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The children of immigrants encounter host-society educational systems: Mexicans in the U.S. and North Africans in France

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Mexicans in the US and North Africans in France represent the largest immigrant populations in these two countries whose incorporation can be viewed as problematic. This holds not just for the immigrant generation but for the second generation, now quite numerous, as well. For the children of these immigrants, there is a high degree of commonality in their starting positions and in their outcomes, at least as of the moment when they leave the school system: They are the children of immigrant parents who have themselves very low levels of education, and they enter complex educational systems in economically advanced societies, where labor market position is determined largely by educational credentials and experiences. This paper attempts to identify the key aspects in the school systems that determine these outcomes and to ascertain the points of similarity and difference between them.

The immigrants and their children

The Mexicans and North Africans both originate in countries that have suffered from proximity to the societies that now receive them. In the case of Mexico, the conquest of the Southwest in the mid-19th century is but the best known instance of its vulnerability to its neighbor from the North. All of the countries—Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia—from which North African immigrants come were at one time either colonies of France or, in the case of Algeria, fully incorporated into it. Nevertheless, the degree to which these immigrations can be regarded as post-colonial is variable, with the Algerians marking the extreme case, given the vividness of the memories of the colonial period and of the war of independence for the immigrants and for many French (Galissot, 1987, Lucassen, 2005)

The immigrants who are parents to the contemporary second generation have mostly arrived with very low levels of education by comparison with those of US and French natives. For example, about half of the immigrant parents of Mexican-American school-age children in the 2000 Census did not go beyond the 8th grade (Hernandez, Denton and McCartney, 2006). In the case of the North Africans, the lowest levels of education are found among the Algerians while Tunisians are much more educated (Tribalat, 1995).

The second generation of both immigrant populations makes major strides on average beyond the low educational levels of their parents, but remains well behind the attainments of the native group. This finding is demonstrated by the statistical comparisons presented in Table 1. In the US case, the data are drawn from 2000 Census data and cannot be limited to the second generation (because of the absence of a parental nativity question in the census); however, considerable research shows that, in cross-sectional data such as these, there is not much difference between the educational

attainments of the second and the third and later generations (Farley and Alba, 2002). Hence, the educational distribution of the US born is a suitable proxy for that of the second generation.

The US-born Mexican students suffer a considerable disadvantage by comparison with their white peers, although the gap is not as large as some have claimed (e.g., Huntington, 2004; cf. Alba, 2006). A fifth to a quarter of young Mexican Americans have left high school without a diploma, condemning them to the lowest levels of the labor market. This fraction is two-and-a-half to three times the rate among non-Hispanic whites. A smaller disparity as large appears at the other end of the educational distribution, among those who gain some post-secondary education. It is noteworthy that almost half of Mexican-American students now go beyond high school. They are therefore positioning themselves to qualify for jobs that are in the middle class, broadly construed.

The North-African second generation is also much more educated than its parents (Silberman and Fournier 2006b). However, the proportion of the Maghrebin second generation that leaves school without any diploma remains high. Even though the French educational system has undergone a substantial democratization during several decades, which is reflected in a rising average level of education and more massive access to the university, the cohorts of the Maghrebin second generation that have left school recently, made up mainly of young people who have been born in France or entirely educated there, still show substantially higher percentages with no diploma or with limited educational attainment. Nevertheless, the ratio of disparity in relation to the native French is not as high as its equivalent in the US—among both Maghrebin men and women, the percentage without a meaningful diploma is not quite twice its value among the native French. But the absolute values are higher than for Mexicans in the US, with one third of second-generation men having left school with no diploma to present to prospective employers.

Insofar as its members obtain school credentials, the Maghrebin second generation more often leaves school with intermediate levels of diploma, such as the general *baccalauréat*, that produce weak results in the labor market. In terms of post-secondary education, the level of disparity in relation to the native French is very similar to what is found in the US: among men, the native rate of university attendance for at least a year is about 50 percent higher than the second-generation one; but the absolute levels are lower. Few of the Maghrebins attain a university degree, and as a group they have now been surpassed in this respect by the Portuguese second generation (Silberman and Fournier 2006a), of whom it has long been said that its members prefer to take the short vocational tracks that lead to rapid entry to the labor market (Tribalat, 1995). As in the Mexican case, however, it is important to underscore that a large percentage of the Maghrebin youth do at least obtain an intermediate credential while a smaller group finish with a university degree.

Overview of the systems

The broad similarity of educational outcomes for second-generation Mexicans and North Africans is all the more intriguing insofar as the educational systems these groups must

deal with appear, at least in their formal descriptions, to differ in some critical ways.¹ Most significantly, the US system varies considerably from one location to another, while the French system is organized to be more uniform across space. In theory, this difference should produce greater relative disadvantages for Mexican Americans than for North Africans. That is, the funding of American schools is heavily dependent upon locally raised taxes, and this produces marked inequalities among schools in resources and in the characteristics of teachers (e.g., Kozol, 1991; Orfield, 2001). These inequalities impact negatively on minorities, both native and immigrant, because of residential segregation and their concentration in places that are relatively impoverished. From the perspective of its organizing principles, the French system, by contrast, should treat schools more uniformly, reducing (but not eliminating) the opportunities for affluent areas to provide their schools with greater resources. Moreover, the French government put in place in 1981 a policy, the ZEP (for Zones of Educational Priority), to provide additional funding to schools in difficulty according to criteria that include the percentage of immigrants in the catchment area. The French system now also teaches a single curriculum up through the last class of the *college*, which corresponds to the US middle school, so that the point of divergence into different tracks has been postponed to the *lycée*, or high school (Merle, 2002). Far more than is the case in the contemporary US, then, France has attempted to redress inequalities through the school system.

In a similar vein, the systems differ in the way that their public and private portions relate to one another. Both have well developed private school systems. In the US, about 10 percent of students are attending private schools in any given year (and an additional 2 percent are educated at home); in France, the comparable figures are 14 percent at the primary level and 20 percent at the secondary, and a recent estimate is that about a third of students spend at least a year in the private system by the time they have completed their secondary-school years (Langouët and Léger, 1997). In both countries as well, the private system is frequently used as a refuge by students from middle-class and more affluent circumstances whose families want to avoid public schools with many minority and poor students. However, in the US, the private system is truly separate, which means

¹ We have obviously not compared the degrees of inequality between natives and the second generation with controls for family background, as is customary in the social-science literature. One reason for this omission is that we are interested here in the other side of inequality, in the institutions that “process” students, rather than in the families that “produce” them. In this sense, the comparison serves mainly as motivation. However, there is another reason: we are not certain what the results mean when controls for parental characteristics are implemented. When the parents are immigrants, there is a lack of commensurability to the characteristics of natives. This is most evident for education because of the differences in the educational systems from which the two sets of parents have emerged: the immigrants from Mexico and North Africa have generally obtained education that is average or above average for their societies of origin, but they are being compared to natives who fall at the absolute bottom of the educational distributions of their own societies and who are likely to suffer from a variety of personal and social problems that the immigrant parents do not have. A similar point can be made about occupation.

