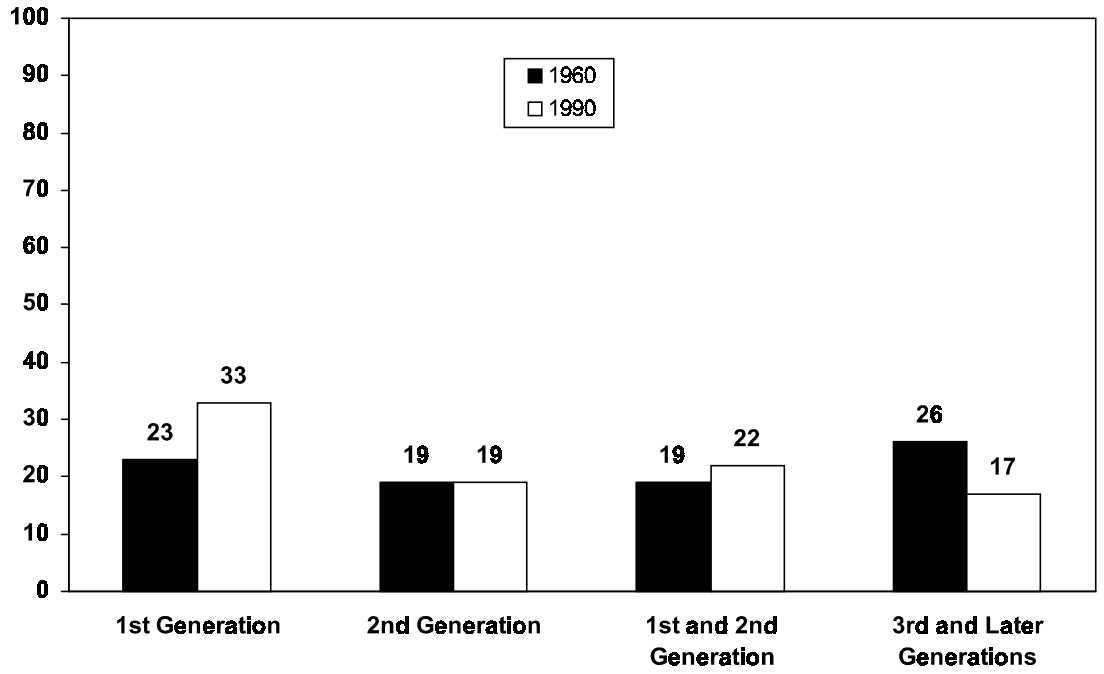
In addition, low family income can lead to overcrowded housing conditions which, in turn, can facilitate the transmission of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, hepatitis A, and other enteric and respiratory infections (Hernandez and Charney, 1998).

POVERTY AND INCOME INEQUALITY

First- and second-generation children were somewhat more likely to live in families with incomes below the official poverty threshold in the 1990 census (income during 1989) than were third- and later-generation children, at 22 and 17 percent, respectively (Figure 4). Most of the difference was accounted for by the high poverty rate among the first generation (33 percent), while the second generation was only slightly more likely (19 percent) to be poor than were third- and later-generation children (17 percent). In the 1960 census (for income in 1959), the opposite was true, overall, because first- and second-generation children were less likely to be poor than third- and later-generation children (19 versus 26 percent), although, as in 1989, the risk was greater for the first than for the second generation in 1959 (23 versus 19 percent).

Figure 4

Percent in Official Poverty for First-, Second, and Third-and-Later-Generation Children: 1960 and 1990



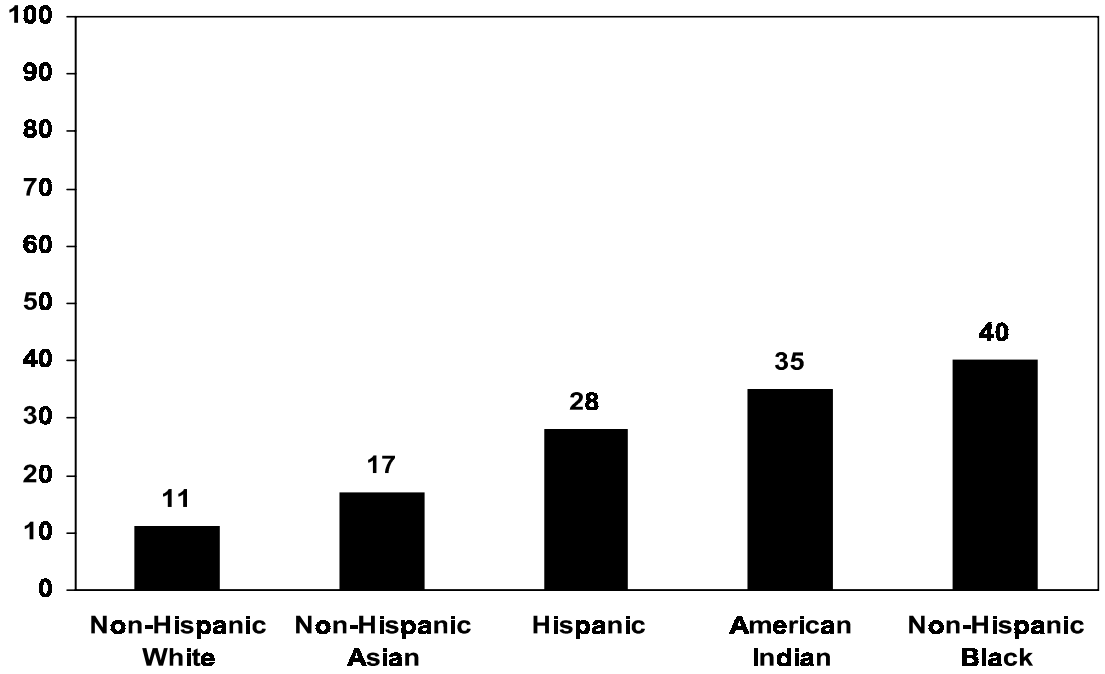
Note: See Technical Appendix for description of variables.

