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The Back Pocket Map: Social Class and Cultural Capital as Transferable Assets in the Advancement of Second-Generation Immigrants

Patricia Fernández-Kelly

Princeton University

Abstract

In this paper I move beyond current understandings of family- and school-related dynamics that explain the educational and occupational success of low-income immigrant children to investigate the role of cultural capital acquired in the country of origin. Class-related forms of knowledge acquired prior to migration can become invaluable assets in areas of destination through the realization of what Pierre Bourdieu calls *habitus*, that is, a series of embodied predispositions deployed by individuals in their pursuit of set objectives. Although the concept has attracted prolonged attention, the mechanisms by which the *habitus* is fulfilled remain unspecified. Here, I propose and examine three of those mechanisms: (a) cognitive correspondence, (b) positive emulation, and (c) active recollection. My study shows that class-related resources, like education, self definition, and remembrance of nation and ancestry play an important function, shaping youthful expectations and behaviors, and protecting the children of low-income immigrants from downward mobility.

Introduction

Amanda Disla was seven years old when her mother, Sulema, decided to move with her two daughters, Amanda and her younger sister, Shahana, from The Bronx to Greenville, North Carolina. Sulema was twenty-seven and recently divorced for the second time. Amanda's father, like Sulema, was from the Dominican Republic. Shahana's was a man from Bangladesh, whom the woman had first met in the United States. The woman's drastic move to the southern state was more than a response to marital disappointment—it was also an affirmative step on behalf of her girls. She had heard from her own sister that Greenville was a safe place to raise children. Wishing to protect her daughters from inner-city dangers, she sold her scanty furniture, packed a few necessities and drove nearly 500 miles to start a new life.

In the summer of 2006, nearly eighteen years later, Amanda had vivid memories of her childhood in North Carolina. Almost every day, as a middle school student, she came home crying because other kids called her names. Her olive complexion and angular features did not readily signal a particular ethnicity; yet she was often called spic and nigger. As much as the words hurt, Amanda knew they did not apply to her but she was still uncertain as to

where she fit in the racial mosaic. She hid her troubles not to worry her mother who, by then, was working two jobs and dating a new man. Finally, one night, after Sulema noticed her tear-filled eyes, Amanda made her confusion known. The mother was undisturbed; she took out a map of the Western Hemisphere, pointed to the Dominican Republic and told her daughter, “That’s where we come from—it’s a great country. Next time people call you names, don’t take it personally; educate them; show them where you come from!”

It was a small, un-self conscious gesture but it caused a big impression on Amanda. In her mid-twenties, when I first met her, she was still carrying her mother’s map in the back pocket of her pants: “It gave me a sense of place,” she explained, “Now I knew who I was and I couldn’t wait to tell everyone else.”

In this paper I take Amanda’s back pocket map as a metaphor and point of reference to investigate the role played by knowledge reserves acquired in countries of origin on the adaptation of immigrant children. I claim that informational repertoires linked to class position and brought from abroad can give low-income immigrant youngsters significant advantages in points of destination when other favorable conditions related to family and school are in place. I further argue that the investigation of class-based knowledge should give special attention to cognitive, imitative and memory-related dimensions as paths leading to the realization of what Pierre Bourdieu calls *habitus*, that is, a series of embodied predispositions that allow individuals to efficiently pursue objectives in various fields of activity. A focus on class based knowledge sheds light on the workings of culture. It also allows for a better understanding of outcomes in education and employment among immigrant children growing up under inauspicious conditions that include poverty and racial discrimination.

Recently arrived immigrants, especially those from Latin America and the Caribbean, are often seen as lacking the key material and educational resources to advance in American schools and workplaces. This is especially true in the post 9/11 era when harsh anti-immigration views have proliferated in the United States. Linguistic limitations, an undocumented status, and modest levels of formal instruction can create potent barriers for progress among foreign-born workers clustered at the bottom of the occupational ladder. Nevertheless, perceptions about the shortcomings of immigrants often clash with reality. An extensive literature now spanning more than three decades shows that most newcomers do not hail from the poorest social segments in countries of origin. What drives them at the risk of dislocation and even physical harm is not, in most cases, the fear of destitution but the lack of correspondence between their ambition and the character of economic opportunities in the places left behind.

The self-selected character of international sojourners points in two research directions: one demands a more nuanced understanding of the class background of people who may experience poverty in the United States but whose social standing prior to relocation may endow them with advantages not easily apparent to the casual observer. The second research path focuses on the way in which factors associated to class position intervene in places of destination to facilitate or impede the successful incorporation of immigrants and their children into the receiving society.

At least in some cases, immigrants who live modestly and take menial jobs in the U.S. are endowed with formal and informal knowledge that facilitates the advancement of their offspring. They carry within a hidden stock of knowledge that belies their lowly position in the receiving society. That is because social class does not solely depend on material resources—it significantly entails benefits derived from membership in social networks—what authors call social capital—and other assets transmitted via traditional narratives or familial accounts, and internalized by the young through emulation and recollection. For example, immigrant children are routinely separated from classmates to receive remedial teaching in English—an evidence of vulnerability and possible marginalization—but their minds may be filled with notions of grandeur passed on by parents who constantly remind them about that their families once owned land back in Mexico or Nicaragua or how their uncles and aunts were prominent physicians and teachers in the ancestral home. Memories, real or imagined can have a profound impact upon the self definition of youngsters, allowing them to see the condition of poverty as a transitory moment in a larger journey towards success.

Studying the role played by assets acquired before migration has intrinsic value but there is another reason why such an endeavor is worth pursuing: it illuminates the operations of what Portes and Zhou (1993) call *segmented assimilation*. Prior to the introduction of that term, authors gave most attention to processes leading to the comprehensive amalgamation of immigrants into American society. By contrast, *segmented assimilation* points to a variety of outcomes, challenging conclusions about the holistic absorption of newcomers into American Society—itself an abstraction implying more of a monolithic object than the actual, fragmented reality that America is. *Segmented assimilation* puts emphasis on the way in which immigrant children merge into preexisting groups through sustained social interaction with specific sectors of the native-born population. In some cases that progression leads to upward mobility. In others, immigrant youngsters experience downward assimilation after being absorbed by stagnant social segments.

