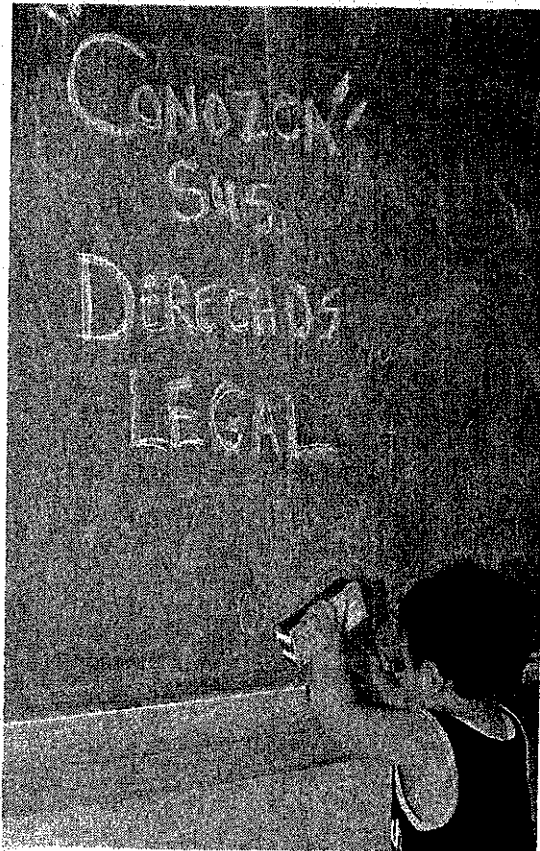
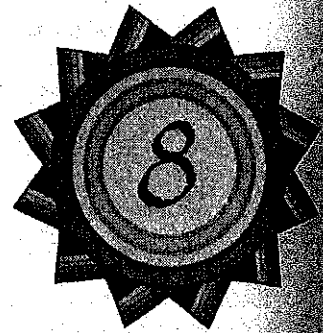


Mexican Americans

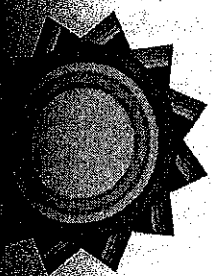
From Colonized Minority to Political Activists



Community-based organizations have promoted opportunities for immigrants and second and third generation Hispanics to learn about their legal rights in the United States. Mexican Americans have increasingly voted in elections, run for public office, and participated in public affairs at the local, state, and federal level.



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In spite of what many Anglo pioneers may have thought generally of Mexicans, most were careful to make the proper distinctions between different "types" of Mexicans. Mexican landowners were "Spanish" or Castilian, whereas Mexican workers were "half-breeds" or "Mexican Indians." The well-known aphorism explains the situation—"money whitens."

—David Montejano

... the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence), and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory).

—Gloria Anzaldua

The preceding chapters highlighted the point that the population of the United States has been built up mainly by successive waves of immigrants from various parts of the world and that these immigrants, broadly speaking, entered this society voluntarily. In the case of the Mexican Americans,¹ however, we confront a second kind of situation.

Unlike nearly all other groups we have discussed, the Mexican Americans did not initially become "newcomers" to American society by leaving the old country and crossing oceans. Instead, like African Americans and American Indians, they originally became a part of American society through conflict and coercion. The southwestern or "borderlands" region of what is now the United States, in which the Mexican American population still is concentrated, was settled by people of Spanish-Mexican-Indian ancestry long before it was settled by Anglo Americans; and, along with the American Indians, the Mexican Americans entered the society through the direct conquest of their homelands.

Some observers believe this is a fact of overriding importance, a fact that makes totally inapplicable to the Mexican Americans the assimilationist ideas we have explored thus far. As Sanchez stated, "the Spanish Mexicans of the Southwest are not truly an immigrant group, for they are in their traditional home."² From this standpoint, the expectation that the experience of the Mexican Americans can be analyzed properly in terms of any or all of the three main ideologies of assimilation discussed previously is considered to be a serious mistake. It is rather argued that to understand the Mexican American experience we must employ an antiassimilationist ideology and framework.



Early Indian-Spanish Relations

To assess the competing claims of the assimilationist (immigrant model) and antiassimilationist (colonial model) interpretations of the Mexican American experience, we

begin with the landings of the Spaniards in Mexico during the second decade of the sixteenth century. Here, as in the case of the landings of the English in Virginia and Massachusetts approximately 100 years later, a conquering European, Christian group established itself on lands previously occupied by indigenous American groups. In both instances, the dominant migrant group gradually expanded its frontiers to create an increasingly large colonial territory. The expansion of the English toward the west and of the Spanish toward the north were the processes that would one day bring these two enormous colonial developments together.

The specific course of colonial development in the English and Spanish territories differed in a number of significant respects. For one thing, the two powers' entire approaches to colonization were different. The exploration and colonization of the Spanish territories relied more strongly on the initiatives of the crown and the church. The Spanish monarchs were interested primarily in acquiring lands and precious metals, whereas the Roman Catholic Church wished to save the souls of the "heathens." The English, too, were interested at first in these very same things; but after a while it became clear that there was no gold and silver treasure on the Atlantic coast. So the efforts to Christianize the Indians proved to be largely futile.