Source: Hernandez and Darke, 1999.

Poverty rates differed enormously in both the 1960 and 1990 censuses among first- and second-generation children by country of origin, and among third- and later-generation children by race and ethnicity; for example, in 1989 among third- and later-generation children, the poverty rate rises from only 11 percent for non-Hispanic white children to 17, 28, 35, and 40 percent, respectively, for non-Hispanic Asian, Hispanic, American Indian, and non-Hispanic black children (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Percent in Official Poverty for Third-and-Later-Generation Children by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1990



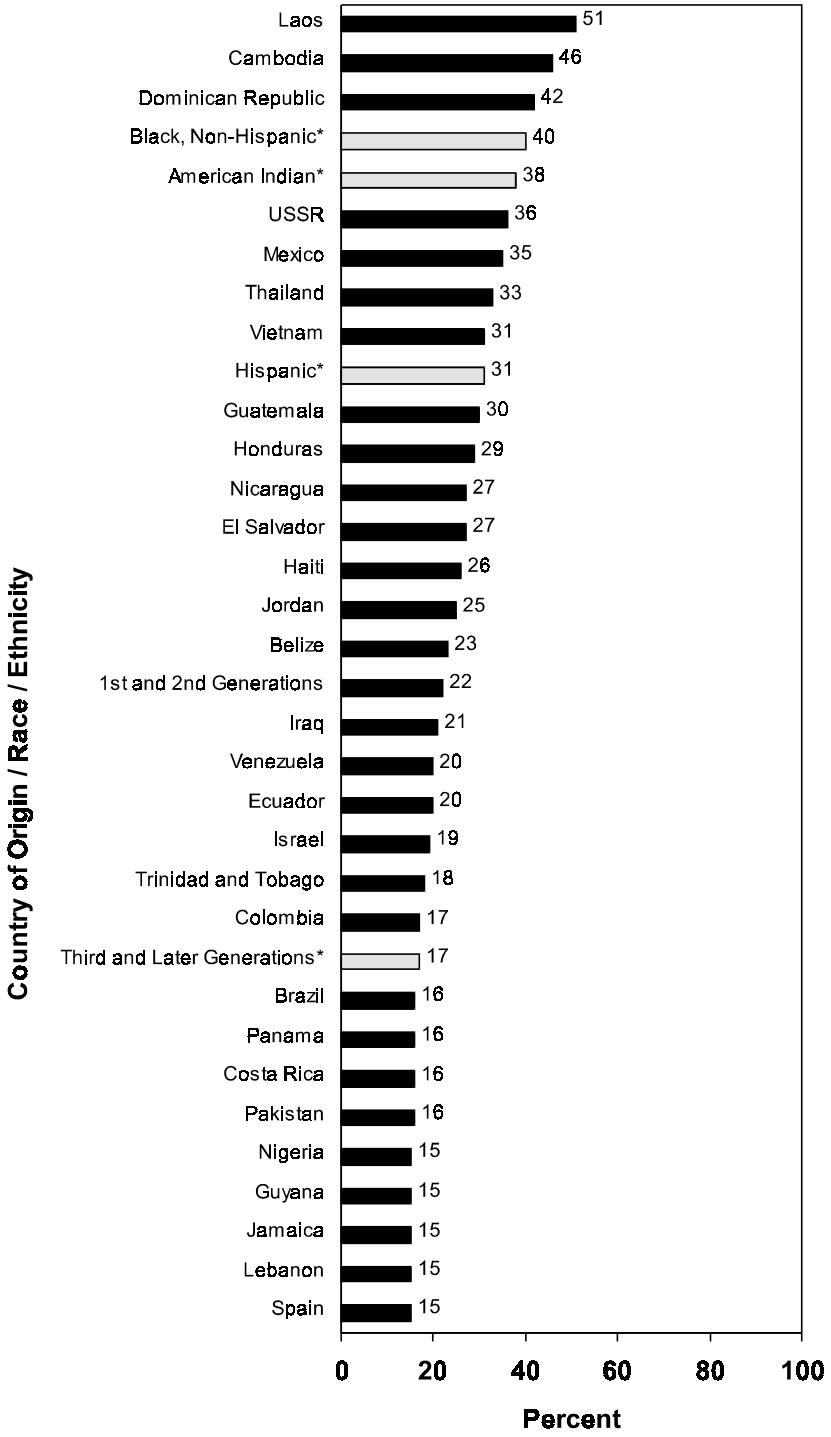
Note: See Technical Appendix for description of variables.

Source: Hernandez and Darke, 1999.

Similarly, among first- and second-generation children from about two dozen countries spread across Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, poverty rates were about equal to, or substantially less than, the rate of 11 percent for third- and later-generation non-Hispanic white children in 1989 (Figure 6 and Table A). But for first- and second-generation children from 12 other countries in 1989, poverty rates were quite high, ranging from 26 to 51 percent depending on the country of origin. In view of the negative risks associated with poverty generally, the situation of children from these 12 countries is of particular concern.