that, at its elite levels, it can provide a level of educational resources well above that attainable in the public schools. In France, by contrast, the private system, which consists mainly of religious schools (with some non-religious ones that are very well known and found typically in major cities), is much more integrated with the public one. As long as the private schools, mostly Catholic (Héran, 1995), agree to teach the national curriculum and accept the same constraints as the public schools (e.g., number of students by class), they receive state funding for the teaching staff, which mostly has the same qualifications found in the public school. So the main difference with the public sector remains the avoidance, or at least low level, of socially disturbing children (since the private schools have complete freedom to select and expel students). It must also be noted that the French private schools tend to be much less expensive than the American ones, and this allows a few immigrant families to send their children to private schools (ref).

The French system has also undergone a significant “democratization” in recent decades, with the aim of opening up pathways for working-class and immigrant students to the “baccalauréat,” the indispensable credential earned at the end of the high school years that leads to higher education. One sign of this democratization has been the successive postponement since the 50s (Prost, 1968) of the moment in the educational career when students are separated between vocational and academic tracks; simultaneously, long-sequence vocational tracks have been established at the upper level. These developments have especially affected the short-sequence vocational curricula (Silberman and Fournier, 2006a), which were previously the fate of many immigrant students and ended in an early departure from school and entry into the labor market (see Tribalat, 1995). These separate curricula were formerly institutionalized in distinct middle schools (the *colleges*), which sealed the separation of the students on different tracks and also the destiny of those in vocational programs; now students attend comprehensive middle schools that house various programs. Another major element of democratization has been the creation of new types of *baccalauréat*, deemed “professional” or “technical.” They allow students who are not willing, or allowed, to commit themselves to the classical curriculum of the traditional *baccalauréat* and who take an educational track that prepares them for a career to continue into the university system (Merle, 2002). The explicit goal of the democratization was to bring 80 percent of French students into a terminal class preparing for one or another *baccalauréat*. Nevertheless, by 2003 only 70% of a cohort had attained this level. Moreover, even though there has been an important increase over thirty years in the proportion of students obtaining this credential, from 20% to 62%, only 33% obtain the academic *baccalauréat*, and just 20% do so on time (ref).

These are not the only major differences that might matter for the children of immigrants. U.S. schools have made more deliberate efforts than those in France to meet the educational needs of students coming from minority-language homes, though these efforts, especially when based on bilingual strategies, have been contested and uneven. The US system is also one that offers second chances to an unusual extent; access to post-secondary education is potentially open to the large majority of each cohort, since the only requirement is a high school diploma (which can even be earned through an equivalency test). The post-secondary system is highly stratified, with colleges and

universities recognized as having varying quality and thus leading to different ultimate outcomes. But positive discrimination at the university level enhances the access of immigrant minorities, especially to the elite tier of the university system (Bowen and Bok, 1998; Massey et al, 2002). The linkage between education and the labor market is unusually loose.

In France a feature of the system that in principle should benefit the children of immigrants is the preparation for schooling through *maternelles*, which many children begin to attend at the age of 3 and which educates nearly all 4 and 5 year-olds in the country. The *maternelles*, by providing a common preparatory foundation to nearly all children and introducing children from immigrant homes into a French-language environment, are one way that the French system attempts to overcome the very different endowments they receive in their families. One study of differences in the educational attainments of the children of Turkish immigrants in different European countries credits the *maternelles* with the somewhat more favorable outcomes achieved in France (Crul and Vermeulen, 2003); other studies, however, suggest that in general improvement does not last beyond the end of the primary school (Oeuvarard, 2000).

The French system is more explicitly articulated than the U.S. one and contains more branches once the secondary level is reached. The French system also offers a much wider array of credentials, many of which are linked fairly explicitly to labor-market outcomes (this characteristic is quite modern, a product of the social planning of the post-World War II period) (Tanguy, 1991). Access to university education has been quite selective until the recent reform aiming to democratize the system; however, access remains more selective than is true in the U.S.

One issue that each system has struggled to deal with is the presence of children who reside illegally in the society. The number of such children is very large in the US—by one well-accepted estimate of the size of the unauthorized population, nearly 2 million children fall into this category (and another 3 million children are US born and therefore US citizens but live in families where at least one of their parents is an unauthorized immigrant) (Passel, 2006). The right of such children to education at the primary and secondary levels has been guaranteed by a decision of the US Supreme Court; however, their right to university education is less clear, especially since they cannot receive public monies. It is thought that many of these children drop out of school without any diploma because, without legal status, their educations are of little use in the US labor market; but there are no systematic data about their educational attainments. In France, the situation of such children is also difficult, in large part because of an absence of clear policy. The question of students “without papers,” as the French expression puts it, can be posed at all levels of the educational system. In the mid-1980s, Pierre Chevènement, the then Minister of Education, reaffirmed by specific instructions to the schools the principle of educating children regardless of their legal status. Policy toward them hardened, however, as the undocumented immigrant population grew and when the right returned to power. Moreover, the practices at the local level (the mayor’s office generally registers children for primary school) are diverse. Nevertheless, it is apparent that a large number of children in irregular situations are being educated at all levels of the French system.

Matters became quite tense at the end of the 2005-06 school year, when many of these children were threatened by expulsion and many French parents and teachers took their side. The Minister of the Interior (Sarkozy) was forced to retract his deadline and to put in place a procedure for reviewing requests for regularization.

In conclusion, despite the formally greater uniformity of the school system in France and the more systematic efforts to democratize schooling there, the results achieved for the children of disfavored immigrants from North Africa are, as we have seen, similar to those obtained by the children of Mexican immigrants, an equally disfavored group, in the US, where the school system varies enormously from one locality to another and between its public and private branches. The rest of this essay is devoted to understanding how the educational differences between the children of immigrants and the children of the native born emerge through increasingly disparate trajectories. What we will find is that, even in a system like France's where the role of the national state is relatively strong, as is the intent to equalize educational opportunities, there is sufficient latitude within the system to allow local educational actors and parents to create differentiation that helps to preserve the privileges of the children coming middle-class and more affluent homes. In the US, that such children are privileged is not open to question. In both systems, the children from immigrant groups with limited educational attainments (as in the case of the Mexicans and the Maghrebins) are particularly disadvantaged, in part because the parents lack knowledge of the systems' complexities and cannot effectively guide their children. We will also find that attendance at colleges and universities is more common in the US than in France, in part due to the more frequent completion of the relevant secondary-school diploma, which the great majority of US students obtain. In France, this is not the case, as a substantial proportion of students leave without a secondary-school diploma or with a terminal vocational one; the Maghrebins are especially likely to leave school without any qualification.