Soon after its introduction in the early 1990s, the concept of *segmented assimilation* became standard reference but it has come under attack more recently. Critiques are of two kinds. Some argue that, although immigrants may experience obstacles in their march forward, most overcome them, eventually fusing into the mainstream. Others are repulsed by the suggestion that downward assimilation may be fueled by contact with poor and racially distinct sectors of the native population, especially African Americans and Latinos. Neither criticism is convincing. The first objection overlooks a simple point: it may be true that, in the final analysis, immigrants assimilate one way or another but there are salient differences in the paths they traverse, especially in the early stages of settlement. The study of those variations fulfills the true purpose of sociological analysis, which is to reveal variations in the paths that explain social ascent or decline among New Americans.

The second objection stems from liberal sensibilities that deplore the stigma imposed upon impoverished and racial minorities. From that point of view, a focus on segmented assimilation seems like a recombinant theorization of what Oscar Lewis once called the ‘culture of poverty.’ Even worse, the concept appears to blame the victims of economic maldistribution and racism for their own circumstances. Given rising levels of inequality and

a long tradition of racial discrimination in this country, those concerns are not trivial. Nevertheless, they are better situated in the realm of ethics and political advocacy than in the field sociological research. The fact is that poverty and exclusion beget distinctive forms of deviance. It does not advance the cause of the oppressed and exploited to distort the crude realities of poverty or romanticize attitudes and behaviors derived from a marginal condition. In streets, schools, and workplaces, immigrant youngsters find cues to understand what it means to be an American; whether those cues are emitted by members of disaffected or conforming sectors makes a difference in their outlook and behavior. Thus, as the idea of *segmented assimilation* suggests, not all immigrants share a common destiny—a multiplicity of factors impinges upon their capacity for socio-economic mobility.

In this paper I focus on dimensions of segmented assimilation that have received little attention until now. I develop my argument by first providing a methodological explanation and briefly discussing family and school dynamics pertaining to a sample of low-income immigrant children who have exceeded educational and occupational expectations. In the third section I discuss the role of intangible assets in the process of immigrant adaptation. I focus on class, culture and memory as relevant agents in the success of impoverished immigrant children. The conclusion offers some ideas for further investigation.

Methods

This paper is based on 58 interviews conducted in Miami-Dade, Florida, and San Diego, California, between March 2006 and August, 2007, as part of the fourth stage in the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey (CILS).¹ Throughout its duration, CILS has depended on a dual method approach to enhance understanding of the conditions surrounding immigrant youngsters and their families. Quantitative analyses have provided a wealth of information about statistically significant processes. Ethnographic research has identified chains of events leading to specific behavioral outcomes, and pinpointed meanings assigned by second-generation immigrants and their parents to their own conduct and that of others. This dual methodology is consistent with state-of-the-art approaches, including Michael Burawoy's Extended Case Method (1990). The dialogue and triangulation between quantitative analysis and qualitative techniques—participant observation, community mapping, and face-to-face interviewing—can lead to greater accuracy in description and explanation.

Dual method approaches are of special significance in any attempt to understand exceptional success in education and employment among low-income immigrant children. The factors resulting in impeded or downward mobility have been well documented through quantitative research but it is only through qualitative means that exceptions may be properly accounted for. Youngsters belonging in poor families, whose parents have few years of schooling and

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¹In 1993 data were first collected on a national sample formed by more than five thousand, second-generation immigrant children between the ages of nine and fourteen. The sample was equally divided between Miami-Dade County, Florida and San Diego County, California—areas known to be immigrant points of entry and places where large and representative concentrations of newly arrived immigrants reside. The youngsters in the CILS sample and at least one of their parents were interviewed again in 1995. Subsequent interviews with members of the CILS sample took place in 2001. Throughout its duration, the survey was complemented by ethnographic research based on participant observation and in-depth face-to-face interviews with immigrant children and members of their family.

perform menial jobs, and those who grow up in female-headed households, or belong in stigmatized racial or ethnic minorities face a high probability of school desertion, limited earning capacity, and even arrest and incarceration. The opposite is also true. Among Chinese, Indians, and Cubans in the United States—national groups that have strong educational and employment profiles—high-school dropouts, adolescent mothers, and prisoners are rare exceptions, barely detectable in statistical accounts. By contrast, nearly half of Mexican Children in this country do not complete high school and one third of adolescent girls in that group have given birth to at least one child. Incarceration rates among second-generation Jamaicans and Dominicans now approximate those of African Americans. The correspondence between poverty, limited education, early motherhood and nonconformity has also been established among young people in long established groups. African Americans are the most salient example as are sectors of the Hispanic population, including Puerto Ricans and, increasingly, Mexicans and Guatemalans.

Alarming as the statistics are for some national groups, the fact is that most immigrant children overcome the daunting obstacles that devastate the lives of many of their cohorts. Even more astonishing is the case of youngsters who have grown up in poverty but who have surpassed expectations to achieve high levels of educational and professional standing. How do they accomplish so much with so little? CILS-4 broached that question through the application of a qualitative strategy whose results, although insufficient for generalization, point to trends worthy of continued analysis

In a country like the United States where individualism is at the center of the collective worldview, it is tempting to invoke values when answering questions about educational and occupational achievement. A focus on character, however, falls short of providing satisfactory explanations. Since Robert K. Merton wrote his influential text on social structure and anomie (1938)—and after several generations of sociological research on the same subject—it is known that the aspirations and value sets of deviants tend to be similar to those of law-abiding citizens—it is not *ends* but *means* that distinguish the two populations. Furthermore, as shown by Merton himself, attitudes and conduct may vary independently thus confounding our capacity to see virtue and diligence as the sole cause of social mobility. A large number of workers in the United States toil diligently without advancing while some in the affluent classes boast oppositional values and engage in anomalous behaviors without experiencing social or economic decline. In those cases moral fiber and persistence can hardly be invoked as an explanation for either outcome. It is therefore necessary to center attention on the *patterned experience* of immigrant youngsters—not just their attitudes and values—in any attempt to account for ascent or decline.

Because of its long duration, CILS offers an ideal opportunity to undertake such a goal. When they were first interviewed in 1992, the children in this national sample were between nine and 14 years of age, that is, at the brink of puberty or in early adolescence. By 2006, they were in their mid and late twenties, old enough to have overcome numerous barriers or been demolished by them. Included in the sample under review here are individuals who met at least three of four criteria: (a) parents with low levels of instruction and occupational standing; (b) low household incomes; (c) membership in a one-parent household; (d)

membership in stigmatized ethnic or national groups; and (e) completion of at least a college level education in a four-year institution.

We followed standard procedures in ethnographic research by identifying informants and conducting most in-depth interviews in their homes or workplaces. Some interviews were held over the telephone or in public settings like parks or restaurants. Personal exchanges were supplemented with community mapping and participant observation. We traversed the neighborhoods where many of our informants grew up and had enlightening conversations with parents, teachers, and mentors in programs in which they had participated as middle- and high-school students. Some interviews were followed by telephone calls requesting clarification or additional information.