Figure 6 (Part 1)

Percent in Official Poverty for First- and Second-Generation Children by Country of Origin, and Third-and-Later-Generation Children by Race and Ethnicity: 1990



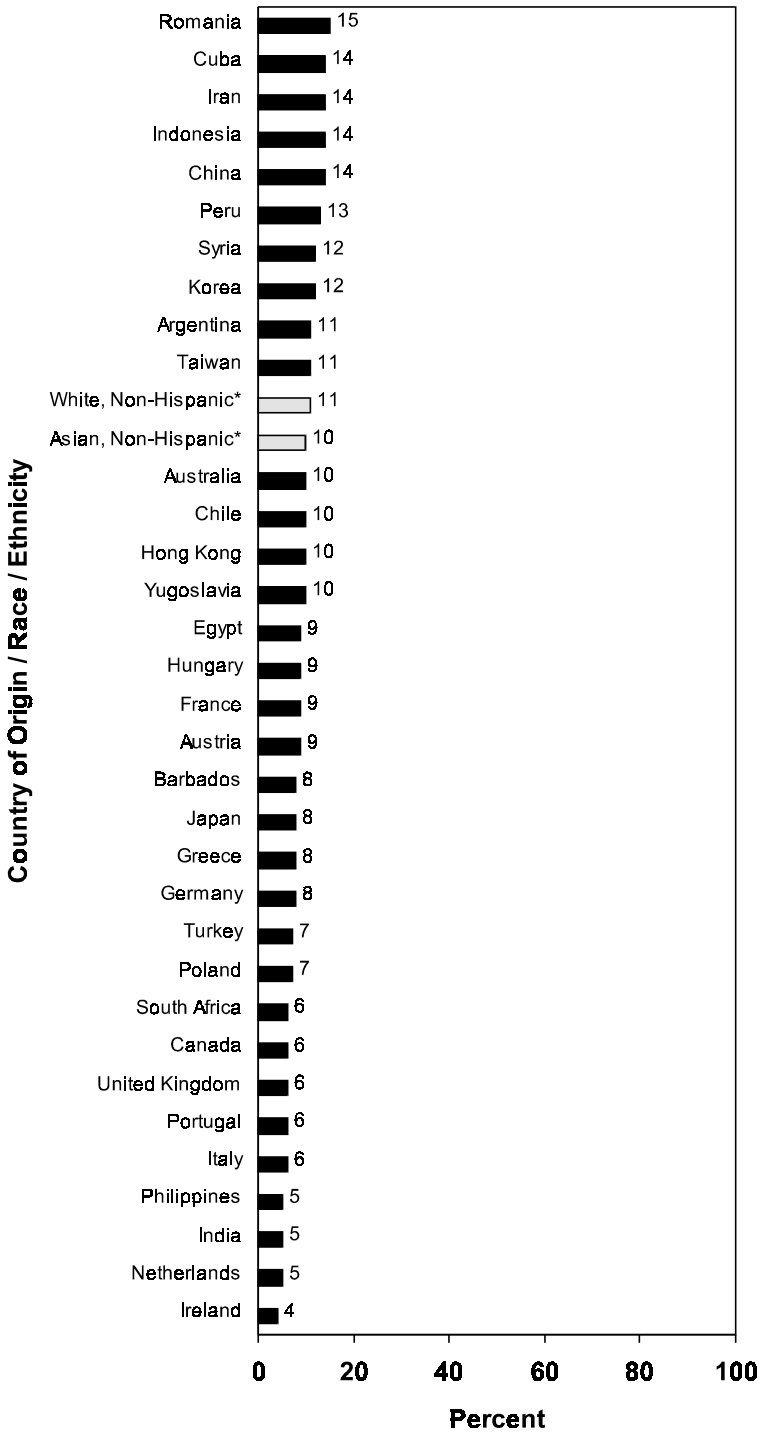
* Third-and-later-generation children shaded lightly.

Note: See Technical Appendix for description of variables.

Source: Table A and Hernandez and Darke, 1999.v

Figure 6 (Part 2)

Percent in Official Poverty for First- and Second-Generation Children by Country of Origin, and Third-and-Later-Generation Children by Race and Ethnicity: 1990



* Third-and-later-generation children shaded lightly.

Note: See Technical Appendix for description of variables.

Source: Table A and Hernandez and Darke, 1999.v

Five of these 12 countries are the source of many officially recognized refugees (former Soviet Union, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam); three are war-torn countries in Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua); and three are small and impoverished Central American or Caribbean countries (Honduras, Haiti, Dominican Republic) which are sources of unskilled labor migrants. The twelfth country is Mexico, which currently sends the largest number of both legal and illegal unskilled labor immigrants, and which has been a ready source of unskilled labor for the U.S. economy throughout the twentieth century (Romo, 1996; Rumbaut, 1996). Within the racial and ethnic stratification system of the U.S., most children from 11 of these 12 countries, with the former Soviet Union as the sole exception, are classified as Hispanic, Asian, or black.

First- and second-generation children with origins in these 12 countries accounted for 47 percent (3.9 million) of all first- and second-generation children in 1990 (8.3 million), but they accounted for 72 percent of the first- and second-generation children who lived in poverty. Moreover, Mexico alone accounted for 31 percent (2.6 million) of all first- and second-generation children, but 49 percent of those officially classified as poor in the 1990 census.

In fact, the poverty rate among first- and second-generation children, especially those from Mexico, is at least somewhat higher. Analyses of the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), commissioned by the Committee on the Health and Adjustment of Immigrant Children and Families indicate that more than 67 percent of U.S.-based children in migrant farm worker families lived in poverty in each year from 1993 to 1995, that is, more than 590,000 of the 880,000 total (Mines, 1999). Insofar as a substantial portion of migrant farm worker families and their children, especially those of Mexican origin who account for 69 percent of the U.S.-based children in the NAWS, are not enumerated in the decennial census, the total number (and percent) of children in immigrant families, especially of Mexican origin, who were living in poverty was higher, perhaps by several hundred thousand (and several percentage points), than indicated by the decennial census data.