These differences in colonization methods and experiences had one consequence of special importance for us: The relations between the conquering Europeans and the conquered Indians developed along significantly different paths in the two cases. As noted in Chapter 3, the relations between the English and the Indians became predominantly hostile and were interspersed with warfare. The policy of the Anglo Americans toward the Indians became one of exclusion and extermination. By and large, the Indians were forced to move west as the Anglo American frontier advanced.

The relations between the Spaniards and the Indians in Mexico also were frequently hostile, but the Spaniards were much more successful than the Anglo Americans in the matter of converting the Indians to Christianity, at least to many of its outward forms. Consequently, even though the Spaniards also took an enormous toll in human lives and misery, the cross as well as the sword marked the advance of the northern frontier of Mexico.³ The place of the Indians in Mexican society, to be sure, was at the very bottom. They provided most of the manual labor that was needed to construct and maintain the *haciendas* and to exploit the riches of the earth. They were the *peons*, who were bound to the Spanish masters and the land in a form of human slavery; but they also were human beings and Christians, and they were accepted as an integral, if lowly, part of Mexican society.⁴

The Spaniards' policy of counting the Indians "in" rather than "out" led, during a period of three centuries, to a much higher degree of marital assimilation of the Indians with the dominant Europeans. Two related points should be noted. First, just as the English subscribed generally to the Anglo-conformity ideology of assimilation, the Spaniards adhered generally to an Hispano-conformity ideology. The Indians were expected to do their very best to move toward a mastery of Spanish culture and ways of acting. Second, by the time Mexico achieved independence in 1821, the culture and population of Mexico had become very much more "Indianized" than had the culture and population of the United States. Whatever may have been the intentions of the dominant Spaniards, the melting-pot process of assimilation was more significant in Mexico than in the United States.

The Hispano-Indian society of Mexico and the Anglo American society of the United States came into direct and continuous contact after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. The line of contact between these groups was exceptionally long and blurred. The treaty through which the United States secured Louisiana from France did not give a detailed description of the boundaries of the territory. This fact helped to create and maintain an almost constant state of tension along the frontier, first between Spain and the United States and then, later, between Mexico and the United States. Many Americans seemed to believe that Texas definitely had been included in the purchase; but the Spanish and Mexican governments disagreed. Many other Americans believed that it was the "Manifest Destiny" of their country to span the continent. In this way, a struggle began that led, by 1848, to the transfer of what we now know as the American Southwest from Mexico to the United States and to the creation of the Mexican American minority group. The incorporation of Texas into the United States was an important part of that story.



The Texas Frontier

The process through which the Mexican American group has emerged may be visualized more clearly by a consideration of some of the events that occurred in Texas after 1803. The United States recently had been flexing its muscles in international affairs (e.g., the Monroe Doctrine) and was clearly in a stronger military position than the young Mexican nation. Also, the Americans generally did not hide the fact that they regarded themselves to be racially superior to the heterogeneous population of Mexico. The majority of Mexico's citizens were either Indians or Spanish Indians (*mestizos*). Basically, the heritage of the "pure" Spaniards was itself suspect in the Americans' minds because of the centuries of interaction between the Spaniards and various African populations (e.g., the Moors). Hence, racism played an important role in Mexican and American relations.

Less than 15 years after Mexico gained her independence from Spain, Texas broke away from Mexico to establish still another independent republic. Nevertheless, a basis for *Tejano* and Anglo American immigrant cooperation was created and maintained by able leaders from both sides. Stephen F. Austin, the leader of the first group of Anglo American immigrants to Texas, was enthusiastic about the prospect of an independent Mexico and the development of Texas within it. He sincerely accepted Mexican citizenship and was a respected link between the native and immigrant groups. From the native Mexican side, such men as Ramón Músquiz and José Antonio Navarro worked energetically to assist the assimilation of the Anglo Americans into Mexican society. But the goodwill and substantially similar interests of the native and immigrant leadership in Texas did not extend to Mexico City. In a way, the central authorities fell victims to their own plan. The colonization program was so successful that by 1835 the Anglo American immigrants outnumbered the *Tejanos* by about five to one; hence, as the talk of revolution spread, most of those who favored it were, simply as a matter of numbers, Anglo Americans. When the revolution erupted, the Texan armies were comprised

mainly of Anglo Americans; nevertheless, a large proportion of the native Mexicans in Texas believed that various actions of the central government had been unjustified. Kibbe (1946:33) estimated that as many as one-third of those who opposed the government of Santa Anna were *Tejanos*, and several *Tejano* units participated in the actual fighting during the Texas revolution (Barker 1943:333).⁵

Although the *Tejanos* were a numerical minority, they were not yet treated systematically as an ethnic minority. An ethnic line of distinction did exist, but it was a blurred rather than a sharp line. Taylor (1934:21) described the situation as follows: "During the period of confusion some Texans were fighting with Mexicans . . . other Texans were committing depredations against both Texans and Mexicans, while Mexicans could be found on both sides." Gradually, however, friendships between the *Tejanos* and the Anglo American Texans became more difficult to maintain, and the relations between the groups became more strained. Anglo American Texans, in particular, increasingly failed to distinguish the *Tejanos* from Mexican nationals and came to regard the conflict in Texas as one of "Mexicans" versus "Americans" (Montejano 1987:26-30).

