

During the previous decade, the most trenchant demographic trend was the immigration from throughout the Southwest, especially Texas, to California.³ There was also heavy immigration into the United States from Mexico. Over 290,000 Mexicans entered the country legally in the fifties. Illegal immigration may have been four times greater. Nevertheless, over 85 percent of the Mexicanos were born in the United States. Indeed, over half of the Spanish-speaking people in the Southwest were native-born of native-born parents; that is, they were at least second-generation US citizens. The fertility rate was very high. Consequently, the population was relatively youthful. The median age was a little over nineteen years, compared to twenty-eight years for the non-Hispanic white population in the Southwest. The high fertility rate and immigration combined to bring about rapid growth: during the fifties, the Mexicano population of the Southwest increased by a remarkable 51 percent. By 1960, Spanish-speakers, almost all of them of Mexican origin, made up 12 percent of the total population in the region.

Impressive social and economic gains had been registered by this time. During the decade of the fifties, the percentage of Latinos in the Southwest classified as laborers declined from 42 to 30 percent. Another positive trend was the entry of Mexican and Mexican American women into the labor force. Their rates of employment outside the home were higher than among Anglos. During the fifties, median income for Mexicano households rose at a substantially higher rate than that of Anglos. Home ownership went up as well.

Educational levels were improving. During the fifties, the proportions of Spanish-speaking people in the Southwest who completed high school increased almost 75 percent, with California making more progress than other states. The educational gap between Mexicanos and Anglos actually narrowed slightly at this time. Greater numbers of Mexicanos were enrolling in institutions of higher learning. Though brown faces were difficult to find in major universities across the United States, or even in the Southwest, for that matter, the emerging community colleges provided minorities, including Hispanics, a golden opportunity to improve their socioeconomic status. Prominent Mexicanos benefiting from a junior college education, many of them in this period, include scholars Renato I. Rosaldo, Ralph Guzmán, Américo Paredes, Carlos Muñoz Jr., Armando Navarro, Oscar J. Martínez, Vicki Ruiz, and Patricia Zavella; writers Ron Arias, Gary Soto, Denise Chávez, and Floyd Salas; civil rights activists Ignacio López, Dolores Huerta, Cruz Reynoso, José Ángel Gutiérrez, Corinne Sánchez, and Edward James Olmos; political leaders Eligio de la Garza, Philip Sánchez, Henry B. González, Grace Flores Napoletano, and Gloria Molina; educators Julián Nava, Tomás Rivera and Cecilia Preciado de Burciaga; artists Manuel Neri, Emigdio Vásquez, José Montoya, and Rupert García; athletes Hank Aguirre, Jeff García, Tom Flores, and Andre Ethier;