Poverty rates for children in immigrant families in 1989 were lower, sometimes much lower, for second-generation children than for the first generation for nearly all countries of origin, including most of the 12 countries with the highest poverty rates (Table B). But for children with origins in Mexico, who account for about two-thirds of the children in immigrant families from these 12 countries, the poverty rates for the second generation and the third and later generations were quite similar, at 32 and 28 percent respectively, which is 2.5 to 3 times greater than for third- and later-generation non-Hispanic white children.

Among children with origins in the four Central American countries for which information is available for all three generations (Tables B and C), the decline in poverty from the second to the later generations is somewhat larger than for Mexican-origin children, and the levels for the poverty rates for the later generations are 14-17 percent, only somewhat greater than for third- and later-generation non-Hispanic white children (11 percent). This might reflect greater intergenerational assimilation of children from these four countries than from Mexico. But a plausible alternative explanation derives from the possibility that immigrants from these countries during the past two decades, escaping war-torn conditions in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, may have had substantially lower socioeconomic status, on average, than did immigrants from these countries during earlier decades; for example, among first- and second-generation children with Central American origins other than Mexico in 1960, the proportions with fathers in the home who graduated from high school were 61 and 69 percent, respectively, for the first and second generation, compared to 51 percent for third- and later-generation non-Hispanic white children. Thus, the apparent improvement between the second generation and the third and later generations of children in 1990 from Central American countries other than Mexico may reflect differences in socioeconomic status of parents as they entered the United States rather than intergenerational socioeconomic assimilation.

Children in immigrant families with origins in the Dominican Republic and Haiti also have very high poverty rates, but they are nearly the same for the first and second generations (41 and 42 percent for the Dominican Republic, 30 and 26 percent for Haiti), and available data for the Dominican Republic indicates no change for the third and later generations (40 percent).

The continuing high poverty rates of second- and of third- and later-generation children from these Caribbean countries and from Mexico suggest that the black and Hispanic children from these countries have experienced limited socioeconomic opportunities even, in the case of Mexican-origin children, after many generations. For those of Mexican origin, the pattern has been quite consistent since at least 1959, when the poverty rates for the first, second, and third and later generations were 58, 48, and 53 percent, respectively, that is, about 2.5 to 3 times greater than the rate of 19 percent for third- and later-generation non-Hispanic white children. Thus, among third- and later-generation children in 1959, those with origins in Mexico had a poverty rate of 53 percent, or about four-fifths as large as among black and American Indian children, who had poverty rates of 67 and 69 percent, respectively.

Although official poverty rates declined by approximately two-fifths between 1959 and 1989 for third- and later-generation children belonging to each of these racial and ethnic groups, Mexican-origin, black, and American Indian children all have continued to experience highly elevated risks of poverty, compared to third- and later-generation non-Hispanic white children. This historical continuity in the economic deprivation of children belonging to these racial and ethnic minorities raises the following question for the new Central American immigrant populations of Hispanic origin. Will they tend to assimilate socioeconomically to the level of non-Hispanic whites or to the level of Mexican-origin Hispanics?

Of course, it is possible that a substantial portion of third- and later-generation children with a Mexican-origin parent or grandparent also have a parent or grandparent(s) with non-Mexican origins, and that such children tend not to be reported as Mexican-origin and tend to have lower poverty rates than children with two Mexican-origin parents or four Mexican-origin grandparents who are reported as Mexican origin. As of 1990, 9 percent of third- and later-generation children who were identified as Mexican-origin, or as having at least one Mexican-origin parent, had a Mexican-origin parent but were not themselves identified as Mexican-origin. The exclusion of these children from the poverty estimates above can affect the poverty rates of third- and later- generation Mexican-origin children by no more than a percentage point or two. Additional research is required to assess the effect for third- and later-generation children on measured poverty of marriages between Mexican-origin and non-Mexican-origin grandparents or great-grandparents. But available estimates suggest a continuing pattern of economic disadvantage as measured by official poverty for third- and later-generation Mexican-origin children which, compared to third- and later-generation non-Hispanic whites, is similar to, though somewhat less extreme than, the restricted opportunities for socioeconomic advance experienced historically by black and American Indian children. Official poverty rates among third- and later-generation children in the 1990 census were 11 percent for non-Hispanic whites, 28 percent for Hispanics, and 40 and 39 percent, respectively, for non-Hispanic blacks and American Indians.