Many of the Anglo American Texans did, in fact, still regard themselves as Americans and were eager to have Texas join the United States. This goal was shared by many people within the United States. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that after only some ten years of independence, Texas agreed to become a part of the United States.



Conflict in the Borderlands

The annexation of Texas aggravated rather than ended the hostilities in the borderlands. President Santa Anna had warned in 1843 that "the Mexican government will consider equivalent to a declaration of war against the Mexican Republic the passage of an act for the incorporation of Texas with the territory of the United States" (Faulkner 1948:324). In May 1846, President Polk claimed that Mexico "has invaded our territory and shed American blood on American soil" (Faulkner 1948:325), and he asked Congress for a declaration of war against Mexico. Abraham Lincoln disagreed with Polk and stated that the war was "unnecessarily and unconstitutionally commenced by the President" (Faulkner 1948:325).

Constitutional or not, "one of the most obviously aggressive wars in American history" was under way (Jordan and Litwack 1987:315). The conflict involved not only the disputed territory between Texas and Mexico but all of Mexico. In February 1848, Mexico surrendered under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The treaty ceded to the United States nearly one-half of the territory of Mexico. The Rio Grande was established as the boundary of Texas. So the great bulk of the land that now comprises the southwestern region of the United States was acquired.⁶ The "Manifest Destiny" of the United States to stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific had now been achieved. The Spanish-Mexican-Indian group that was left behind as Mexico's northern frontier receded (75,000 to 100,000 people)⁷ was now a conquered group. As individuals, they had the right either to "retain the title and rights of Mexican citizens, or acquire those of citizens of the United States" (Moquín and Van Doren 1971:246). Those who did not declare their intention to remain Mexicans automatically became citizens of the United States after 1 year. At this point, al

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though they were U.S. citizens, they generally were viewed as a defeated and inferior people whose rights need not be taken too seriously (Griswold del Castillo 1990). They "gradually saw their property and influence dwindle as they faced . . . the flood of Anglo Americans" (Burner, Fox-Genovese, and Bernhard 1991:387).

In this way, the Mexican Americans became a minority within the United States. Their entry into the society was by conquest and, to repeat, was quite different from that of the Irish and Germans who were arriving in large numbers in the East during this very same period. The Creation Generation of Mexican Americans had not decided to leave their native land and go to the United States. They simply discovered one day that by a mutual agreement of the United States and Mexico (at gunpoint), the places where they lived were no longer in Mexico. In fact, to continue being Mexicans, they either had to leave their homes and move south of the new border established by the treaty or declare officially their intention to remain Mexican nationals within the United States. Acuña (1981:19) states that "About 2,000 elected to leave; most remained in what they considered *their* land."

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo did not end the violence in the borderlands, but it did mark the point beyond which those of Mexican descent were subordinated to the Anglo Americans. A system of ethnic domination had been born. The Americans had ample incentives to compete with the Mexicans for Texas; they had the power to seize it if necessary, and they typically had a low regard for the Mexican people. Most Mexican Americans found themselves in a position in society not much better than that occupied by Indians and African Americans elsewhere in the United States. The combination of these ingredients created a highly unstable situation along Mexico's northern frontier, especially in the area of Texas.

The strip of land between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande was the staging area for many violent conflicts. Numerous "filibustering expeditions" were launched into this area by Anglo Americans in an attempt to extend U.S. territory even more deeply into Mexico. The traffic was not entirely one way, however. Between 1859 and 1873, the flamboyant Mexican leader Juan N. "Cheno" Cortina initiated a series of raids along the Texas border (Acuña 1981:33-37; Rosenbaum 1981:41-45; Webb [1935] 1987:173-193). Cortina, who was born near Brownsville, Texas, came prominently to attention in July 1859 in the first of a series of "Cortina Wars." Cortina's daring exploits won him labels ranging from "cattle thief" to "champion of his race" (Lea 1957:159). Among the Mexican people, Cortina was immortalized as a border hero in several *corridos*, or ballads, about the border raids (Paredes 1958). These border conflicts provoked continuous, bitter confrontations with military and law enforcement authorities on both sides of the Rio Grande.

The interethnic violence in Texas reached a peak during the early 1870s, but the disorders subsided by 1875. The combined actions of the authorities on both sides of the Rio Grande led to a reduction of border raiding. Cortina was commissioned as a general in the Mexican army and was stationed far from the border in Mexico City. By 1878, after more than 40 years of almost continuous friction and warfare, the Anglo Americans had established an uneasy control over the land between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande and over the Mexican American people who lived there.