On the average, interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. They were recorded and summarized to produce master narratives. Those accounts were tagged to show how they fit into the overall project and how they compared to one another. Analysis was facilitated by cross-referencing individual stories and pinpointing thematic differences as well as similarities. This coding approach is in consonance with a major goal of ethnographic research, namely, the identification of common threads in the lives of those interviewed.

The result was a compendium of narratives about the extraordinary lives of Cuban, Jamaican, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Haitian, and Mexican children some of whom left native countries escaping political oppression arriving in America to confront racial prejudice. A good number entered the country illegally in decrepit schooners that almost sank in mid sea, hidden beneath car seats, or stuffed inside large boxes within vehicles crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. Almost none of our interviewees spoke English when they first arrived. Even some who were born in the U.S. had limited English fluency and were therefore subjected to remedial teaching. A few belonging to indigenous groups had to learn not only English but also Spanish in their adopted country.

They lived in crowded rooms sharing beds with siblings and other relatives. Their mothers and fathers labored for long hours while they went to school and returned to modest homes to be cared for by grandparents or to do school-work in the company of older brothers and sisters. A few ended up in subsidized housing projects where they faced the familiar troubles encountered by impoverished groups, including the violent death of relatives and friends. A handful saw friends succumb to the lure of drugs and gangs. In school, they were sometimes treated with disdain or dismissed by teachers with minimal expectations about their intellectual potential. Family love notwithstanding, many felt the blow of belts and fists as parents tried to impose discipline. Every one of them experienced some form of deprivation. Many had to start working at an early age to cover their own needs. All and all the lives of the children in this project would have led the observer to predict bitterness, despondency, and limited success in school or the labor market.

Instead, they grew up to become undergraduate students in prestigious colleges and universities, some went on to obtain master's degrees and a few are enrolled in doctoral programs at main academic institutions. Their fields cover computational sciences, engineering, mathematics, biology, and education. Several now work as accountants in

major firms, as personnel managers in hotels and banks, or as stockbrokers in well known companies. Some are directors of not-for-profit organizations and coordinators of programs that have commanded national attention. Nearly all of them dream about continuing their education and making a difference in their communities and the nation at large. What *went right* in the lives of these young men and women?

Family and School Dynamics Revisited

The answer to that question is condensed in Portes and Fernández-Kelly (this volume). Family- and school-related factors combined to open paths for impoverished immigrant children that would have remained blocked otherwise. In the first instance, the capacity of parents to isolate youngsters through authoritarian means—including corporal punishment and constant oversight—reduced the risk of downward mobility. Such parents saw native-born youngsters, especially African Americans and Latinos, as a potential source of trouble. They discouraged independent decision making on the part of their sons and daughters and took exception to actions that would have resulted in a weakening of the parent-child bond. Not surprisingly, even as adults, most of the young men and women in our sample were still living at home or in close proximity to their parents.

School dynamics were equally significant. Remarkable for the frequency with which it emerged as a thematic theme in this study was the extent to which a single, respected adult met in school was able to create bridges between children and mainstream institutions such as colleges or universities. A magical sequence of events was set into motion when an admired teacher or counselor took a special interest in a youngster. The child was made *socially visible* by the concern of a knowledgeable outsider. Expectations changed and new identities took shape. Previously unknown goals suddenly came within reach.

Almost invariably, immigrant parents with low levels of instruction and limited means work hard to provide their children with the opportunities they never had. Without exception they value education but their respect for learning is not matched by their know-how or coaching capacity. Parents strongly encourage their sons and daughters to get good grades but have almost no information about how to advance their capacity to compete in the educational terrain. Admirable goals frequently clash with behavior that comes close to sabotage. It is for that reason that skillful teachers, counselors, and mentors can play such a decisive role in the life of striving immigrant children. They are the ones capable of unraveling the complex bureaucratic and procedural knot that separates youngsters from college admission. It is them, not immigrant parents, who can act as bridging agents, telling students about the importance of SAT scores, the significance of timely applications, and the paramount role played by well crafted personal statements and letters of recommendation. Interested teachers facilitate the creation of *weak ties* connecting youngsters to the world of higher education and meaningful employment. They are the bearers of new skills that enable youngsters to move ahead.

A similar function is fulfilled by college preparatory programs that make the experience of higher education real for children whose environments contain few if any people with advanced degrees. A wide variety of after-school and enrichment curricula have become the

trend in American cities over the last decade and a half. Nevertheless, this study strongly suggests that it is those initiatives designed around *the expectation* of a college education that work most effectively. Many of those programs are sponsored by political groups that also promote strong ethnic identities. Initiatives like MECHA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan known also as the Aztlan Chicano Student Movement) and Latinas Unidas foster feelings of belonging and pride predicated on national, ethnic and gender identity. This contradicts the idea that ethnic self definitions are counter to assimilation. On the contrary, this and other studies strongly suggest that a vigorous attachment to ancestral culture and nationality facilitates integration into the receiving society.

In the next section I move beyond family and school dynamics to explore other, less well understood factors, involved in the advancement of immigrant youngsters

Effects of Class in Country of Origin

Parental authoritarianism in combination with the bridging capacity of teachers and counselors largely explains educational success among impoverished immigrant children but does not account for the whole story. Below I examine embodied knowledge derived from class position as a means for advancement in areas of destination.

Much has been written about social class and it is not my purpose here to recapitulate long-standing debates on the subject. I merely adhere to a heuristic definition that characterizes *class* as a large social segment whose members share an equivalent position vis-à-vis control or ownership of vital resources and means of production. In addition to varying economic status, class encompasses political and ideological potentialities. It provides groups and individuals with differential access to various forms of capital—human, financial, social, and even cultural—and unequal degrees of power to mobilize those assets. The difference, then, between professionals residing in affluent American suburbs and poor, racially distinct groups clustered in inner cities is not just their unequal stock of material assets but in each case the character of political participation, the distinct configuration of social networks, the level of spatial concentration and mobility, and multiple daily practices, beliefs, and outlooks. Race, ethnicity and gender overlap with social class to create even more distinctive patterns of experience. In short, social class is about the capacity to amass and transmit wealth and the ability to control or influence others.