The primary school system

In both countries, the differences among population groups begin to be constructed at the elementary school level, though probably more importantly in the US. To begin with, there is very substantial segregation of second-generation children from middle-class majority-group children. In both countries, this is largely a function of well-entrenched residential segregation. This segregation involves concentrations of minority and majority families in different jurisdictions, as much as it involves segregation by neighborhood within the same city: thus, in the US, European-American families with school-age children tend to be found in heavily white suburbs, while similar minority families are more often located in large cities or inner suburbs; these spatial placements are nearly the reverse of those in France, where immigrant minorities are concentrated in specific suburbs (*banlieues*) around major cities. But the impact on school segregation is probably equivalent.

Recent analyses from the US demonstrate that Latino children, along with black children, are increasingly likely to be found in heavily minority elementary schools, partly due to the declining proportion of European-American children in school-age cohorts and then

in the portions of those cohorts in public schools (Orfield, 2001). We have no comparable systematic data on school segregation from France, but since the immigrants are frequently concentrated in separate municipalities in the suburbs (Guillon, 1980; Preteceille, 1995), a fairly high level of segregation is implied. Recent studies have shown that in the schools qualifying for the ZEP program, where immigrants' children are particularly concentrated, social homogeneity has been increasing (Benabou, Kramarz and Prost, 2004).

In both systems, school choice is limited. In the United States, the principle determining where a child is educated at public expense is still that of the "neighborhood school," despite attempts, especially from more conservative parts of the political spectrum, to create openings for more parental choice. In France, the government has increasingly limited school choice in recent decades, imposing a mapping of addresses to schools (*carte scolaire*). This was in fact an attempt to restrict the ability of more affluent families to avoid local schools with many poor and/or immigrant students, but at the same time it implies as a matter of policy that school composition will reflect the local resident population and thus that schools will be segregated in the way that neighborhoods are. For those affluent parents who find that the *carte scolaire* will send their children to the socially "wrong" school, the private schools are always an option, and in fact they are frequently used at the primary level.

In the American case, this school-based segregation of children corresponds with disturbing levels of inequality in school funding that create disadvantages for schools that serve heavily minority populations. This is not simply traceable to the heavy reliance of American school systems on locally based sources of funding. The evidence shows that there are significant disparities among the individual schools within local systems; these are probably explicable in terms of the political leadership of school systems, since school boards are elected and often most responsive to more affluent, better educated parents (Condrón and Roscigno, 2003; Kozol, 1991).

These inequalities are probably enhanced by features that provide a more enriched educational experience *in schools* to children from middle-class European-American backgrounds. (One must not forget the importance of the educational experiences provided outside of schools by families, which generally favor children from more affluent homes; research has regularly shown, for instance, that children from poorer and from minority background fall behind their peers during summers, when schools are not in session [Heyns, 1978; Entwisle and Alexander, 1992]) While curricula are to some degree standardized across schools—at least in the sense that states define minimal standards that must be met for different subjects in each grade, and the testing movement has further strengthened the role of standards—schools that are more resource-rich and serve middle-class populations are able to offer their students many supplements to the minimum standards, so that differences in learning grow over time (Kozol, 1991). Also playing a role in the development of inequalities is so-called ability grouping, which is an informal tracking process that occurs often within classrooms, whereby teachers group students according to their knowledge of a given subject such as reading and their presumed facility to make progress (e.g., rapid vs. slow learners)

Inequalities in school funding are far more limited in France, though they exist and have increased in recent years. Since the end of the 1990s, the national government has decentralized an increasing share of the financing of, and decision making about, local schools (Louis, 1994, Henriot-Van Zanten 1990). It has nevertheless retained the budget for teachers, the single most important factor determining the level of inequality. The financial support provided for the teaching staff in a school is, moreover, a function of the numbers of students and classes, and the Ministry of Education strictly controls the number of students per class. The ability even of school principals to exert an influence over the teaching budget remains limited.

Moreover, social inequalities may be partly counterbalanced through the increased funding for schools in areas with social problems. The so-called ZEP policy provides supplementary support for the teaching staff at such schools, with an aim of reducing the number of students per class. Eleven percent of the primary schools are under the ZEP, but little data exist to establish the extent of the reductions in class size due to the policy. In any event, the pressures to reduce class size are also powerful on the schools serving more affluent areas, since the parents there advertise it to school administrators as a major factor in deciding whether they will send their children to the public school. They can find justification if they need it in a recent study that seems to demonstrate that when classes at the primary level are reduced by two children, school achievements improve (Piketty, 2004).

Where inequalities have clearly sharpened is in domains where funding and direction have traditionally been under the control of local and regional authorities. Thus, they have had charge of budgets for the purchase of school books, equipment and other resources. They also have a new responsibility for the construction and maintenance of school buildings, which leads to notable differences among areas in the condition and modernization of school structures (just as in the US, one should add).

Perhaps even more important for the development of inequalities based on residence is the role of local authorities in financing supplementary activities and functions (Dutercq, 2000). Thus, they are responsible for the supervision of children during school vacations (which are numerous in France) when their parents are unable to take care of them during the work day. These periods of supervision have taken on more and more of a pedagogical character (e.g., trips to the theater) and play an increasing part in the access of children from poor or immigrant families to cultural resources. Such families sometimes send their children to the vacation supervision even when a parent is at home, since the cost is modest. Similarly, the primary schools offer after-school care, generally for two extra hours, for which parents have to pay a modest fee, which they can ask the local authorities to pay. Since the 1970s, some schools have tried to use these supplementary hours (*les "études"*) to help students with their homework, with the aim of reducing socially based inequalities.

The connection of the development of inequalities linked to social origin with supplementary school activities is better illustrated by the so-called nature classes

(*classes de nature*). These involve excursions with a pedagogical character and even exchanges with other countries, the latter often connected with instruction in foreign languages, which now begins in the *maternelles*. The expenses associated with these classes are partly financed by local authorities and partly by parents, thus placing children from poor families at a disadvantage (although limited numbers of “scholarships” [*bourses*] are generally available). The schools in the more affluent areas organize such activities more frequently because of the pressures of parents to provide this form of cultural and educational enrichment and their willingness to pay the extra costs (Glassman, 2001).