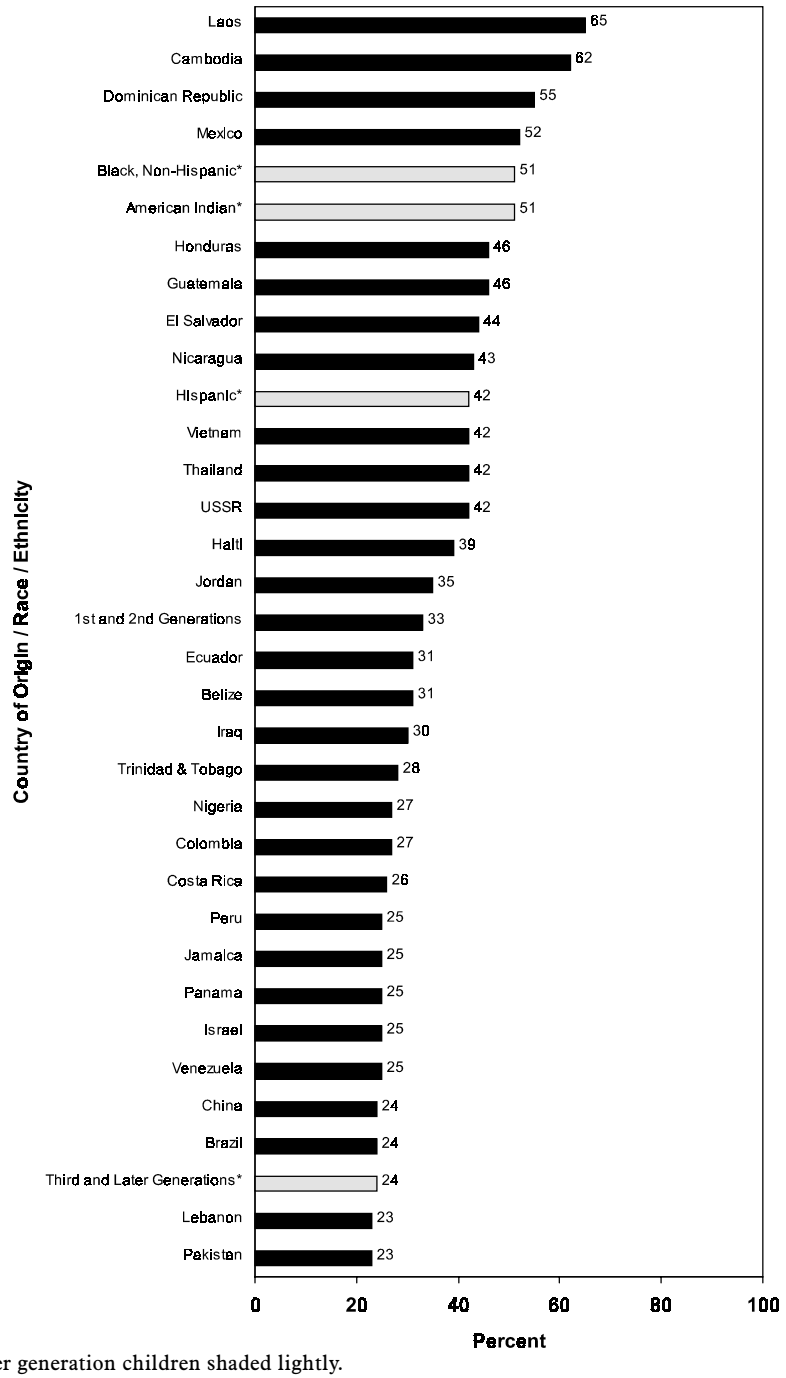
Alternative measures of "relative poverty" and of income inequality are valuable for historical as well as international comparisons, because they take into consideration changes in the real standard of living that occur through time and that exists across countries (Smith, 1776; Galbraith, 1958; Fuchs, 1965; Rainwater, 1974; Expert Committee on Family Budget Revisions, 1980; Ruggles, 1990; Hernandez, 1993; Smeeding and Torrey, 1995, Citro and Michael, 1995). A "relative" income measure that has been used to study historical changes experienced by children since the Great Depression is defined (taking family composition into account in a fashion similar to the official poverty measure) as follows: relative poverty is an income less than 50 percent of median family income during a given year, near-poor frugality is at least 50 percent but less than 75 percent of median family income, middle-class comfort is at least 75 percent but less than 150 percent of median family income, and luxury level income is 150 percent or more of the median family income level (Hernandez, 1993).

The relative and official poverty rates were quite similar in 1959, but by 1989 relative poverty rates were substantially higher. Among first- and second-generation children from the 12 countries of origin with the highest official child poverty rates, the relative poverty rates were about three- to six-tenths higher than the official poverty rates (Figure 7 and Table A). Hence, the official poverty rates ranged from 25 to 51 percent for these countries, compared to 35 to 66 percent using the relative poverty measure. Overall, the relative poverty rate for first- and second-generation children was 33 percent, compared to 24 percent for third- and later-generation children in 1989 (Figure 8). The patterns of relative poverty across the first, second, and third and later generations by country of origin were similar to the patterns in official

poverty, but at generally higher levels (Tables A and A). Overall, the relative poverty rate for the second generation was somewhat greater than for the third and later generations, at 29 and 24 percent, respectively, but enormously larger at 47 percent for the first generation.

Figure 7 (Part 1)

Percent in Relative Poverty for First and Second Generation Children by Country of Origin, and Third-and-Later-Generation Children by Race and Ethnicity: 1990