Casual observers and even specialized accounts often assume that immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean uniformly come from impoverished sectors. That notion is reinforced because, upon arrival, people from those regions tend to cluster at the bottom of the occupational ladder. Systematic research shows, however, that immigrants tend to be self selected in terms of stamina, ambition and even health. What drives them away from hometowns is not impending destitution but a lack of fit between their desire for advancement and the limited opportunities in countries of origin. Many who experience poverty in areas of destination come from middling sectors. Given their recent arrival they may not be familiar with mainstream practices and necessity may force them to take menial jobs but inscribed in their minds are forms of knowledge that can contribute to their successful adaptation and that of their children.

Critical to this argument is a reevaluation of formal and informal instruction prior to migration. Several factors can combine to bestow educational advantages upon children born abroad. Youngsters, whose parents have limited resources, may be able to acquire a good education thanks in part to his personal talent but also as a result of her family's contacts. A robust literature in economic sociology leaves little doubt about the significance of *weak ties* that become valuable currency among those with limited economic means. Poor people can increase their asset reserve through connections with persons of a higher position through institutions like *compadrazgo* (godparentage). Such institutions create bonds and obligations among families of differing class backgrounds. All over Latin America, parents seek to provide their children with two sets of *padrinos* (co-parents), those of first waters (*primeras aguas*) and those of Church baptism. *Padrinos* are seen as economic and political resources that offer protection or economic assistance in times of need (Derby 1994). In the same vein, asymmetrical relationships between employers and workers can forge bonds of mutuality. Service providers, especially domestic servants and caretakers, are in a strong position to mobilize resources when bonds of trust and reciprocity are established with employers. In other words, fictive kinship and other reciprocal connections facilitate the flow of information and gifts from richer to poorer groups. One of those gifts often consists in higher levels of education.

An example from CILS 4 will suffice to illustrate the workings of personal ties in countries of origin, which then give rise to advantages in places of immigrant destination. Emmanuel Mallard was born to low-income parents in Port Au Prince, Haiti. Although his family lived modestly, he was taught to value education. When he was 14 he applied for a scholarship at the College Saint Pierre, then a prestigious private institution. According to Emmanuel, "it was a one-in-a-million shot" but he thought it was worth trying because he had always received good grades in public school. Emmanuel was heartbroken when his application was turned down. His mother persisted. As a nurse she had assisted one of the administrators at Saint Pierre during a period of prolonged illness. It was now her turn to ask for a favor. Her plea succeeded; Emmanuel was admitted to Saint Pierre and it was there that he acquired substantial amounts of knowledge about geography, economics, and history, subjects that scarcely receive attention in American inner-city schools.

He was 17 when his family decided to move to Miami. In his neighborhood, adjacent to a dejected urban ghetto, he was not differentiable from other dark-skinned youngsters. Given his background, however, he consistently obtained higher than average standardized test scores. Although he had to work on weekends and summers to defray personal expenses, he first attended Miami-Dade Community College and then transferred to Florida State University. Emmanuel majored in Chemistry and graduated with a 3.4 grade point average. His goal is to pursue a doctoral degree in the same field at an elite institution. His mother still works as a nurse's aid in Miami. His father, a man of impeccable religious credentials, is a humble custodian at a local hospital.

In other cases, personal tragedy, natural catastrophe or political turmoil can result in poverty among the members of formerly affluent and educated immigrants. In 1980, when she was 12, Lisbeth Hernandez came to the U.S. from Cuba with her mother, Lillian, and her two older siblings, Gerardo and Lisette. Lillian decided to leave her native country after her

estranged husband, and father of her children, committed suicide. Born into a family of means, he had grown up to become a Lieutenant Cornet in the Cuban army. His daughter, Lisbeth, thinks that he suffered from post traumatic stress disorder after participating in military tours in Africa. Lillian and her children first traveled to Madrid, Spain. When they received legal authorization to enter the United States they joined other relatives in Miami. The family lived modestly for many years, depending mostly on Lillian's income.

According to Lisbeth, Lillian's greatest virtue is perseverance. "[My mother] is someone," she says, "willing to clean houses, something she never had to do before, to provide for her children." Her older sister, Lissette, agrees:

No matter what tragedy occurred, like my father's death ... she kept focused on us. When we arrived [in Madrid] she took us to the steps of a church. She had no milk to give me, no food to give my brother and sister. It was *Nochebuena*, Christmas Eve. She was crying and, suddenly, coins started raining on her because people felt so badly about her situation they wanted to help. She did what she had to do to get ahead. In Cuba her family had had maids, now she had to clean houses to support us.

Once in Miami, Lillian first continued to hire her services as a domestic. Eventually, she found a job as a receptionist. Her younger daughter, Lisbeth, went on to become a teacher. Her older sister, Lissette obtained a Master's Degree in Psychology and is now the Director of Counseling at a large Miami school. She is pleased to report that her salary is larger than the one earned by her husband.

Another relevant case is that of Martin Lacayo summarized in Portes and Fernández-Kelly (this volume). In 1978, the year Martin was born, the Sandinista Revolution was in full rage. Chaos prevailed. Street demonstrations were rampant. People burnt tires to express their discontent. The fumes made Violeta, Martin's pregnant mother, choke and vomit. Her nose bled. She was frightened for her unborn child. One day, while attending church, the preacher observed that the name Martin came from Mars, god of war. When her child moved in her womb Violeta talked to him saying, "It's all right, your name is Martin; you are a warrior and you will overcome everything!"

When Martin was six, his mother took him and his younger sister in a more than 3000 miles voyage by land, air, and water to Miami. The trip culminated when the small family was smuggled across the Rio Grande. In the U.S. the woman worked cleaning houses for more than two decades to provide for her children. She is still a janitor earning a paltry wage at Florida International University. As an immigrant child growing up in the U.S., Martin lived modestly with his mother and two older brothers who had been sent to Miami earlier to escape the Sandinista Revolution. He grew up to excel in high school and college and became an accountant employed at a major financial firm. He recently bought a chic condominium in an up and coming residential area.

As recounted above, the story is truthful but it leaves out critical elements. Violeta, Martin's mother had been born in Jinotega, Nicaragua in 1942, the daughter of an affluent and well connected family. Her mother owned a bakery and gave her a small appliance store as a

wedding gift so that she didn't have to depend on her husband's income. Her godmother was a wealthy woman who later co-signed payments so that Violeta could expand her business. Before marrying Martin's father, Violeta completed a Master's degree in Business Administration. When she decided to migrate to the U.S. to protect her four children from Communism, she was able to pay all her debts in advance, leave the deed of her house in her husband's hands, and sell her jewels to finance the arduous journey. Martin's father had served as Mayor of Jinotega. He was well educated and a member of such organizations as the Rotary Club and the Red Cross.