In the US, the most disputed attempt to help the children of immigrants has involved the problems of students coming from minority-language homes. That these students are entitled to equal educational opportunities has established by court decision, specifically the Supreme Court’s Lau decision of 1974. However, what is required to create equal educational opportunity differs considerably across states and has changed over time. Indeed, the term “bilingual education” has become more a political code word, reflecting polarized opinions over the appropriate policies to immigrant-origin and minority students, than a reference to a specific set of school policies. Thus, the practices encompassed by the term are quite varied, ranging from educating students for most of the school day in the minority language to placing them for limited periods of time in classes that teach English as a second language. In recent years, these policies have been constrained by referendum in some states. This process began with a heavily financed campaign in California, led by the entrepreneur Ronald Unz, that successfully imposed new requirements on student participation in bilingual programs (students now need annual letters from parents requesting their placement in bilingual classrooms, and these requests are honored only if the parents have visited the school). While the practical effects of the California referendum are still not clear, there can be no doubt that it has placed a large question mark on the future of bilingual education.

French schools have provided less in the way of assistance to ease students speaking languages other than French into mainstream classrooms. In some schools, classes of “reception” (*classes d’accueil* [CLIN] in the primary school) exist to help newly arriving immigrant students make the transition into regular classrooms (Lorcerie, 1994). These classes were intended to provide only a few months of preparation, but several studies have shown that students have been relegated to them for long periods and that even some French students, coming from areas outside the metropole (e.g., the Antilles), have been placed in them. There were also attempts, especially during the 1970s, to provide courses in the language and culture of the countries of origin of students from immigrant families, taught by instructors named by these countries. The purpose was more to cultivate the students’ respect for the countries from which their parents came than it was to provide a transition to mainstream classes, but the success of the courses was disputed, in any event, and even some of immigrant parents were against them. A report issued in 1986 (the Berque report) argued the policy was failing because of stigmatization of the students who were participating and of weak control over the teachers and what they were teaching, along with other factors. The children of immigrants are probably further disadvantaged by the relatively recent policy of introducing foreign-language instruction

at early ages; it now begins in the *maternelles* (in affluent areas) or in the primary schools. Since the first foreign language is usually English, the children from immigrant families are confronted with the need in the beginning school years to learn two unfamiliar languages, the other of course being French.

It is difficult to know how much the children of immigrants have benefited from the policies that have been tried during the last twenty years to help children who are having difficulties in school. This point applies especially to a practice far more widespread in France than in the US: requiring such students to repeat the school year. (In the US, by contrast, the criticism has been that unprepared students are pushed ahead by so-called social promotion.) At various times, schools have been permitted to establish ability groupings within primary grades, to allow students to pursue material at different speeds and to different depths; officially, this policy has had the aim of helping students in difficulty to avoid repeating the year, but in practice, it also helps the better students. Consequently, the policy has been exploited by some school principals to retain students from middle-class families. Extremely contested, the policy has been allowed only sporadically. In any event, the role of grade repetitions in creating inequalities between the children of immigrants and native students remains significant. The repetitions, which must be recommended by the teaching staff and can be appealed by parents, are concentrated especially at key transitional moments in the educational career, including the first and third years of primary school, along with the first and fourth years of middle school and the first year of high school. The children from immigrant families have been more likely than native French children to be required to repeat a school year. Thus, attempts to reduce limit these repetitions should have benefited to them. But the older practice continues to return and even to develop (Paul, 1996). In 1995, at the entry to middle school, the children of immigrants were much more likely than the others to be one or two years behind (Caille, 2005).

Middle & high school levels

In both systems, the inequalities among students that have developed at the primary-school level are enhanced at the secondary-school level and are frequently expressed in formal ways through placements in different curricula or different tracks. The *college* and *lycée* are the French equivalents to the American middle and high school, respectively. In both systems, entry to the lower of these levels—middle school and *college*--occurs usually after six years of primary education, though there is some variability in the US in the grade range included in primary schools, since in some places the same schools contain grades from kindergarten to 8th grade.

Some of the aspects of the primary-school systems carry over into the secondary-school level. Most notably, this holds for school segregation, even though secondary schools generally have larger catchment areas than do primary schools. School segregation is thus somewhat reduced by the larger areas covered by secondary schools, but it does not for that reason cease to be an important consideration. Likewise, in the US, where there is school segregation, there is, correlatively, inequality of resources, largely because of the role of local funding bases.

However, starting at the lower secondary school level and developing further at the higher one, segregation of students within school buildings takes on a larger role in the construction of inequalities of learning among students according to social origin. This is the phenomenon of tracking, for which an extensive literature exists in the US (e.g., Oakes, 2005). Tracking can occur in the form of disparate curricula that determine students' coursework once they are placed into a track—thus, students may take vocational courses that are intended to help them find jobs once they leave secondary school or academic courses, many of them overlapping with university-level coursework, that are intended to prepare them to enter universities. Tracking also frequently occurs on a subject-by-subject basis, so that a student may be placed in an accelerated class in mathematics and a normally progressing one in English. However, research has established that there are correlations between student placements in different subjects, so that students placed in rapidly advancing classes in one subject tend to be placed in such classes in some other subjects as well (though not necessarily in all), while those placed in one slowly moving class tend to be found in others also. Research also has shown strong correlations between these placements and class and racial and ethnic origins. Consequently, many schools that do not appear to be segregated from outside the building—because the stream of students entering in the morning is quite diverse—are strongly segregated within them, so that middle-class white students have little contact with fellow minority students within classrooms and vice versa.

One of the unclear aspects of American school systems is the correspondence of family and student aspirations with educational experience at this crucial level of the system. Surveys routinely show that minority students and their families typically cherish high educational aspirations, extending to professional and post-graduate degrees. However, the realities of student placement and achievements in secondary schools are often in contradiction with these aspirations. Second-generation students in particular have been characterized as exhibiting optimism about their futures (Kao and Tienda, 1995), and this may help them to weather initially unfavorable educational experiences.

For many minority students whose aspirations are thwarted in the school system, the risk is that they will become engaged in oppositional subcultures and their “failure” crystallized. The idea that oppositional cultures appeal to minority youth because of their experiences and their fears of rejection is traceable to the work of John Ogbu and his collaborators (e.g., Fordham and Ogbu, 1987). While their formulation has been disputed, it seems unassailable that groups of alienated students form in secondary schools and that in many cases they engage in risky behavior (e.g., deviant acts, such as petty crime and drug use) and disengage from academic work; this disengagement can be manifested in irregular attendance, refusal to do assignments, both in and out of the classroom, failure of courses, and eventual dropout. Students on these trajectories are often supported socially and psychologically by similarly inclined peers. While some European-American students become involved in such oppositional subcultures, minority students are at greater risk, perhaps, as has been frequently argued, because of their uncertainties about acceptance by mainstream teachers and educational institutions, if not outright experiences with discrimination, and greater anxieties about their futures. Entry into

oppositional subcultures is implicated to some extent in the higher dropout rates of Hispanics and African Americans, especially true of boys.