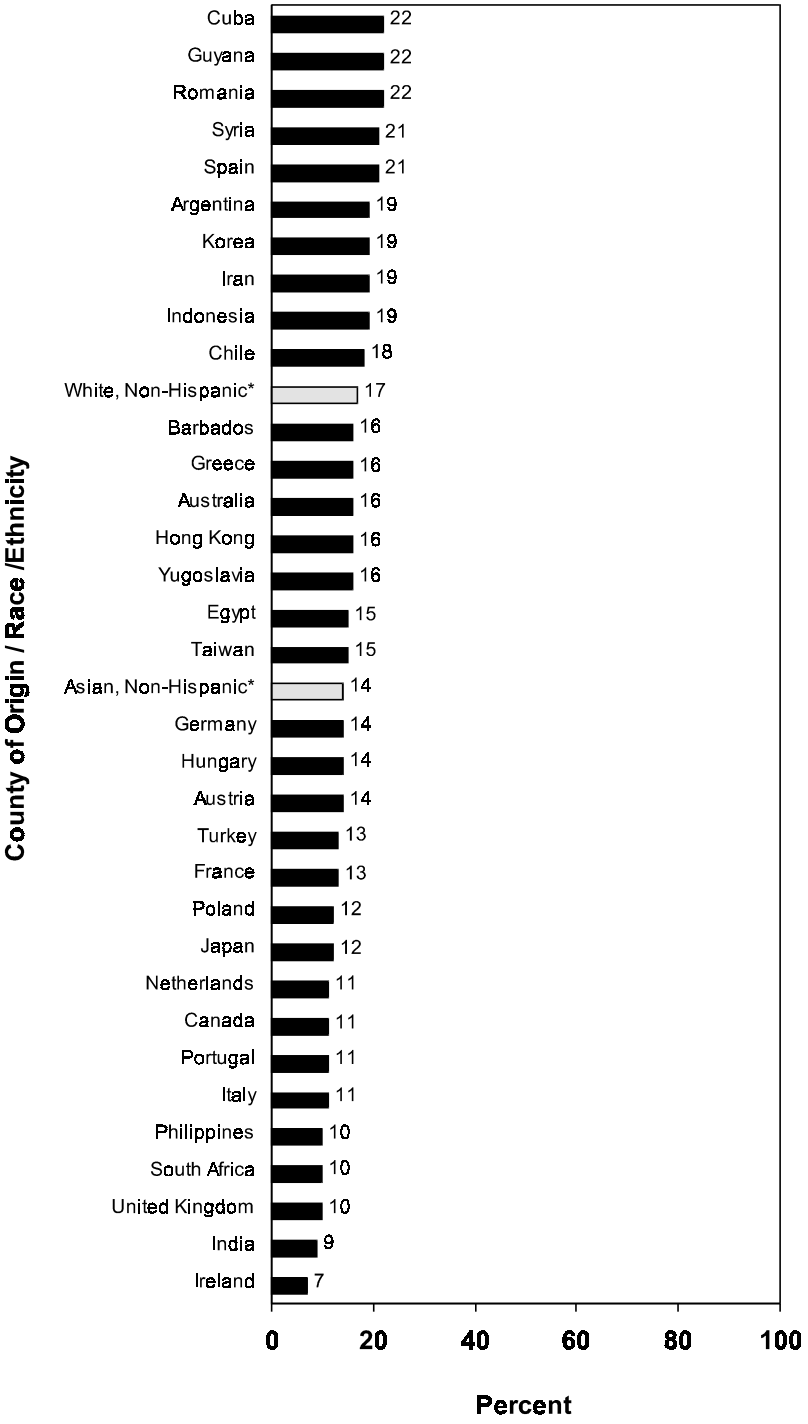
* Third and later generation children shaded lightly.

Note: See Technical Appendix for description of variables.

Source: Table A and Hernandez and Darke, 1999.

Figure 7 (Part 2)

Percent in Relative Poverty for First and Second Generation Children by Country of Origin, and Third-and-Later-Generation Children by Race and Ethnicity: 1990



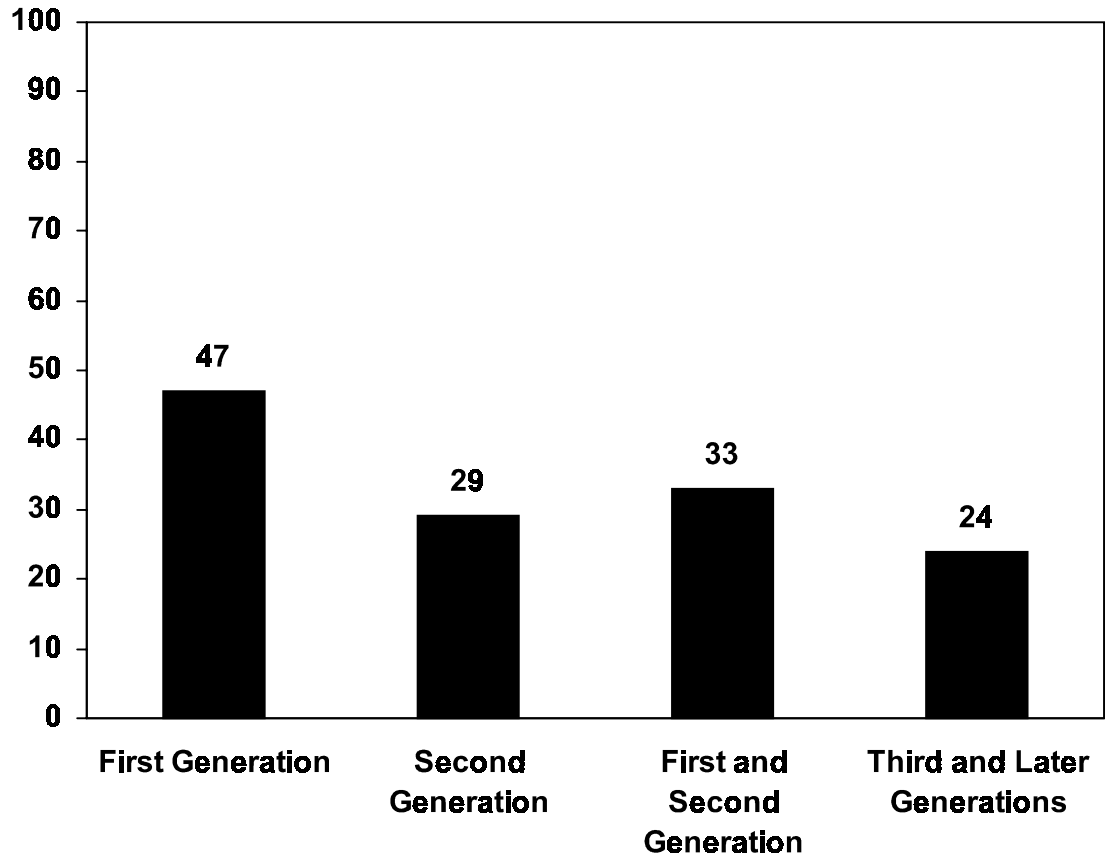
* Third and later generation children shaded lightly.