In other words, when Mrs. Lacayo left Nicaragua, she was in a position to mobilize substantial resources to facilitate her voyage. A friend who worked with an airline helped her to obtain tourist visas for her children. Her father in law recruited a trusted man to escort the family for part of their journey. Once in American soil, Violeta was able to draw from an account in a Dallas bank where she had placed money in reserve thanks to the mediation of yet another friend.

In their childhood, Martin and his older brothers had attended the La Salle School, an elite Catholic institution in Jinotega. He remembered being cared for by servants and knew that his grandmother had been a respected woman of means. His family included professionals. At an early age he had learned from family and social network many of the lessons he then used as a foreign-born student navigating his way in American public schools. In other words, although Martin was perceived as a poor immigrant—and surely was by conventional measures—his self-definition corresponded to a higher position in society.

Learning the fine details in these lives does not mar the exceptional trajectories of Emmanuel Mallard, Lisbeth and Lissette Hernandez or Martin Lacayo. Such details merely refine our understanding of processes that lead disadvantaged youngsters to succeed, suggesting that immigrant parents who undergo material deprivation in their adopted country may not be poor in other, decisive respects. They use social and cultural tools acquired in the country of origin to gain upward mobility in areas of destination. Cognitive and behavioral elements attached to class position are transposed across borders as invisible but precious assets.

Finally, when assessing the effects of class-based knowledge it is worth remembering the powerful processes of cultural diffusion that expose people throughout the world to mores and practices in areas of resettlement, long before they migrate. Economic integration on a world scale combined with advanced communication technologies offers extensive access to images of success and how to achieve it in countries like the United States. This also suggests that the emphasis placed by some authors on cultural differences between native and foreign born populations may be exaggerated. Samuel Huntington attained dubious fame by arguing that new immigrants from Latin America, especially Mexicans, will not assimilate given stark cultural differences inimical to the Anglo-Protestant way of life. The facts say otherwise. In their own country, and for many generations, Mexicans have been subjected to the cultural influence of mainstream America. A preference for American forms coexists with older autochthonous tastes in the country's daily experience. That is true about language as well. Many Mexicans do not speak English but most have more than a passing

acquaintance with American modes of expression. The propagation of cultural norms from the American core to every corner of the planet shrinks gaps in information resulting from class inequalities in sending countries. Even marginal groups are now connected to cultural fields operating at the global level.

Illustrative of such trends are indigenous migrants who experience discrimination in their own countries and after migrating to the U.S. but who, despite naïve presumptions, are connected with world culture thanks to advanced technology and contact with earlier migrants acting as purveyors of new knowledge. Such is the case of Norma Gonzalez, a Mixtec Indian who spent the first years of her life in Santa Maria Natividad, Oaxaca. When she was 13, she was smuggled across the U.S.-Mexico border crouched under the driver's seat of a van driven by her father. The family settled in Linda Vista, a San Diego district. When she first arrived she didn't speak English and was not fluent in Spanish. Despite such linguistic limitations, Norma remembers as a girl in her distant village hearing about life in the United States from her cousin, Feliciano:

He came back every year and my whole family gathered in the evenings to hear his stories. He told us about life in *el Norte*, about the way people dressed and behaved and about what was different from our way of life. He brought presents. He once gave me a pocket radio and batteries and I just thought that was wonderful! It made me feel like I was no different from other people in [the United States].

After living in San Diego for a while, Norma forgot her native language, Mixtec. It was through interaction with other Mexicans in her school and neighborhood that she mastered Spanish even as she had to take remedial classes in English. Because of her linguistic limitations, Norma didn't get good grades at first but she caught up gradually. When she was a student at Tierney High School—where most students were Mexican—she learned about college from her older sister, Julieta. She then applied and was accepted at San Diego State University where she majored in sociology and graduated in 2000 with a 3.6 GPA. Norma now works at a not-for-profit organization dedicated to nurture educational aspirations among Mexican youngsters. She would like to get an advanced degree in a related field.

When asked about the huge distance that separates her childhood years in the Mixtec backwaters and her present condition, Norma shrugs the question off; "It wasn't as difficult as it seems," she recites, "at every step of the way there were people to push me forward and even in the village, I knew about the United States, its customs, its way of life—I wasn't scared to live here."

The cases sketched above provide a sense of ways in which social class in countries of origin shapes the experience of immigrants in points of relocation. In some instances, the dearth of material resources and low occupational status in the U.S. conceal the true standing of immigrants in countries of origin. In others, impoverished families are able to mobilize resources through bonds of reciprocity with affluent persons that may result in better educational options for children prior to migration. That makes a big difference in outcomes. Finally, global processes of cultural diffusion give even marginal populations familiarity with mores and practices found in areas of destination, attenuating gaps in information and knowledge resulting from a lowly class position. In the next section I

deepen this discussion by exploring dimensions of social class related to cognitive potentialities.

Embodied Knowledge as a Factor in Success

Class standing begets the transmission of subtle forms of knowledge and information, the manner in which identities are built and expressed, conventions about inter-personal transactions, and ways in which the body is managed. In other words, a significant dimension of class is what Pierre Bourdieu calls *habitus*. That concept was already present in antiquity, especially in the works of Aristotle and, more recently, in the writings of Norbert Elias, Max Weber, and Edmund Husserl. Nevertheless, it was Bourdieu who reinterpreted it giving it contemporary salience as part of a critique of the Marxist paradigm. Following Marcel Mauss, Bourdieu uses *habitus* to designate aspects of culture anchored in the body and in the routine, unself-conscious practices of individuals. In that scheme, the *habitus* is constituted by a system of dispositions or enduring and learned schemes of perception, thought and action that are neither fully voluntary nor wholly involuntary. The *habitus* represents embodied knowledge at the collective level, providing agents with the practical skills and orientations necessary to navigate in fields that range from employment and sexuality to domestic relations and artistic expression. In other words, the *habitus* directs behavior without the need of formal rules; it mediates between social structure and individual action. What is useful about the notion is that it focuses attention on forms of non-discursive knowledge deployed by social agents as they adapt to and modify particular environments.

The concept of *habitus* delves deeper into the social condition than most definitions of culture. With scores of different ways to define it, culture remains one of the most elusive concepts in anthropology. Definitions fall into two camps, one which emphasizes instrumental uses and another one in which culture is seen as an epiphenomenon shaped by economic forces. A focus on *habitus* forces us to interpret culture as an ever permeating aspect of economic and political adaptations. In other words, there is no economic behavior or political maneuver impervious to *habitus*. And it is the non-discursive character of the *habitus* that is relevant to our understanding of immigrant adjustments in areas of destination. Beyond their capacity to obtain jobs and access to services and institutions, the impetus to ascend in the social scale depends on *habitus* rooted in social class in countries of origin.