The extent to which minority students can be protected from the risks associated with oppositional cultures by engagement with ethnic and immigrant cultures has been the subject of considerable research and debate. The “segmented assimilation” perspective advocated by Alejandro Portes and his collaborators (e.g., Portes and Zhou, 1993) asserts the positive and protective role that ethnic cultures can play, and the research of Zhou and Bankston (1998) has provided supportive evidence from a study of the Vietnamese of New Orleans. In this line of argument, maintenance of the immigrant language by the second generation is a key to avoiding the risks of “premature” acculturation and the emulation of oppositional models of behavior and thinking. However, the role attributed to language has opened doubts about the general validity of this line of argument, insofar as the most successful second-generation groups are of Asian origin and tend not to be bilingual to any great extent in the second generation, while Mexicans and other Latinos, where second-generation bilingualism is most concentrated, have far higher rates of school failure and dropout (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Since some research shows that bilingual students achieve better grades, it is clear that the relationships among these factors need far more research and may be contingent in ways that have yet to be specified (Lutz, 2004).

It should be noted that, although majority students may also participate in oppositional school cultures, they are less likely than immigrant-origin and minority students to suffer the full consequences of their participation. Undoubtedly, this fact is attributable to the many second chances afforded by the US system and the greater resources of their families. For instance, the greater economic resources of their families mean that many majority students are better able to weather periods of idleness and to take advantage of opportunities, such as private tutoring or academies for troubled students, to recover academically. As an indication of how significant these differences can prove over the long term, the New York Second Generation Project has found that the rates of arrest for criminal behavior are quite similar between native whites and immigrant youth, but that the consequences are quite different, with the children of immigrants and those of native minorities suffering more severely (Kasinitz et al., forthcoming).

In France, the ability of parents to determine the middle school of their children has become increasingly limited in recent decades. However, in the same period the *college* has become the most problematic stage of the school system partly due to the democratization of the French educational system, which has unified once separate curricula (academical and vocational). In the suburbs with high concentrations of immigrant and poor families, the *college* is the site of considerable violence beginning with the second year; and drop out, which often takes the form of chronic absenteeism, is a common phenomenon during the third and fourth years. Moreover, since the 1980s there has been a growing decentralization of authority at this level of the system (Louis, 1994, Legrand, 2000) that has widened differences among middle schools. Thus, local and regional authorities have increasing financial responsibility for the maintenance of school buildings and for the acquisition of educational materials, such as books, matters

that were previously in their domain only with respect to primary schools. Even more recently, they have acquired the responsibility for hiring auxiliary personnel, such as guards and social workers, who play an important role in the functioning of schools in the most disadvantaged areas. However, often these areas—for example, the immigrant suburbs—depend on municipal and regional governments that are themselves strapped for resources. Hence, the inequalities among the schools widen (Trancart, 1998, Thomas, 2005).

Parents who wish to avoid their children's attendance at a school that they view as problematic often resort to the private school system after the 6th and final year of primary school. Some of these children then reappear in the public system at the high-school level. Another strategy pursued by some parents depends on the so-called hidden curricula (*curricula cachés*), which involve difficult modern or ancient languages (e.g., Japanese, Russian, ancient Greek) or unusual courses developed by principals to raise the prestige of their schools, such as the *classes européennes*, in which some of the instruction is in a foreign language such as English or German (Duru-Bellat and Van Zanten, 1999). This sort of differentiation among students grows beginning with the third year of middle school, when students start to study a second foreign language. The hidden curricula produce social segregation across schools, since not all middle schools can offer, for example, unusual languages such as Japanese, but also within school buildings creating differences between classes (Duru-Bellat and Mingat, 1997), similar to the effects of tracking in the US.

The democratization of the school system has undoubtedly benefited some children of immigrants by postponing the moment at which children enter purely vocational curricula and thus giving them a longer period of exposure to the same general curriculum that middle-class native French children receive. However, some native French families have successfully thwarted the intent of the democratization policy by resorting to strategies such as the hidden curricula (which can enable them to avoid the school assignments of the *carte scolaire*). The schools themselves, insofar as they serve children from such families, are pressed to create offerings targeted to them in order to prevent their flight to the private schools. Another divergence in the school careers of the immigrant working-class and the native middle-class occurs when children have problems in schools. Middle-class native French families then make use of tutoring or the placement of their children in special courses given after school hours by regular teachers who are paid extra by the parents to instruct small groups of students, often in mathematics. Such additional instruction, which generally takes place off the school grounds, has become a common supplement at all levels of the school system. It appears that immigrant parents, even when they express very high educational aspirations for their children, do not take the same measures to support their children who are in difficulty in school (Brinbaum, 2002). This difference then adds to the cumulative inequalities from which the children coming from immigrant families suffer throughout their time in school.

Further, the beneficial, counterbalancing effects of the ZEP policy, which has concentrated more on *colleges* than on the primary schools, are far from clear. The policy attempts to attract experienced teachers with bonuses and to avoid having schools

in disadvantaged neighborhoods become mere transit stations for teachers who are attempting to gain experience at the beginning of their careers. However, its success in these ways has been disputed (Meuret, 1994; Brizard, 1995): since the bonuses for teachers are very small, it continues to be the case that schools in ZEP areas are staffed with disproportionate numbers of less experienced teachers. One recent study (Benabou, Kramarz and Prost, 2004) shows that the impact of the ZEP policy on the educational success of students has been very small.

The middle-school stage is fateful for many students. By the time of middle school, a large number of the children from immigrant families are already having academic problems at school. Qualitative studies have shown that the oppositional culture in evidence among the academically weaker children of minority origins, especially North African, emerges during the first years of middle school (Van Zanten, 2001). The academic future of the great majority of these children is already determined.

The measures that many middle-class families are prepared to take to avoid sending their children to a problematic middle school are justified in their eyes by the impact of the reputation of the middle school on the quality of the high school the children can enter. The *lycée* attended has a pronounced impact on the rest of a young person's educational career and is especially determinative of the chances to enter the most elite track, the so-called *classes préparatoires* that prepare for the competitive examinations to the *grandes écoles*, the Ivy League of French higher education. The differences in quality among high schools are recognized to such a degree that the media have published national rankings of them, forcing the Minister of Education to publish his own ranking (which went beyond those in the media by taking into account not just the results on the *baccalauréat* examinations but also estimates of the "value added" by each school). Because of the critical role presumed to be played by the high school and hence the resistance of middle-class families, the state has had to weaken the rules of assignment of students to schools based on where they live. However, at this level, the game becomes complex for many families since their children are allowed three choices: a school in the immediate geographic area and a second in another zone; the third is unrestricted. This system has helped some children of immigrants in the suburbs who can opt to attend a school outside their area. But the admissions are in the hands of the schools themselves. Thus, the system puts a premium on informed choices by students and their families, and this factor operates in favor of native families and to the disadvantage of less knowledgeable immigrant families (Broncholini and Van Zanten 1997, Gilotte and Girard 2005). In any event, geographic proximity continues to be the dominant factor determining where children attend high school.