The next three decades were relatively quiet along the Rio Grande. But if this period seemed to be one of accommodation, the hatreds and antagonisms smoldered at its

very surface. Violent group conflict was always a possibility and was frequently a reality. Various incidents—shootings, lynchings, beatings, and so on—continued. Each incident usually led to some form of retaliation from the injured side, which only aggravated the matter further. Relations between the Mexican Americans and the Texas Rangers, in particular, were very poor (Acuña 1981:25–29). In the years to come, the Rangers increasingly were viewed by Mexican Americans as an official expression of hatred against them. The period of relative quiet was brought to an end by political and economic troubles. There was mounting opposition to the repressive regime of the dictator Porfirio Díaz, until he was overthrown by liberal revolutionaries in 1911. The new government was short lived, however; and the following period of conflict kept the border in a state of agitation.

Angered by the diplomatic recognition of the new revolutionary Mexican government by the United States, Francisco “Pancho” Villa began attacking Americans. When Villa crossed the border, raided Columbus, New Mexico, and killed a number of Americans, President Woodrow Wilson sent General John J. “Blackjack” Pershing into Mexico to capture Villa. Pershing searched for Villa for 9 months but returned home empty handed. The years of revolution in Mexico and the border crossings by Villa and Pershing severely damaged the relations between Mexico and the United States. They also fanned the flames of distrust, hatred, and violence that had existed for so long between the Mexican Americans and Anglos. Quite clearly, the period of apparent accommodation between Mexican Americans and Anglos had ended.

The “reversion” to an earlier stage in Park’s race cycle, that of intergroup conflict, is a dramatic illustration of the point that the experience of the Mexican Americans has differed fundamentally from that of the European minorities. The periodic eruption of organized conflict between Mexican Americans and Anglos poses a serious challenge to the central ideas of the assimilationist perspective and suggests that a perspective that includes the colonialist view may be more appropriate for analyzing the incorporation experiences of this group.

A defense of the assimilationist view of the Mexican American experience, however, concerns the question of *when* the analysis actually should begin. Although it is undeniable that the Mexican Americans were in the borderlands for more than three centuries before this territory was annexed by the United States, the critics of colonial theory are more impressed by a series of events that coincided with the peak of the second immigrant stream from Europe. These events laid the groundwork for arguing that the Mexican Americans, though initially Americans through conquest, are nevertheless similar in most essential respects to the Europeans of the second stream. We turn now to the basic ideas of this contention.



The Immigrant Model

How can a comparison of the Mexican Americans to the immigrants of the second stream be valid? The basic argument is this: Although the Mexican Americans occupied the Southwest long before the Anglos, comparatively few of them resided on the Ameri-

can side of the border prior to 1900. For nearly 50 years after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, relatively few Mexican nationals moved to the United States with the intention of becoming permanent residents. An unknown but probably large number of people did move back and forth across the border in search of work. At this time, however, such movements were mainly informal; few records were kept. For one period, in fact, between 1886 and 1893, there are no official records of immigration from Mexico into the United States.

In a way, this is not so strange. The first major federal law restricting immigration was not enacted until 1882. America's policy had been to have an "open door" to the world, to encourage people to move to the United States and share the labors (and rewards) of developing the continent. Even when the attention of the nation did turn to immigration, the main focus of debate was the second immigrant stream and the "yellow peril" from Asia, not people from Mexico. After the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed and later was made permanent, there still was little concern about the immigration of Mexicans. United States policy toward Mexico remained unrestrictive. The border patrol did not begin operations until 1924, and its first efforts to control immigration from Mexico, paradoxically, seem to have been directed primarily against the Chinese (Grebler, Moore, and Guzman 1970:519). Mexicans continued to cross into the United States legally and with ease. For most practical purposes, a Mexican national could enter the United States (at a small fee) simply by obtaining permission at a border station. Still, as had been true since the end of the Mexican-American War, the flow of legal immigrants was only a trickle. Less than 14,000 entrants were counted during the entire last half of the nineteenth century.

Beginning with 1904, however, the number of entrants from Mexico began to rise substantially (see Table 8.1). The rapid expansion and growing scale of the agricultural, mining, transportation, and construction sectors of the southwestern economy required a massive infusion of labor. The official count during this period appears greatly to understate the actual rate at which Mexicans were entering and remaining in the United States. One official report estimated that "at least 50,000 'nonstatistical' aliens" arrived in "normal" years (Gómez-Quíñones 1974:84). Another estimate suggested the figure may have reached 100,000 (Bryan 1972:334). No one can be sure, of course, how many of those who entered in a nonimmigrant status then became permanent residents of the United States; but it seems certain that a great many did.

The sudden sizable flow of immigrants from Mexico during the first decade of the twentieth century was greatly exceeded during the second decade, but a still greater wave of Mexican immigrants came during the 1921-1930 period. During this period, the composition of the Mexican American population was transformed. Before 1900, most Mexican Americans either had been among those conquered in the Mexican-American War or were their descendants. From this standpoint, the Mexican immigrants of the period after 1900 were in many respects the first generation—entering more or less voluntarily—of what has become our nation's largest minority. From this standpoint also, just barely enough time has passed to test the three-generations hypothesis in regard to those who arrived after 1900. The modern Mexican Americans are predominantly either Mexican nationals, who have entered the United States since 1900, or their descendants. From an assimilationist perspective, therefore, the reason they have seemed