Note: See Technical Appendix for description of variables.

Source: Table A and Hernandez and Darke, 1999.

Figure 8

Percent in Relative Poverty for First-, Second-, and Third-and-Later-Generation Children: 1990



Note: See Technical Appendix for description of variables.

Source: Tables A and B, and Hernandez and Darke, 1999.

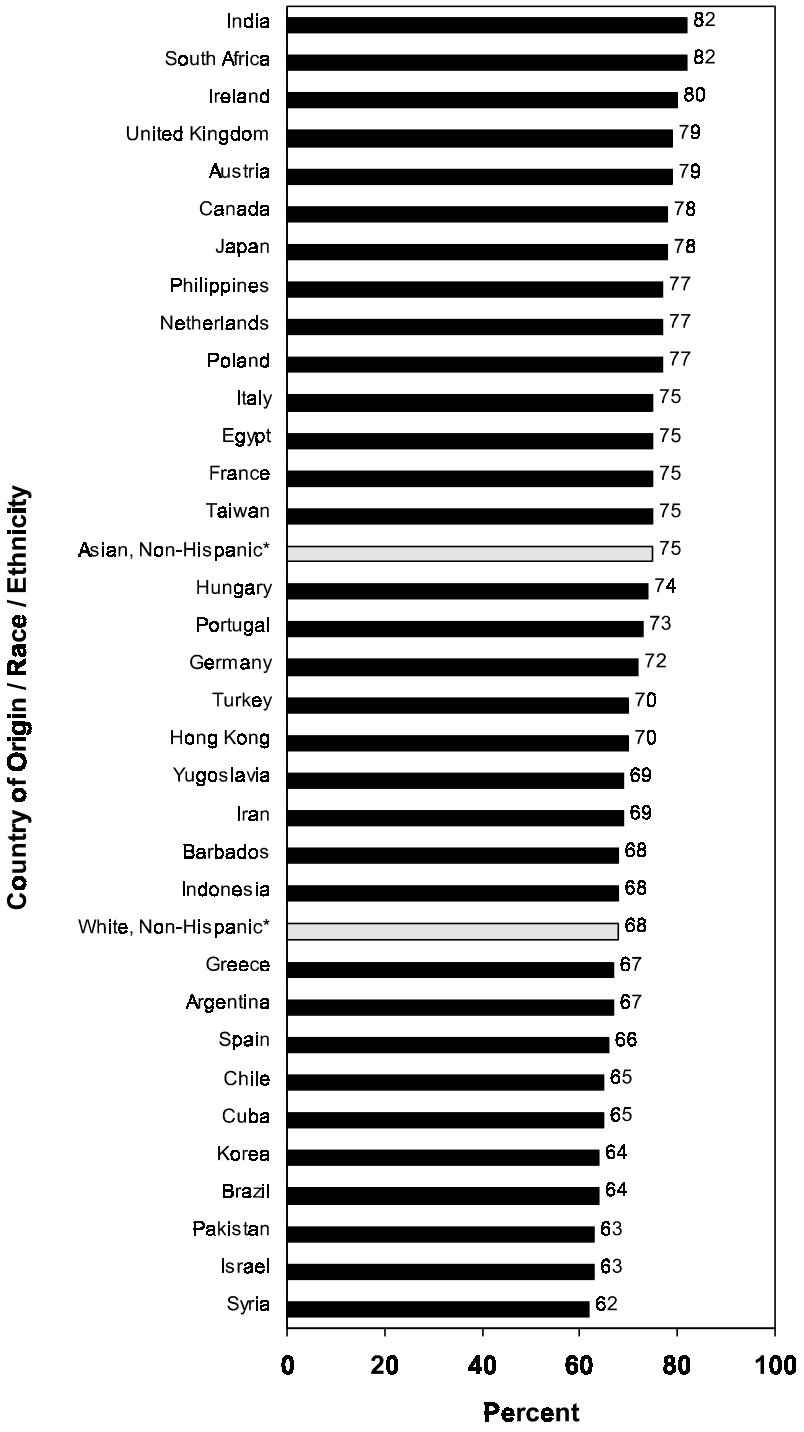
At the other end of the income distribution, middle-class or luxury level family incomes represent important resources for children. Although poverty rates for first- and second-generation children exceeded those for third- and later-generation children using the official and relative measures, respectively, by 5 and 11 percentage points, the proportion with luxury level income was nearly as high for first- and second- generation children as third- and later-generation children, at 19 and 22 percent, respectively (Table A). In fact, among children from 36 of the 62 countries of origin that each accounted for at least 15,000 children in immigrant families in the 1990 census, the proportions living in luxury were 25 percent or more, that is, at a level equal to or exceeding the 26 percent for third- and later-generation non-Hispanic white children. These 36 countries included 13 of 14 European countries, 10 of 14 Asian countries, 3 of 6 Middle-eastern countries, 4 of the 8 South American countries, as well as Egypt, South Africa, Australia, and Canada, but only 1 Caribbean country (Cuba), and no Central American countries.

