The rich nations on both sides of the Atlantic are confronting a new set of challenges, arising from the large-scale immigrations they hosted during the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Ironically, immigration in many cases was encouraged by governments and employers as a solution to labor-market problems, especially (but not exclusively) in filling slots at or near the bottom of the job hierarchy. But immigration imports its own set of dynamics, which are not easily controlled. In combination with the low fertility and aging of native populations in the wealthy countries, the swelling of youthful immigrant groups has produced profound, unanticipated shifts among the children of these countries. The share of children coming from immigrant homes has been increasing, and almost everywhere now, they account for substantial fractions of the young people in nurseries and classrooms. As these children grow up and enter adulthood, simultaneously with the departure of huge numbers of baby-boom natives from work and civic activity, an historic transition will take place toward much more diverse societies than could have been anticipated half a century ago. This transition will have far-reaching consequences. In effect, the future of the West in economic, cultural, and social terms—this is not too bold a formulation—will depend on how well immigrant-origin youth have been prepared to replace aging natives.

Many of these immigrant-origin youth—in most countries, the majority—belong to what in this volume we will call “low-status” immigrant groups. This means that they grow up typically in homes where adults have
little education by the standards of the receiving society and work at low-
skill jobs (or are unemployed) and where a language other than the main-
stream one is in common use; and they and their parents belong to groups
that are stigmatized in the new social context because of ethnic, racial, and/
or religious differences from the native mainstream. This characterization
applies to Turks in the multiple Western European countries where they
have settled in large numbers and to Mexicans and Central Americans in
the United States. The children from these groups begin school handicapped
by substantial disadvantages rooted in their immigrant backgrounds, and
their future contributions to the societies where they live and their ability to
experience the full range of opportunities available there depend critically
on their experiences in schools. If schools succeed in bringing them to parity
with children in the native mainstream, then the transition to diversity will
be made smoother; if schools do not succeed, then the challenges of coming
decades will be that much more difficult. The project on which this volume is
based, the Children of Immigrants in Schools (CIS), set out to find out how
well schools are fulfilling this mission in the United States and five West-
ern European nations—France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Spain, and
Sweden—and to identify features of educational systems that might possibly
enhance the chances of children from immigrant homes.

The CIS project is a significant departure from the earlier and predomi-
nant focus of United States–based researchers such as ourselves on the Amer-
ican experience with immigration, presumed in the past to be unique. We
believe that this exclusive focus is out of date and no longer justifiable, and
that the immigration societies have much to learn from each other, since no
one of them possesses a singularly successful formula for including immi-
grants and their children in the mainstream. In embarking in this direction,
we join other US researchers, who are also embracing broader international
and comparative perspectives. In “internationalizing” migration studies,
some of them have looked into the origins of migrants who have settled in the
United States and examined the implications of sustained transnational ties.
Others have looked comparatively at the settlement and integration of immi-
grants into advanced industrial nations, including other countries formed by
immigration, such as Australia and Canada, but also countries of prior emi-
gration and now of immigration in Europe, such as Germany. To promote
this geographic expansion of US immigration studies, organizations that
support migration research are beginning to develop training for younger
scholars along with research projects that are designed to promote international approaches.

When we initiated the CIS Project, one of our hopes was to develop a useful model of how international training and research could be organized and contribute to understandings of migration processes and outcomes. The project grew out of the Working Group on Education and Migration at the Social Science Research Council. Two workshops—one of which considered the interactions among institutions, policy, and agency in shaping the educational trajectories of children of immigrants within the United States, and the other comparing aspects of institutional and policy arrangements in the United States and Europe—provided the opportunity to explore possible analytical frameworks for cross-national analysis (see Holdaway and Alba 2009; Holdaway, Crul, and Roberts 2009). These discussions eventually broadened into a collaboration involving ten senior scholars—five in the United States and five in Western Europe—along with fifteen more junior ones, some of them in a postdoctoral phase, others working on their dissertations. Richard Alba, then director of the Center for Social and Demographic Analysis (CSDA) at the University at Albany, SUNY, took on the role of principal investigator, working in intellectual partnership with Jennifer Holdaway of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). Both CSDA and SSRC provided essential infrastructural support. Funding came from two programs: the bulk was from the US National Science Foundation’s Partnerships for International Research and Education (PIRE) program (grant OISE-0529921); in addition, the Nuffield Foundation in London gave us critical support to expand European participation by supporting six post-doctoral researchers (who could not be financed by the National Science Foundation because they were based outside the United States).

To best achieve the combination of international training and research, the research effort was organized into five teams, each led by two senior scholars, one from each side of the Atlantic, and staffed by younger scholars from the United States and Europe. Each team focused on a comparison of the United States to one of the European countries with a specific thematic emphasis (e.g., postsecondary education in the case of the UK-US comparison, or the transition from school to labor market in the case of France-United States). The younger scholars did much of the legwork of research but in close collaboration with the senior scholars. This organizational formula worked admirably.
Readers can see and evaluate for themselves the results in the ensuing pages, where the authorship of each chapter acknowledges the research contributions made by individual scholars. But here we want to recognize the extensive assistance by others that made the project work. At the National Science Foundation, we could not have managed without the help of Bonnie Thompson, along with her colleague, Patricia White. At the Nuffield Foundation, we are grateful to Anthony Tomei for seeing the potential of the endeavor and enabling it to become truly comparative by supporting the participation of six European postdoctoral fellows; to Catrin Roberts for her active engagement in the intellectual work of the program; and to Velda Hinds for assistance with logistics and finance.

At the Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, Walter (Chip) Ensel and Linda Lawrence made the administrative aspects of the project relatively painless, allowing Alba to spend as much time as possible on the research and training sides. Technical assistance on a number of fronts was provided by Dr. Ruby Wang. Jeffrey Napierala and Joseph Pereira (the latter at CUNY’s Center for Urban Research) carried out the PISA analysis that appears in the first chapter. At the CUNY Graduate Center, Laura Braslow did a remarkable job of rendering complex educational system diagrams in a common visual vocabulary. At the SSRC we would like to thank the several program assistants who assisted with administrative matters and the organization of the numerous meetings and workshops associated with the program: Jeppe Wohlert, Samip Mallick, Wonny Lervisit, Eva Pepi, and Lauren Shields.

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