TABLE 8.1 Mexican Immigration to the United States, 1820–2000

Years	Number
1820–1830	4,818
1831–1840	6,599
1841–1850	3,271
1851–1860	3,078
1861–1870	2,191
1871–1880	5,162
1881–1890	1,913
1891–1900	971
1901–1910	49,642
1911–1920	219,004
1921–1930	459,287
1931–1940	22,319
1941–1950	60,589
1951–1960	299,811
1961–1970	453,937
1971–1980	640,294
1981–1990	1,655,843
1991–2000	2,249,421
Total	6,138,150

Source: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, 1998, 2001:20–22; U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, 2000, 2002:19–22.

slow to assimilate is that Mexicans are comparatively recent immigrants. They are not, strictly speaking, people who “got here first”; and they have not had as long to adopt the “American way” as those who arrived in the United States before 1900. In short, the immigrant model downgrades the significance for the process of assimilation of the “historical primacy” of the Mexican Americans.

Alvarez (1985) argued that this application of the immigrant model is not valid. Even though, technically, those who have moved from Mexico to the United States since 1900 are “immigrants,” is it reasonable to say that people have emigrated when they move from one side of a politically arbitrary (and mostly imaginary) border into a territory that previously had been a part of their homeland, with which they have maintained continuous contact, and in which their native culture still flourishes? In addition to the similarities between their homes and the U.S. portion of the borderlands, the hardships of immigration were buffered for many Mexicans because they were able to live transna-

tional lives. Many people lived and worked in the United States part of the year and returned to Mexico the rest of the year. Others crossed the border regularly to work.

Alvarez (1985) presented two main reasons to consider that it is more accurate to say the people in this movement were migrants rather than immigrants. First, it is hard to believe, he maintained, that the psychological impact of moving across the U.S.-Mexican border would be similar to that of leaving Europe for America. In most instances, the European immigrants realized that they were leaving the Old Country for a long time, possibly for good, that they would arrive in a very different and strange land, and that their children would grow up under quite new social conditions. Can the same things be said of the Mexican "immigrants"? Alvarez argued that there is little reason to suppose that most of those who participated in the "immigration" from Mexico during the early part of the twentieth century thought of themselves as moving irrevocably from an old, familiar environment into a new and alien one. Mexico and the United States are physically continuous and culturally overlapping countries. Urbanization and industrialization brought many Mexicans into Southwestern cities, such as San Antonio, Houston, El Paso, and Los Angeles, where the migrants established large ethnic *barrios*. Even at considerable distances from the border, Spanish has continued to be the primary language spoken by many Mexican Americans and numerous Spanish words and terms have found their way into the vocabularies of the Anglo Americans. In short, the presence of these familiar cultural elements almost surely has served further to modify the Mexican's "immigration" experience. It seems unlikely that they have felt unalterably separated from their native land, as have so many other immigrants. Rather it seems more likely that Mexicans have felt right at home in the Southwest and have not felt, or could more easily resist, the usual pressure that is placed on immigrants to become "Americans."⁸

A second reason offered by Alvarez for regarding those who moved from Mexico to the United States after 1900 to be simply migrants rather than immigrants stems directly from the colonial model itself. Whatever may be concluded concerning the attitudes and reactions of the post-1900 Mexican newcomers, the relationship of this group to the host society was still strongly influenced by the fact that the Creation Generation were a conquered people in their own land. Even if we assume that the Mexicans who came to the United States after 1900 did regard the change as large and permanent, and even if they did feel that they were foreigners in the United States, they still could not assume the "normal" status of immigrants. The host society did not distinguish between the "colonized" Mexicans and the "immigrant" Mexicans. The latter group could not function as immigrants because they were forced into the same kinds of jobs, housing, and subservience as the former. As Alvarez (1985:43) stated, "Socio-psychologically, the migrants, too, were a conquered people." From this perspective, Mexicans who came to the United States as part of the "Migrant Generation"—and even those who have come since 1930—merely joined the ranks of the existing colonized Mexican American minority (Alvarez 1985:39). From this standpoint, the similarities between Mexican "immigration" and European immigration are superficial.

Our comparison of the colonial and immigrant models shows that each emphasizes different aspects of the history of Anglo and Mexican American relations. Many of the most important facts are not in question. It is true, as is stressed in the colonial account, that (1) the Mexicans occupied the borderlands hundreds of years before the

Anglo Americans arrived and, thus, may claim historical primacy; (2) the Anglo Americans, through the annexation of Texas and the Mexican-American War, forced Mexico to cede the Spanish Southwest; (3) the relations between the Mexican Americans and Anglos in the borderlands have been filled with more tension and conflict than usually has been the case for immigrant minorities; and (4) the processes of assimilation have not produced as much change among the Mexican Americans as one would expect to occur in an immigrant population during a period of over 150 years. But it also is true that the great majority of the Mexican American population is comprised of people who have entered the United States from Mexico since 1900 and their descendants. It may be possible, therefore, if one starts the analysis with the Migrant Generation of the early 1900s rather than with the Creation Generation of 1848, that the processes of assimilation may be operating among the Mexican Americans in a fairly "normal" way. To help evaluate these clashing interpretations, let us review some of the main features of the Mexican American experience since 1900.