Among first- and second-generation children from most of these countries, the combined proportion with middle-class or luxury level family incomes also equaled or exceeded the 69 percent experienced by third- and later-generation non-Hispanic white children (Figure 9 and Table A); thus children in immigrant families from more than half of the countries of origin accounting for at least 15,000 children in 1990 experienced family economic resources at least as great as third- and later-generation non-Hispanic white children.

Across the income spectrum, then, children in immigrant families were much more likely than third- and later-generation children to have family incomes below the relative poverty threshold in 1989, but only slightly less likely to have incomes at the luxury level. Hence, children in immigrant families experience substantially greater economic inequality than third- and later-generation children. Moreover, children in immigrant families from various countries are extremely diverse in the economic resources in their homes. Children in immigrant families from about a dozen countries experience levels of economic deprivation similar to those of third- and later-generation black, Hispanic, and American Indian children, and most of the children from these countries are Hispanic, black, or Asian. At the opposite extreme, children in immigrant families from more than two dozen countries experience economic resources similar to or greater than third- and later-generation non-Hispanic white children, and these countries are drawn from all regions of the world except Central America and the Caribbean (with Cuba as the lone exception).

Figure 9

Percent with Middle-Class or Luxury-Level Incomes for First- and Second-Generation Children by Country of Origin, and Third-and-Later-Generation Children by Race and Ethnicity: 1990



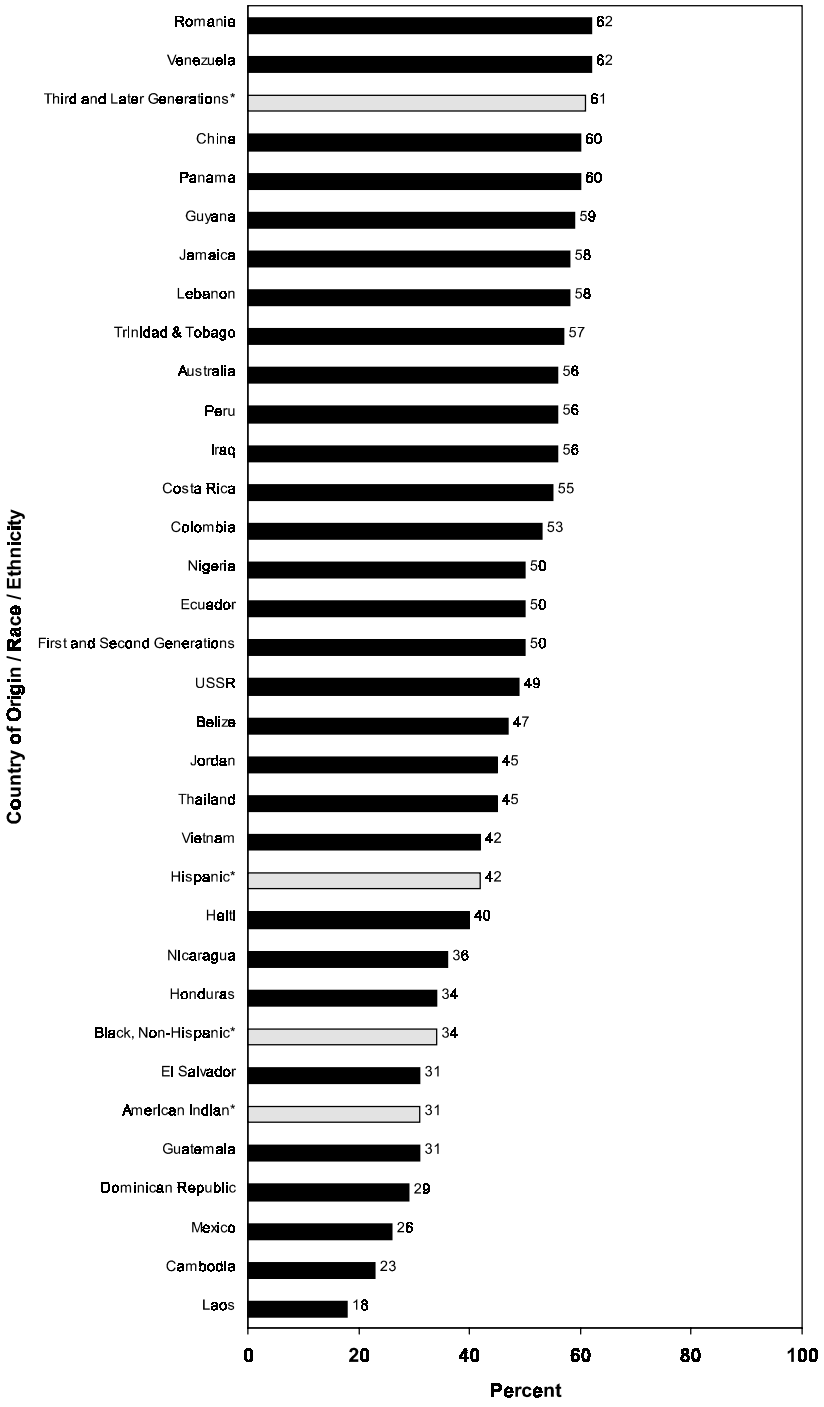
* Third-and-later-generation children shaded lightly.

Note: See Technical Appendix for description of variables.

Source: Table A and Hernandez and Darke, 1999.

Figure 9

Percent with Middle-Class or Luxury-Level Incomes for First- and Second-Generation Children by Country of Origin, and Third-and-Later-Generation Children by Race and Ethnicity: 1990



* Third-and-later-generation children shaded lightly.

Note: See Technical Appendix for description of variables.

Source: Table A and Hernandez and Darke, 1999.