

Immigrants face growing economic mobility gap

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From Monday's Globe and Mail
October 6, 2008 at 1:06 AM EDT

Children of Chinese and South Asian immigrants to Canada do dramatically better over time than the offspring of blacks, Filipinos and Latin Americans, new census data reveal.

The findings, released quietly last week by Statistics Canada, suggest a new paradigm for understanding immigrants' integration and success.

The old vertical mosaic – with whites from Britain and Europe at the top and visible minorities underneath – is no longer valid. Instead, second- and third-generation Chinese and Japanese surpass all other groups of newcomers, including whites, while for blacks and other groups, there is little or no economic mobility across generations.

“You can no longer make broad generalizations about how badly visible minorities are doing. Some groups are doing really well, and others are not,” said Jack Jedwab, a historian and head of the Association for Canadian Studies, who wrote a report on the findings.



Rohan and Patricia Hines play with their daughter Natania, 2, in their Pickering home.

Originally from Jamaica, Patricia earned a masters degree in Canada and Rohan is a successful accountant, but census numbers show incomes for Asian newcomers are growing and blacks often fare much worse.

(JENNIFER ROBERTS/FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL)

“We need to rethink the vertical mosaic and look at why mobility is weak among certain ethnic groups.”

The new research, based on the 2006 census, comes as a disappointment – but not a surprise – to Patricia Hines, a teacher and communications expert who emigrated from Jamaica in 2001.

She believes that, while discrimination is a factor, the community could also do more to help itself.

“A lot of us look for schools and communities with black students and teachers so our children won't feel isolated. But that is self-limiting,” says Ms. Hines, 40, who relocated to Toronto with her husband, an accountant.

“If you really don't have an interest in what other people do, or focus overly on your community, then you are limiting your potential,” said Ms. Hines, who owns her own business and works at the Black Business and Professional Association, but noted that her opinions are her own.

The 2006 census data show that first-generation white immigrants with university degrees, aged 25-44, earned \$68,036 a year on average – just above the Canadian-born baseline of \$65,000. Those from Japan earned \$58,294 and those from China \$55,270, while black immigrants earned \$51,317 a year.

The below-average incomes relate to immigrants' language barriers, lack of Canadian job experience, and difficulties getting their credentials recognized.

The balance shifts, however, with the second and third generation.

The Chinese catapulted ahead, with the grandchildren of immigrants earning an average of \$79,022 a year. Incomes for South Asians also increased substantially by the third generation.

In contrast, blacks languished, with third-generation immigrants earning less than newcomers. The incomes of Latin Americans also fell across the generations.

The census findings also suggest that blacks experience more discrimination and difficulties in the labour market than others.

Jeffrey Reitz, a sociologist at the University of Toronto, has researched this area extensively and found that while recently arrived immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa are fairly well educated, their employment outcomes are far worse than other newcomer groups.

“Blacks do fairly well in terms of education, but black men especially stand out with strikingly lower incomes. They report experiences of discrimination on a much higher level than other racial groups,” he said.

Canada's black community has struggled with racial stereotyping and higher-than-average rates of poverty. The high school drop-out rate for blacks in the Toronto public school system has been estimated at about 40 per cent, almost double the rate for non-blacks, prompting the school board to create an alternative Afrocentric school.

An articulate professional, Ms. Hines observed that she never encountered discrimination until she began studying for her master's degree at the University of Toronto. She was shocked to discover there were no other black students or lecturers.

When the class was asked to write the names of five black people, many could only come up with Lincoln Alexander, Ontario's former lieutenant-governor, and Michael (Pinball) Clemons of the Toronto Argonauts football team.

“It made me realize that even though Canada is so diverse, the different ethnic groups don't really mix or understand one another's culture,” Ms. Hines said. “It is hard to talk about this. What are South Asian and Chinese immigrants doing that somehow gets them ahead?”

The census data found that 60 per cent of second-generation Chinese immigrants had university degrees, compared with 52 per cent of South Asians, 36 per cent of Filipinos, 32 per cent of blacks and 23 per cent of Latin Americans.

The higher education levels among Chinese and South Asians appears to reflect the values of their parents – middle-class, educated newcomers who may be underemployed when they arrive, but who expect their children to advance.