Mexican Immigration and Native Reaction

We have seen that a combination of social turmoil in Mexico and economic opportunities in the United States led to a sharp rise in Mexican immigration during the first decade of the twentieth century.⁹ The Mexicans' opportunities for work, as already stated, were mainly in the hard, dirty, and poorly paid jobs in railroading, mining, and agriculture. The work conditions experienced by large numbers of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in these three industries during the early portions of the twentieth century had a lasting effect on the Mexican American community. Railroad work, which was the main kind at first, helped to take significant numbers of Mexicans out of the Southwest into other parts of the United States. In many instances, railroad crews completed their jobs far from the border area and were forced to accept other jobs wherever they happened to be. Many Mexican American communities outside the Southwest started in this way (Gómez-Quíñones 1974:88; Kerr 1977:294).

The movement of Mexican labor into agricultural work was stimulated by America's entry into World War I. In California, the demand for workers in the citrus, melon, tomato, and other industries increased sharply, encouraging Mexicans to come across the border to perform these necessary tasks. The other southwestern states were similarly affected. Workers were needed in Texas to tend the cotton, spinach, and onion crops and in Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado to raise vegetables, forage crops, and sugar beets (Reisler 1976:77-100). From the beginning, these forms of labor were "seasonal, migratory, and on a contract basis" (Gómez-Quíñones 1974:89). To meet this increased demand for "stoop" labor, the Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization approved, in 1917, some special regulations to permit Mexican farm workers to enter the United States in large numbers. Although the regulations soon were modified to permit temporary workers from Mexico also to fill jobs in railroad maintenance and mining, the "inva-

sion" of agricultural work by both temporary and permanent immigrants from Mexico was the most prominent result.¹⁰ The events of this period stamped into the public's mind a stereotype of the Mexicans and Mexican Americans as agricultural workers.

As noted previously, the increasingly large migration of Mexicans to the United States during this time was not a topic of general concern or debate. Even though the Mexican migration reached its peak in 1924—the same year in which the Immigration Act established the quota restrictions on European immigration and excluded the Japanese—the open-door policy remained in effect for Mexicans. The new law, in fact, contained provisions that made it possible for a Mexican immigrant to work on the American side of the border during the day but to stay at his or her residence in Mexico during the night (Moore 1976:48). Moreover, as the open door began to close on people of many other nationalities, cheap labor from Mexico became even more attractive to employers in the United States; consequently, Mexican immigration jumped sharply during the 1920s both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the total of all immigration to this country (Grebler, Moore, and Guzman 1970:64).

The mutual attraction of Mexican labor and American employers, however, began to subside shortly after the immigration restrictions on other nationalities went into effect. Both because the Mexican immigration became so large and the agricultural sector of the American economy went into a downturn, Mexican immigration now became a subject of national controversy. Predictably, the demand arose to extend the quota system established in 1924 to cover Mexicans. To support this demand, some of the restrictionists used racist stereotypes to support their claims that the Mexicans were socially undesirable. A Texas congressman referred to them as "illiterate, unclean, peonized masses" who are a "mixture of Mediterranean-blooded Spanish peasants with low grade Indians" (Moore and Pachon 1985:136). As things developed, however, no extension of the restrictive legislation was needed.

The flow of Mexican immigration was dampened in the late 1920s when the United States discontinued the practice of issuing permanent visas at the border stations and instead now required applicants to file at an American consulate.¹¹ Under these circumstances, many people preferred to cross the border illegally to avoid the cost of waiting at the border, as well as the possibility that they would not be admitted. Of course, once these undocumented people reached the United States, they were fugitives and were in no position to insist on ethical treatment or to stand upon legal rights. As a result, they frequently fell prey to the unscrupulous and discriminatory acts of labor contractors, employers, and underworld businesses. The life of the migratory or contract laborers also became harsher because they often were regarded with special hostility and suspicion by Mexican Americans as well as Anglo Americans, who feared that the uncontrolled entrance of Mexican laborers to the United States would depress working conditions.

The Great Depression

Although Mexican immigration appeared to be tapering off in the face of these control measures, a dramatic reduction in the flow followed the great financial crisis of 1929. The immediate and primary cause of this decline, of course, was the sharp reduction in

employment opportunities. The prospects were so unattractive, indeed, that the Mexican immigration of 1931 fell below 4,000 for the first time since 1907. The annual number of new arrivals fell even further in the subsequent years of the 1930s and did not begin to recover noticeably until the beginning of World War II.

In addition to the fact that the Great Depression made the United States a less attractive destination for migrants, there was another development of special importance. Many groups and officials within the United States sought to decrease unemployment and the costs of government welfare by deporting Mexican aliens (Hoffman 1974). Some aliens, as in the previous periods, had returned voluntarily to Mexico when their jobs dried up, but many had not; and the border patrol increased its efforts to locate and deport people who had become public charges or were in the United States illegally. At the same time, the authorities in many American cities found that it was much less expensive to pay the transportation and other costs of sending people to Mexico than it was to maintain them on welfare rolls.¹² These combined national and local efforts to save money by "sending the Mexicans home" were in some ways a preview of the evacuation of the Japanese and Japanese Americans. As in the case of the later "roundup" of the Japanese, little attention was paid either to the preferences of the evacuees or to their legal status (Moore and Pachon 1985:137). Mexicans who were naturalized citizens frequently were deported along with Mexican nationals. Many native Americans of Mexican ancestry were scrutinized closely and were intimidated by the prospect of "repatriation." In some cases, families were broken apart when the Mexican father was sent "home," while his American-born children remained behind.