The *lycées* are comprised of schools that provide a general academic and technological curriculum, on the one hand, and of those deemed "professional," which offer a vocational training, on the other. This mix is a product of a unification in the 1980s, since previously there was a total separation between the general or academic *lycées* and those offering other curricula. The partial unification is linked to the democratization initiative and was accompanied by the creation of the technical *baccalauréat* alongside the academic one. At that point, a portion of the students who previously would have

attended the vocational *lycées* began to attend the general ones, choosing their curricula at the end of the second year. A further response to the unification at this level has been increasing differentiation by prestige among the academic curricula themselves: students specialize along scientific, literary, or economic and social tracks, each of which has its own *baccalauréat*, but there is now a more strongly marked hierarchy among the different academic *baccalauréats*, with the highest status attached to the scientific one. Nevertheless, the technical *baccalauréat*, lower in general status than the academic ones, still provides those who earn it with access to higher education. It should be noted, however, that the most prestigious *lycées*, such as the famous Henri IV in the 5th arrondissement of Paris, offer few if any technical tracks. These evolutions in the French *lycée* system appear to demonstrate that each attempt at unification for the purpose of greater equality of chances is counterbalanced by a further differentiation that preserves the privileges of the upper reaches of the system (Duru-Bellat and Kieffer, 2000).

Paralleling the academic and technical *lycées* are now the professional *lycées*. At the end of middle school, a portion of the students definitively leave the academic track and enter into the professional high schools, where they can earn vocational diplomas such as the CAP and BEP in two or three years or the *baccalauréat professionnel*, which gives them access to professional tracks in post-secondary education. These vocationally oriented *lycées* are clearly a major pathway for the separation of students with academic and other difficulties from their cohorts, and they are the sites of massive problems in the suburbs because of high rates of absenteeism and violence. At the end of the *college*, about 40% of the students enter a *lycée professionnel*, according to the 1995 educational panel study. A further differentiation among the vocational tracks is linked to the options they lead to. The French vocational diplomas (especially the CAP and BEP but also now the *baccalauréats professionnels*) are very specialized and linked to a supposed future position on the labor market. One difference is between a diploma preparing for industry and one preparing for services. Here also some degree of hierarchy is apparent (for instance, diplomas in electronics are ranked very high), depending on the return on the labor market. One problem is that, despite constant advertising to encourage students to choose vocational tracks, there are not enough places that students want. This is a major source of frustration for immigrants' children, especially for the Maghrebins, as demonstrated by different surveys (Silberman and Fournier 1999, Brinbaum and Kieffer 2005). In some cases, a desired option is available only in a very distant *lycée*, a source of further discouragement for girls since their parents are reluctant to let them travel so far.

One important difference between France and the US lies in the credentials that are attained at the end of secondary school. In the US, the credential that matters is the high school diploma, which is the pathway to further education, almost regardless of the school and curriculum where it is earned. Indeed, the system even provides for the possibility of earning its equivalent outside of school, the so-called GED, which is acquired by passing a test. The GED can also be acquired through educational experiences provided by US armed forces in preparation for enlistment. (The military services require a high school diploma or its equivalent for enlistment. However, the Army has an Education Plus Program that aims to attract minority youth who have

dropped out of school; it pays for special training to enable a potential enlistee who meets certain criteria to pass the GED examination.)

The French system offers a more complicated menu of diplomas and credentials that can be earned at the secondary level. An important characteristic of the system is in fact that it offers relatively easy access to various tracks but a more rigorous selectivity when it comes to diplomas, which are unmistakably ranked. Thus, the short-sequence vocational diplomas such as the CAP and BEP do not give access to the university system. The new *baccalauréats*, the technological and professional (earned by 18 percent and 12 percent of the class of 2003), created as part of the democratization initiative, do give such access, but they are ranked below the academic *baccalauréat*, which has itself separated according to subjects of specialization that are in turn ranked. Nevertheless, the new *baccalauréats* have opened roads to the tertiary level, especially to vocational tracks in the lower tertiary level. But one must also note that the proportion of a cohort attaining the upper tertiary level remains lower than is the case in the US.

Confronted by the crises of the immigrant suburbs, where many youths abandon school with no meaningful credential. The French government has recently attempted to reinstitute the pathway of apprenticeship (where work and classroom education are linked). It has lowered the age at which an apprenticeship may be pursued to 14. However, a disadvantage of this pathway (which it is possible to choose at different educational stages and even after the *baccalauréat*) for Maghrebin youngsters is that it requires an employment contract. Since the schools take no responsibility for effecting these contracts, the requirement forces the North Africans to encounter the difficulties they will later face as prospective workers: the unwillingness of many employers to take them on. Research has shown that the employment contracts required by apprenticeship programs are often procured by students' relatives, and in this respect the family networks of the Maghrebins can do less than those of other groups, such as the Portuguese, whose families can find places in the ethnic niches the group controls in, for example, construction (Silberman and Fournier 1999)

Post-secondary education

A high proportion of US high-school graduates enter post-secondary education, where they encounter far more differentiation and hierarchy than exists at the secondary level. These variations include great differences in levels of selectivity and major inequalities in the consequences for successful students of the credentials they obtain. This differentiation begins with the distinction between two- and four-year colleges. The two-year college track encompasses a mixture of curricula, with some curricula providing vocational credentials, which are intended to be the endpoint of the scholastic career and to link students directly with jobs, and other curricula offering a general academic preparation, which allows students to transfer to four-year colleges (Brint and Karabel, 1989). The four-year college offers the more esteemed degrees, which can be earned in a general intellectual training (the liberal arts) or pre-professional education (e.g., pre-medical concentrations). A substantial number of four-year college graduates will, either

immediately or after a few years in the labor market, enter post-graduate programs that yield advanced academic degrees, ultimately the Ph.D., or professional credentials.

All research demonstrates that social origins correspond quite strongly with students' entry into the two- versus four-year track. This is a consequence undoubtedly of differences in academic careers prior to this branching point; on average, middle-class European-American students can present stronger academic records and test scores, qualifying them more easily for admission to a four-year college. In addition to having weaker high-school records, the children of working-class immigrants may feel less confident about their ability to complete a four-year academic program, if only because of economic pressures, and may also be uncertain about the wisdom of the choice between vocational and academic training given their circumstances. The correlation between social origins and college entered, along with the frequently slow progress of two-year college students and the high rates of failure at this level, have led some scholars to characterize the two-year colleges as a false promise of social advancement (Brint and Karabel, 1989).