Although Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* has garnered widespread attention in specialized circles, it continues to be the fulcrum of debate, largely because the mechanisms by which the *habitus* is realized were not identified by Bourdieu with any kind of precision. The term points to a significant layer in the perceptual and behavioral repertory of social agents but the process that makes it possible is not explained. Here I begin to unpack the term with an eye on immigrant children whose experience points to three mechanisms by which *habitus* is fulfilled: (a) cognitive correspondence; (b) positive emulation; and (c) active recollection.

Cognitive Correspondence

Cognitive Correspondence designates an unexpected apprehension of nuance; it is the capacity to recognize meaning and value in objects or behaviors whose significance may not be apparent to other members in the same group (or to other groups) but which social agents can use to mobilize resources in the pursuit of specific goals. Cognitive correspondence is the engine that encodes culture and propels performance; it is what is meant colloquially when saying, I get it! Finally, cognitive correspondence is always realized at the point of inflection in social interactions; at least a dyad is needed to make it real.

Dan-El Padilla Peralta, the Princeton Salutatorian discussed in Portes and Fernández-Kelly (this volume) is a case in point. He grew up as an illegal alien, living in abject poverty as part of a female-headed household. Yet before coming to this country his parents had been government employees in the Dominican Republic. Like other youngsters of his condition, Dan-El knew the meaning and worth of Greco-Roman Mythology because such knowledge is a habitual component of early learning among middle-class children throughout the hemisphere. In the United States, his physiognomy made him undistinguishable from other African American youngsters living in a poor neighborhood but when a concerned social worker gave him a book on the Classics, he was equipped to grasp its import and use that and other related forms of embodied knowledge to attract the resources that eventually led him to Princeton and then to Oxford. Many impoverished children here and abroad receive strange gifts from well-intentioned people of greater wealth and education but only a small number of those youngsters possess the means to make sense of such gifts.

Amanda Disla, whose back pocket map is noted at the beginning of this paper, represents another example. Although she endured hardships in the United States, her father had attended college in Santo Domingo and later obtained a scholarship to continue his studies in the U.S. He became a rheumatologist. As a child in the Dominican Republic, Amanda attended a private elementary school. Later on, her mother worked hard to obtain financial support from her estranged husband so that her daughter could go to a private high school in Miami. Sulema, Amanda's mother, harbored strong, positive feelings about her national provenance and the tools to infuse Amanda with a sense of place and continuity. When she gave the girl a map of the Western Hemisphere showing the location of the Dominican Republic as a shield against insult, it was like thrusting a pebble into the pond of Amanda's consciousness—the gesture produced reverberations consistent with the family's class standing

Amanda's love for art is part of the same ideational repertory. She played drums and other percussion instruments in her high-school band with the intent to evoke the tonalities of her native land. She wanted other people to understand that percussion instruments can be used to create stirring emotions. She thinks of art as an important means for immigrants to communicate with the larger society. In her words:

Art speaks to people spiritually... When you see pictures of your country and things like that ... it gives you a sense of pride and I think a lot of immigrants—aliens because that's what we are—use art to communicate. We don't use pen and

paper like everybody else. And that's because not all of us have the ability to write but we have the ability to speak and sing and dance and make pictures.

Amanda sees aesthetic expression as a means to adjust cognitive correspondence between immigrants and the larger society by deploying images of integrity to correct stereotypes.

In her teen age years, Amanda rebelled and even ran away from home for more than a week. Yet she never compromised her academic standing because she understood, through visceral experience, the value of an advanced education. Graduating with honors from high school was one of her proudest achievements. Her grandfather traveled to Miami all the way from the Dominican Republic just to be present at her Diploma Ceremony. Subsequently she obtained a Bachelor's Degree at Florida International University. Now in her mid-twenties, Amada is a recently promoted manager who works for a large Hotel Chain.

Amanda Disla's use of art to dispel stereotypes is not the only way to adjust cognitive correspondence. Impoverished immigrant youngsters often describe the way in which teachers and counselors sometimes underestimate their potential, shunning them aside and belittling their aspirations. Nadege Joseph, for example, was born in 1977 to Haitian Parents who had recently moved into Miami's Little Haiti. When Nadege was in the sixth grade, she remembers other students, some of them African American, calling her and her sister, Blandine, insulting names. She was keenly aware of discrimination. Some teachers assumed that she wasn't as bright as other students in her class. Yet Nadege thinks that discrimination helped overcome difficulties:

When you have money and people treat you fair, you take those things for granted but when people are mean and they expect you to fail, that makes me mad, it's always made me mad. And so I think to myself, "I'll show them, I will surprise them because they're not any smarter or [more] hard working than I am.

After finishing college and before the age of 30, Nadege had become a successful accountant in one of Miami's largest firms.

Minerva Gonzalez has similar recollections. She grew up poor in San Diego and can't forget that Mexican kids were treated differently; teachers did not expect them to succeed. One counselor in particular told Minerva that she would never go to college and suggested that she go to secretarial school. Minerva became angry when told that she "wouldn't make it." Many years later, she was invited to be a guest speaker at the high school where the counselor was employed.

She didn't recognize me but I remembered her; how could I forget! When she finally caught on, she said 'you are Minerva. You were in high school here.' Yes, I said, and I finished college. You told me I wouldn't make it but I did. What do you think now?

The woman didn't know what to say but Minerva didn't want to press the point. "Don't worry, she said, "things were very different then; you had no way to tell that I was different."

The cases of Amanda Disla, Nadege Joseph and Minerva Gonzalez illustrate ways in which immigrant youngsters act to challenge preconceptions and realign cognitive correspondence

Positive Emulation

Positive emulation involves the adoption of signs, gestures, and actions, through unconscious replication, that can translate into the effective mobilization of means to achieve particular ends. Bodily management is involved in this process as is a political economy of movement. How individuals speak, walk, greet others, or communicate through sight—the totality of corporeal rhythms—are effects of positive emulation. Each of those elements is critical to assemble what Erving Goffman called *front*, that is ““that part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance.” (22) Like cognitive correspondence, positive emulation depends on class-based knowledge transmitted across generations by means other than formal instruction. Like cognitive correspondence, it has cumulative effects. Deliberation and conscious action are required to alter the results of positive emulation as shown by the experimentation of youngsters regarding speech patterns, forms of enunciation, and style of attire. The elements of dissent are normally forged through opposition to and defiance of elements internalized through positive emulation. Finally, positive emulation is part of processes of socialization within the home but also in schools and other public settings.