The entire repatriation program emphasized to the Mexican American community just how vulnerable they were to the actions, sometimes whimsical, of government officials. In some instances, the deportations spread panic within the *barrios*. People became afraid that if they applied for relief they would be sent to Mexico. As a result, it is quite possible that many people who were eligible for relief did not apply. McWilliams (1972:386) indicated that more than 200,000 Mexicans left the United States during a 12-month period of 1931–1932 alone, while Grebler, Moore, and Guzman (1970:526) stated that the Mexican-born population of the United States declined during the 1930s from 639,000 to around 377,000. More important, though, than the sheer number of deportations is that American citizens of Mexican heritage were shown dramatically that they were not necessarily considered to be full-fledged citizens. As long as there was a shortage of cheap labor, the "Mexicans" were welcomed and praised as cooperative, uncomplaining workers; but when economic times were bad, American officials wanted the "Mexicans" to go "home."

The Bracero Program

World War II created a manpower emergency in the United States, leading the American and Mexican governments to negotiate a "guest worker" program for farm laborers to enter the United States. Despite Mexico's insistence on stringent protections for the workers—such as free transportation and food; guarantees concerning wages, working conditions, and housing; and the right of Mexican officials to make inspections and to

investigate workers' complaints—many problems arose. For instance, U.S. growers and ranchers found they could save time and money by hiring undocumented workers rather than *braceros*, and many Mexican workers also found it to be more convenient to be undocumented workers. As a result, the undocumented workers and *braceros* were often receiving different wages and benefits while working together in the same fields (Grebler, Moore, and Guzman 1970:67). This situation led the border patrol to increase its efforts to locate, arrest, and deport undocumented workers, culminating during 1954–1955 in a highly publicized roundup called "Operation Wetback" (Reimers 1985:56). Such actions by officers in the United States created frictions between the Mexican and U.S. governments.

Another important feature of the *Bracero Program* was that it gave the Mexican government a firm basis on which to protest acts of discrimination against Mexican Americans as well as against *braceros*. For example, because the practice of establishing segregated "Mexican" schools existed throughout the state of Texas, the Mexican government issued a formal protest against this practice. Other incidents of discrimination also aroused the anger of Mexican officials. One of these occurred when Sergeant Macario Garcia, a winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor, ordered a cup of coffee in a cafe in Sugar Land, Texas, and was refused service. A fight developed, and Sergeant Garcia was arrested on a charge of aggravated assault (McWilliams 1973:261). In another incident, a Mexican American PTA group in Melvin, Texas, was refused a permit to use a community center building. These and many other cases of overt or probable discrimination against Mexican Americans, as well as Mexicans, led the Mexican government in 1943 to halt the *Bracero Program* in Texas. This action led Governor Coke Stevenson of Texas to make a goodwill tour of Mexico, to proclaim a good neighbor policy for Texas, and to appoint a Good Neighbor Commission (McWilliams 1973:270). But these efforts, as well as some others on the local level, failed to satisfy the Mexican government, and the *Bracero Program* was not resumed in Texas during World War II.

The Zoot-Suit Riots

The problem of discrimination against Mexican Americans during World War II was by no means restricted to Texas. Certain events that took place in the Los Angeles, California, area during this period were at least equally alarming and may have had a more lasting effect on the relations of Anglos and Mexican Americans. At about the same time the Japanese were being evacuated and interned, the Zoot-Suit Riots were given wide publicity in the Los Angeles newspapers. According to Mazon (1984:1), the Zoot-Suit Riots, which occurred June 3–13, 1943, "were not about zoot-suiters rioting, and they were not, in any conventional sense of the word, 'riots.' No one was killed. No one sustained massive injuries. Property damage was slight." These disorders may be described as a series of mob attacks by off-duty policemen, U.S. sailors, and other servicemen directed mainly at Mexican Americans who called themselves *pachucos* and wore zoot suits. The zoot-suit look included pants with full trousers and a waist extended high to the chest, a broad-shouldered jacket, long ducktail haircuts, and pointed shoes. Probably of greater importance though, the zoot suits flaunted the distinctiveness of being Mexican American,

pride in the Mexican heritage, and resentment of the racism of the dominant group (Romo 1983:166). The zoot suit was an international phenomenon worn by street traders in London and associated with American gangsters. This dress style gained notoriety among fad-conscious adolescents and was popularized in Harlem among Blacks. The Mexican American zoot-suiters, alien to both Mexican and American cultures and fluent in neither Spanish nor English, were the antithesis of the servicemen and were met with anger and shock by the dominant society.