Also there is a powerful hierarchy evident among four-year colleges. This is well-known to all students applying for admission and to their families, and rating the colleges by such criteria as the academic selectivity of their admissions is a game pursued by various services that publish guidebooks and at which the colleges and universities themselves play by attempting to influence key statistics (e.g., the rate of acceptance by prospective students). The hierarchy among the four-year colleges correlates with the social origins of their students and also with their post-college trajectories. The most selective colleges can usually boast of the highest proportions of graduates who go on to receive further educational training.

Yet there are forces counteracting the social selection operating at the point of entry to the system of US higher education. Most important in this respect are policies of affirmative action instituted by many colleges and universities. They are, to be sure, contested by conservatives and have been overturned in some public universities, notably in California and Texas, by lawsuits or referendum. It is also hard to be sure how many students they affect. Yet research suggests that they can have powerful effects on the long-term opportunities of minority students (Bowen and Bok, 1998; Massey et al., 2002).

Since most professional training is not provided through four-year college programs, the final stage of the system for many students comes in post-graduate academic or professional programs. In this respect, the US system is different from European universities, where specialization begins at entry to the university; in the US, it is common for the first two years of college to be regarded as an academic foundation, and for specialization, insofar as it occurs, to be concentrated in the final two years. Some specialization, such as in liberal arts subjects, is frequently regarded by students and their parents as a more intensive form of general intellectual training, to be followed by professional training in post-graduate programs. These programs can demand as much as four or more years of further education, and especially for students coming from weaker

economic backgrounds must be balanced against considerations of expense and indebtedness, as well as against foregone earnings. Consequently, by the post-graduate stage, there has been a rigorous prior selectivity, which has removed all but a tiny number of children of working-class immigrants.

In France in recent decades, higher education has experienced a very powerful democratization, linked to the greater access to the *baccalauréat*, which, it must be remembered, is the credential *sine qua non* for entry to the higher education (and the reason why juries of the *baccalauréat* examination are always presided over by a university faculty member). About a third of a cohort now attains some level of higher education. Even with the democratization, however, France still lags many other economically advanced societies in this respect.

Moreover, higher education is very stratified, with the most prominent feature the division between the *grandes écoles* and universities. (In reality, however, the system is divided among three or four branches.) The *grandes écoles* were founded in the Napoleonic era to educate civil servants and engineers (training the universities did not provide); to them were added several *grandes écoles* that train business elites. The *grandes écoles* are the most selective branch of higher education and entry to them is strongly correlated with social origin (with a large proportion of entrants having parents who are university professors). Some recent studies reveal that the social homogeneity of their students has increased in recent decades, as entering classes have fewer and fewer children coming from the working class and other less privileged strata (Albouy and Wanecq, 2003). Preparation for entry, which is achieved through competitive examination for the strictly limited number of places, begins with the choice of a *lycée*. It continues after completion of the *lycée* years with “*classes préparatoires*,” which are given in some of the best *lycées* of Paris and other large cities. Even these preparatory classes are highly selective: entrance to them is based on the student’s dossier and takes into account the grades during the last two years of the *lycée* along with its reputation. The *classes préparatoires* provide a broad cultural education along with a training of high quality, and they are themselves stratified since several of the Parisian *lycées* produce the main group of students who will succeed in the entrance examinations for the *grandes écoles*. Success in the examinations requires therefore a risky multi-year strategy based on a sound grasp of the educational system and is consequently unthinkable for virtually all children from immigrant families. The top Parisian *lycée*, Henri IV, has recently proposed to institute a “preliminary” *classe préparatoire* to permit good students from the suburbs to attain this level. In fact, just a tiny number of these students currently succeed at the entrance examinations and can take advantage of the free education that ensues (some students in the *grandes écoles* are even treated as provisional civil servants and paid salaries during their training). To the *grandes écoles* has been added during the last two decades a growing number of less distinguished private universities that charge tuition and provide engineering and business education; they provide another outlet for children from middle-class families.

The access to the universities is automatic as long as the student possesses an academic or technological *baccalauréat*. The length of studies follows the European model, with

credentials acquired after 3, 5 and 8 years (the European Union has recently undertaken a unification at the tertiary level leading to some important changes in French university credentials, e.g., the creation of a masters degree); but the rates of failure and of abandonment of studies during the first and second years are very high. A university education is largely free of cost except for registration fees, which have tended to increase in recent years but remain well below the costs of an American university. However, the scholarships that can be granted to students with limited financial resources are few in number and minimal in monetary amounts. In fact, a large proportion of students coming from working-class and poor families must work while they are at the university, and their need to do so contributes to the high rate of their failure. Increasingly, some universities (e.g., the University of Paris at Orsay) are implementing methods of admitting students based on their *lycée* records, even though such selectivity is supposedly forbidden. To be sure, the access to certain subjects, such as medicine, is openly selective: medical training is linked to the hospital system and admission is based on competitive examination. In addition, the *Instituts d'études politiques* in Paris (also known as Science Po) has a special status that allows it to be selective, since it prepares students for the competitive examination for entry to the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration*, one of the *grandes écoles* and the training ground for the national political elite.

The partition between *grandes écoles* and universities deprives the first years of the latter of a large part of the best students while at the same time the universities are not adequately financed to educate the students they have. The French universities are widely considered to be undergoing a grave crisis, and the separation between them and the *grandes écoles* is regularly challenged but without much hope of achieving a true reform. Students from working class and poor families, among them the great majority of the second generation of immigrant populations, enter then into a university system that is not well structured and can quickly find themselves disoriented and heading for failure (Beaud, 2000).

This is all the more true insofar as, alongside the traditional university curricula, new post-secondary tracks of technological and professional training have been created and have met with great success, removing another group of the better students from the main university sector. This is specifically true for the university institutes of technology (IUT) that were created during the 1970s. But it is also increasingly the case for the curricula leading to the vocational certificate, *Brevet de technicien supérieur* (BTS), which are generally pursued at *lycées* after the *baccalauréat* has been earned. These technological/professional tracks, whose diplomas are advantageous in the labor market and which are selective in their admissions, are all the more in demand now that bridges have been created to allow students to have subsequent access to the universities, where they can earn university diplomas, the *licence* and masters. However, the universities are also developing more advanced tracks of this kind, leading to new credentials (DESS). These developments have benefited many children of immigrants, who, numerous in the vocational tracks in the *lycées*, are able enter the post-secondary professional tracks thanks to the technical and professional *baccalauréats*. This is notably the case for many second-generation Portuguese, but is much less true for the Maghrebins, who continue to

prefer the academic curricula of the universities. Finally, there is a third way in the post-secondary sector, constituted by training for professions having a middling status in France (e.g., social workers and physician's assistants). Such tracks are particularly in demand among young women from modest backgrounds, including many who come from immigrant families.