July 15, 2006, began with a morning filled with color and light; an ideal combination to frame the graduation ceremony of the Barrio Logan Institute, a grassroots organization founded more than a decade ago to nurture college aspirations among Mexican children living in Barrio Logan, one of the poorest neighborhoods in San Diego. The ceremony was held at one of the auditoriums on the campus of the University of San Diego. Fourteen-year old Viviana Cruz was one of 20 other youngsters of Mexican descent bound for college and being celebrated at the ceremony. Ten had recently been admitted to various institutions of higher learning. One of them was headed for Yale University the following week. Viviana’s older brother, Jose, had also attended the Barrio Logan Institute since he was nine. In 2006 he was attending the University of Colorado but took time off to be present at the BLI graduation ceremony. Teodora and Francisco Cruz, his parents, were also in attendance. Both had been born in Mexico and neither of the two has more than a fifth-grade education. Teodora works as a domestic and Francisco in construction but, throughout their lives, they have encouraged their children to stay in school. The Barrio Logan Institute equaled in know-how what the family had in ambition.

Jose, who grew up illegally in the United States and only became a citizen in 2000, attended Martin Luther King Elementary School where most of the students were Mexican and African American. He says that his parents’ “main focus” was always been on education:

[My parents] suffered because they never got the right amount of [schooling]. I mean, when I’ve gone to work with my dad I’ve experienced just for a short time what he has experienced all his life—working under the sun every day. And we’ve also gone out with my mother to help her clean houses, so we know how hard ... they have worked on our behalf. And they don’t want us to go through [the same

thing]. They always said we should imitate their hard work but look for good examples in other people too. That's where [BCLI] comes in; that's where we learned the things we couldn't learn at home.

As expected, the BLI graduation ceremony was inspiring. The reception that followed featured good food but also the presence of a mariachi band consisting of approximately fifteen young people in traditional *charro* attire. All but one of the musicians had learned their craft in the U.S. giving testimony to the resilience of Mexican culture. Jose Cruz says that he feels pride when donning traditional attire and listening to the music of his ancestral country. "I take the best of that tradition," he says, "and the best of the American tradition to become my own best."

Finding elements of strength in autochthonous culture or in someone worthy of imitation need not be mutually exclusive propositions. Minerva Gonzalez, mentioned in the previous section, graduated from California State University at Northridge with a 3.4 grade point average. She says that she "got her identity" in college where she learned the history of the Chicano Movement. She recalls with affection two instructors who encouraged her to "question the status quo." When asked about the individuals who were most influential in her life, Minerva first mentions her father, a factory worker. She admires him because he was self taught and urged his children to read history, mythology, geography, and many other subjects. Of her father, she says, "He gave me a bigger picture of the world." Minerva also lists Mr. Himes, her high school French teacher. "He didn't just teach a subject," she says, "he taught us about life. I wanted to be just like him."

Positive emulation can reach beyond individual experience to shape urban spaces in unexpected ways. Hidden in broad daylight, in Miami's Little Haiti, is the Fanm Ayisyen nan Miyami (FANM) a community organization founded by Marlene Bastien to meet the needs of Haitian families. But FANM is more than that—a modern-day replication of traditional institutions in Haiti.

FANM's founder, Marlene Bastien, was born in Port Benoit, a small city in southern Haiti, one of seventeen brothers and sisters. Her father was a farmer and a trained nurse; her mother was a homemaker deeply involved in her community. Marlene completed her secondary education before coming to the United States at the age of twenty-two. She wanted to become a doctor but those were the Duvalier years and attending a good university required connections and Marlene didn't have the right ones.

When Marlene first arrived in the U.S. she became a volunteer at the Haitian Refugee Center. She then began to work for an immigration lawyer who helped her to regularize her immigration status. She attended Miami-Dade Community College and then transferred to Florida International University where she completed her college education and received a Master's Degree in public health. After that she went to work at Jackson Memorial Hospital as a social worker. She kept that position for thirteen years. Gradually, she noticed the ways in which life in the U.S. had altered Haitian customs. Here parents had to work all the time to survive. As a result, children were often left stranded without a proper place to go after school, no assistance with their school work, and no protection from external influences. Many young mothers did not have access to child care. Politicians weren't helping and

neither was the private sector. Throughout the 1980 hostility prevailed against immigrants in Miami partly as a result of the Mariel Boatlift. Marlene remembers a notorious suicide by a young Haitian man whose girlfriend left him when she learned about his background—he was so ashamed to be Haitian that he didn't want to live

As a result of such experiences Mme Bastien began to develop a new philosophy centered on the conviction that it is important for children to know the history and customs of their countries of origin:

When people try to adopt the values of the adopted land, they don't necessarily adopt the ones that are good for them. That's why families that are successful are families that are able to tell children what their traditions are and why they matter. And also to realize that the children are learning new things outside the home and those new ideas have to be included in the conversation.

Marlene thinks that it has been difficult for many Haitian families to reconstitute their kinship networks in the U.S. because here they often do not have access to grandmothers who, typically, take care of children in Haiti, while parents work. The Lakou, a system of collective farming whereby families help each other providing childcare and other services, is hard to reproduce in American soil. Marlene patterned FANM after the Lakou. It offers a variety of interconnected programs including childcare, pre-school preparation, after-school learning, family intervention, mental health support, and smoking cessation.

Mme Bastien and FANM illustrates= the transferability of social-class assets and their utility in implementing upward mobility in areas of destination. Her father was not wealthy and he did not attend college but he was a trained nurse with a distinguished position in his community. Both Marlene's parents were involved in neighborly activities for the collective

Active Recollection

Finally, *active recollection* depends on the ability to deploy memories, real or imagined, in the process of identity formation. Beyond cognitive and experiential realities, the transference of cultural resources, and their use in promoting educational achievement, extends to the possession of shared narratives that give the young a sense of place and breadth. Such family accounts redefine poverty as a transitory detail in a larger, worthier saga. They foster ambition and develop a taste for possibilities. They are the stuff of which fairy tales are made: a child born to a princely house is kidnapped or lost but, after many adventures, returns to the home and wealth that are her true entitlement. All pain is vanished and the story ends well.