In contrast to the United States, France has not developed policies of affirmative action and is, in principle, quite opposed to them. However, it is in the domain of higher education that the first initiative in this direction has been taken. Science Po has created an avenue of access specifically for the better students coming from the *lycées* of the immigrant suburbs. The autumn, 2005, riots throughout France will presumably stimulate more initiatives like this, though at the moment they remain extremely limited and are very contested by the adherents of the so-called Republican model. It is necessary to recognize in this context the rigidity of the French educational system: second chances are difficult to find, even though various reforms have attempted to change the system. The direction of evolution has been more toward the validation by the university of vocational training than toward a veritable opening to allow students who left to return in order to complete advanced diplomas.

Conclusion

In both systems, the disparities between the native group and the children of immigrants are sizable, despite gains by the latter over time. In France, democratization has allowed the children of North African immigrants to improve their educational attainments; more now attain the *baccalauréat* and attend the university, though they complete university credentials less often than do their native French counterparts. In any event, democratization has also benefited the native French group, and this fact has thwarted any large reduction in the overall gap between groups. A similar story is found in the U.S., where improvements in Mexican-American educational attainments over time have been more than matched by improvements in the attainments of native-born whites. As in France, the disparity is quite large at the upper end of educational distribution, in the attainment of university degrees.

There are, nevertheless, differences in labor-market outcomes. The U.S. has a substantially lower unemployment rate, and it appears that there are no significant differences in employment between second-generation Mexican Americans and native whites. Such differences do appear in France between second-generation North Africans and the native group (Silberman and Fournier, 2006b).

The most intriguing part of the comparison is perhaps is that such superficially different educational systems produce such similar results. From the point of view of governance, the French and American systems would have to be seen as opposites: the French system is mostly determined by policies and financing that come from the national state and its basic thrust would seem to push in an egalitarian direction, resulting in more equal treatment for schools serving socially disparate populations; by contrast, the US system is very much one driven by local and regional centripetal forces, with policies largely

determined by states and financing coming heavily from localities and states, with the evident consequence being substantial inequalities among schools that correspond with the social compositions of their student populations. Moreover, the French system has initiated policies to overcome socially structured inequalities in educational opportunity, through the ZEP policy to provide additional financing to schools serving disadvantaged populations and through the attempt to democratize access to the *baccalauréat* and hence to post-secondary education, including the universities. While the US recently has attempted one major educational reform, the No Child Left Behind policy, the effects are uncertain and the policy is widely viewed as inadequately funded. It is unlikely to have made much of a dent in the systemically rooted inequalities of educational opportunity so evident as one looks across the national landscape.

Of course, when one peers beneath the surface, there are some undeniable similarities: most important is the way that social segregation, especially by race (in the US) and social class and ethnic origin (in both France and the US), shapes educational opportunity. In the US, this shaping is very apparent and has been the subject of a lengthy literature, but in France, it occurs, too, both because local authorities and parents retain important influences on the resources of schools and on what happens within them and because schools that concentrate poor and immigrant-origin students are problematic in ways that schools that serve middle-class, native students are not. Another similarity lies in the stratification within schools that buttresses, and is buttressed by, the developing educational differences among students of different social origins. In France, this stratification is highly formalized in the ramified hierarchy of diplomas and certificates that can be earned at both the secondary and higher educational levels; but it also has less formal manifestations, as in the so-called hidden curricula, e.g., the study of unusual languages, that some schools have developed in order to attract better students and those from more privileged families. In the US, tracking is less formal but it is nevertheless a highly developed feature of school systems, implemented in the early years through ability groupings that often occur within classrooms and later through subject-matter classes that proceed at different paces and to different depths, with the consequence that the mere possession of a high-school diploma, the universal terminal secondary certificate, tells very little about the academic preparation of an individual.

That two such different systems produce such similar results is, however, more likely to be a consequence of the attempts of advantaged native families, from the middle class or more affluent circumstances, to retain privileges for their children in the face of the prospective competition with the children of recent immigrants, especially those from the most disfavored groups, such as the Mexicans in the US and the Maghrebins in France. What the French case in particular demonstrates is a kind of Newtonian Third Law of Social Inequality: for every initiative to reduce inequality there is an opposing reaction to preserve it. Hence, in reaction to the initiatives of the state to promote greater equality of educational opportunity (e.g., the ZEP policy), parents and to some degree local authorities have reacted by creating new mechanisms that give latitude for social inequalities to assert themselves in and through educational institutions: examples are the hidden curricula and the supplementary educational activities in schools for which families must bear the cost.

For either system to greatly reduce educational inequality would require a step that contravenes one of its fundamental principles. In the US, the principle of local control of schools is paramount but is the foundation of educational inequality insofar as the financing of schools is in the hands of local authorities to a great extent and is effected mostly through the property tax. Given the cherished nature of the principle, it would be difficult to overturn, and attempts to provide a more level base of funding would undoubtedly be greeted with reactive devices to restore inequality, such as voluntary funding of supplementary resources and activities by parents (already a feature of some school systems). In France, the virtual absence of affirmative action makes it very difficult to overcome systemically based ethnic inequalities and to give chances to the children of immigrants coming from the more impoverished suburbs. But the principle of equality of individuals before the state, which is interpreted to imply no discrimination in favor of, or against, individuals based on their ethnic origin, is deeply enshrined in the French understanding of its revolutionary heritage. Here, too, a contravention on a large scale, with the aim of promoting greater educational opportunity, is difficult to imagine.

Table 1. Educational disparities for second-generation Mexicans and North Africans compared to the native majority in France and the US

		Anglos Born 1971- 75, ages 25- 29 in 2000	Mexican Americans Born 1971- 75, ages 25- 29 in 2000	Native French Born 1969- 1978, ages 25-34 in 2003	Maghrebins Born in France 1969-1978, ages 25-34 in 2003
Males:					
No secondary credential	In US, no hs diploma; in France, no diploma other than BEPC	10.2	27.4	19.5	32.9
Basic secondary credential	US High school diploma; in France, CAP-BEP or baccalauréat	27.6	31.1	44.2	42.4
Some post- secondary education		61.1	41.5	36.3	24.7
Females:					
No credential		7.7	21.4	16.8	27.2
Basic credential		22.8	27.4	41.7	42.5
Some post- secondary education		69.5	50.9	42.5	30.3

Sources: The 5 percent Public Use Microdata Sample of the 2000 Census for the US and the 2003 *Formation Qualification Professionnelle* survey in France

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