In like vein, many of the young people whose lives are sketched here grew up listening to parents tell stories about their ancestral country and family origins in ways that affirmed an untainted identity. One of our informants is busily reconstructing his genealogical tree on the basis of his conversations with relatives sharing the same Cuban roots in the United States. Another proudly notes that he never paid attention to racial slurs because one of his ancestors was a prominent *Californio* who owned properties in San Diego and crushed an Indian revolt. One of our Mixtec interviewees notes that she could not afford *not* to do well

because that would have reflected badly upon her indigenous community, whose members have a long history of suffering and endurance.

In other words, familial and historical accounts fulfill important functions by enabling immigrant children to develop a dignified identity and placing material deprivation in a wider context. It therefore does not surprise, that many of the young people in our sample define their achievements as a means to compensate their parents for their hard work and make good on the family name. The Mayen family is a case in point.

Francisco and Hermelinda Mayen are the parents of Antonio Donato Mayen. Their house is located in East San Diego in an integrated neighborhood where most residents are Mexican, African American and Filipino. It evokes working class Mexican homes, replete with family portraits, velvet covered furniture and satin and lace drapery. Several cabinets display crystal bowls, vases, and figurines. A 60-inch TV screen almost fills one of the sitting rooms. The guest bedroom features a bed covered with red brocade and framed by gilded wood. On the walls hang two large paintings of full bellied *putti*. Towards the back of the house, a bar counter, half surrounded by tall chairs, gives evidence of the Mayen's yearning for status.

Mr. Mayen started working when he was fourteen to help his mother and siblings. She was a single mother of five. His father, Donato Mayen, was an affluent furniture store owner and merchant who had twenty five sons and daughters by five women. Incongruously, Francisco remembers his father with great affection and describes him as a cultivated man who was for some time a public accountant. That's the reason why his two sons and three grandsons are named after his own father. He thinks Antonio inherited some of his grandfather's qualities; he too had a predilection for mathematics.

Mr. Mayen works as a custodian and manager at a car dealership. His wife has cleaned houses for more than 20 year. Their son, Antonio Donato Mayen, graduated from Morse High School and then attended San Diego State University where he majored in Math. He graduated in 2001 one of only fifty other students majoring in that subject in a class of approximately 20,000. Unlike other graduates, he wore a white robe, a sign that he graduated with honors. His GPA was 3.75. At the graduation ceremony, Mr. and Mrs. Mayen were asked to stand up when he received his diploma. Antonio is currently trying to complete a master's degree on line in the same field to be able to teach at the college level. Marjorie, his wife, is also of Mexican descent. She too graduated from SDSU. She is twenty seven and works as a school teacher.

Mr. Mayen says that Antonio and his wife are even more Mexican than he is because they have deliberately sought their roots. They celebrate all Mexican holidays and have an intense interest in the history and culture of their ancestral country. They have even traveled several times to Mexico City to become more familiar with local customs and traditions. His children, including Antonio, grew up listening in fascination to their father's stories about refined living and professional achievement among many of their relatives, including their grandfather. Says Antonio,

It is true that I always liked math but maybe my liking was because I always new that my grandfather was good with Math. My dad was always telling me how much I resembled him and so it became a natural thing for me to like Math even more because I wanted my dad's approval. It was all those stories that he told me ... They became part of me.

Conclusions

The findings sketched above represent a new point of departure for further research about the factors that enable impoverished immigrant children to succeed in America. Those findings do not conform to images spawned by the conservative/liberal divide. Conservatives will mistakenly conclude that the success of impoverished immigrant children was caused by impeccable family values. Yet the families in this study included alcoholism, philandering fathers, warring couples, and mothers with more than one boyfriend. It was not values that differentiated these families from others with larger means or higher standards. One true difference was the capacity to control children, often through physical force, and to keep them away from peer group influences. While conservatives may celebrate authoritarian parenting they may find other elements in this story less worthy of applause. In light of this study Affirmative Action and almost every program aimed at boosting a dignified, even militant identity, provide immigrant children with an arsenal to resist the leveling pressures of discrimination and belittlement.

Beyond family- and school-related dynamics I have stressed the significance of intangible assets transferred from countries of origin and used in areas of destination to achieve upward mobility. In retrospect it appears reasonable to posit that the capacity of impoverished immigrant children—and of all children, for that matter—to prosper in the United States does not depend solely on their ability to secure a proper education and remunerating employment. Those outcomes are, in fact, the visible manifestation of deeper, less visible processes rooted in psycho-social strata of experience. In this paper I have endeavored to explore some of those mechanisms by focusing on the class-related knowledge that immigrants and, in some case, their children acquire in countries of origin. I have argued that such subtle forms of knowledge can be profitably deployed in the United States for socio-economic advancement.

Those forms of knowledge, as well, depend on what Pierre Bourdieu presciently called *habitus*. That concept is useful in that it forces us to give attention to embodied, non-discursive forms of knowledge that can be deployed to mobilize resources and productively affect environments (the opposite, of course, is also true—there are forms of embodied knowledge that prevent the accumulation of resources or the alteration of environments for the purpose of gaining added independence and prosperity). While the concept digs deep into the workings of culture, it does not readily specify the mechanisms by which it can be realized. In this paper I put forth three of those mechanisms—cognitive correspondence, positive emulation, and active recollection—as paths whose collective convergence buttresses the predispositions named by Bourdieu. Especially significant is the capacity of young immigrants to recognize value and meaning in objects and behaviors that some might

think would escape them—what I label cognitive correspondence—and to use that embodied knowledge to find their way up in the educational and occupational ladders. Imitative patterns

Stereotypes and presumptions not sufficiently questioned lead many to believe that immigrants uniformly originate in the poorest sectors of their own countries and that their lack of material and human capital condemns them to economic and social stagnation. This presumption takes double force in periods, like the one we live through right now, when harsh anti-immigrant feelings stereotypes them as poor, ignorant, and possibly criminal. The facts speak otherwise. Hidden in the minds of recently arrived immigrants are often experience of striving effort to acquire higher social standing in the countries left behind. Those with meager resources are able to improve their stance by allying themselves with individuals of higher standing through institutions such as god-parentage or by cashing in on ties of mutuality established through service with those in power. Others who experience poverty and exclusion in the United States carry memories of better times in the ancestral land and remember relatives and friends of wealth as points of reference in their journey abroad. Still others who have experienced poverty and marginality in their own countries have been exposed to images of success abroad as a result of their exposure to global fields of information that reduce the effects of class and racial and ethnic differences in the places left behind. All and all, immigrants possess mental and experiential resources that observers tend to miss.

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