The summers of 1942 and 1943 witnessed two particularly notable events involving zoot-suiters. The first of these centered on the mysterious death of a young Mexican American, José Díaz, following a fight between two rival gangs near an East Los Angeles swimming hole. The press coverage of this event was described by McWilliams (1973:229) as "an enormous web of melodramatic fancy." The gravel pit near which the gang fight occurred was referred to as "The Sleepy Lagoon," and the newspapers emphasized that the case involved Mexican Americans. Twenty-two young men of a 38th-Street gang were arrested and charged with conspiracy to commit murder. Following a trial, called the Sleepy Lagoon Trial, that lasted several months, three of these young men were convicted of first-degree murder, nine were convicted of second-degree murder, five were convicted of lesser offenses, and five were acquitted (Romo 1983:166). The convictions were appealed by an organization of East Los Angeles citizens on the grounds that the trial had been conducted in a biased and improper way, in an atmosphere of sensationalism. The prosecution had played on the fact that the defendants were of Mexican heritage, had ducktail haircuts, and wore zoot suits. These improper tactics were criticized by the appeals court, which overturned the lower court's decision. After nearly 2 years of imprisonment, the defendants were released "for lack of evidence" (McWilliams 1973:231). Although this outcome was viewed as a great victory for justice and the Mexican American community, the fact still remains that 17 young men served prison sentences for a crime they were not proven to have committed. Their crime, it seems, was that they were Mexican Americans.

The Sleepy Lagoon Trial, conducted as it was during the period of the Japanese internment and with generous press coverage, strengthened the impression held by many people that the Mexican Americans were "just naturally" criminals. The supposed natural link between Mexicanness and criminality seemed to receive official support shortly after the arrest of the Sleepy Lagoon defendants. Captain E. D. Ayres of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Office presented to the grand jury a report of the results of his investigation of what was considered to be the "problem of Mexican delinquency." Captain Ayres's suppositions, conclusions, and chain of reasoning sounded much like those presented by General DeWitt to justify the wartime treatment of the Japanese. In Captain Ayres's view, those of Mexican ancestry are more likely to engage in violent crimes than Anglos because such behavior is an "inborn characteristic." Anglo youths, said Captain Ayres, may use their fists or kick when they fight, but the "Mexican element" feels "a desire to use a knife or some lethal weapon . . . his desire is to kill, or at least let blood" (McWilliams 1973:234). Such opinions, presented by a police official during these tense days, could hardly have increased the dominant group's understanding of the underlying causes of the behavior of the *pachucos*. The answer lay in an entirely different direction. As noted by Sanchez (1972:410), the *pachuco* movement grew not out of the violent nature of the

Spanish-speaking people but from the discriminatory social and economic situation in which the Mexican Americans lived. Nevertheless, the stereotype of the naturally violent *pachuco* gangster was apparently widely believed.

The publicity surrounding the Sleepy Lagoon Trial, the presentation of the Ayres Report, and numerous contacts between the police and *pachuco* fighting gangs prepared the way for the Zoot-Suit Riots (Mazon 1984). Mexican youths wearing zoot suits had gradually come to represent for many members of the dominant group an open defiance of constituted authority, and the zoot suit itself became a symbol of moral degradation; consequently, those who wore them appeared to many to be enemies of the state who needed to be "taught a lesson."

There had been some intermittent fighting during this time between the "zooters" and sailors and marines who were stationed near the East Los Angeles *barrio*. The servicemen considered the *pachucos* to be draft dodgers, and the Mexican Americans resented the servicemen's frequent visits to their neighborhood (Romo 1983:167). Widespread violence between the servicemen and the "zooters" began when a group of sailors was beaten up, allegedly by a gang of Mexican Americans, while they were walking through the *barrio* area. On the following night, about 200 sailors "invaded" East Los Angeles in a caravan of some 20 taxicabs. On their way, they stopped several times to beat severely at least four Mexican American youths wearing zoot suits. In the following days, the local newspapers featured reports concerning violence (and threats of violence) between servicemen and "zooters." By June 7, the numbers of people engaged in the disorders had swelled into the thousands. Throughout all of this, the Los Angeles Police Department reportedly took few steps to curb the activities of the servicemen and, for the most part, seemed to avoid the areas in which violence was occurring until after the conflict was over. In some cases, the police simply followed along behind the servicemen to arrest the Mexican Americans who had been attacked! The disorders were not brought under control until the military authorities intervened. Servicemen were ordered to stay out of downtown Los Angeles and the *barrio*, and the order was enforced by the shore patrol and military police.¹³

There can be little doubt that many members of the Anglo American group subscribed to the theory of innate criminality among Mexican Americans and more or less openly approved of the efforts of the servicemen to "clean out" the "zooters." It seems clear, too, that the zoot suit itself became a hated symbol of Mexican American solidarity and defiance. In a large number of instances, the servicemen stripped the suits from their victims and ripped them apart. An official view of all this was illustrated dramatically when the Los Angeles City Council declared that it was a misdemeanor to wear a zoot suit (McWilliams 1973:245-250).

The repercussions of the Sleepy Lagoon Trial and the Zoot-Suit Riots were felt throughout the United States as well as abroad. The disorders were headline news in newspapers all over the United States. Zoot-suit and other race-related conflicts broke out in several other cities across the United States following the Los Angeles disorders. And just as the incidents of discrimination against Mexican Americans in Texas had led the government of Mexico to end the *Bracero Program*, the ambassador from Mexico asked for an official explanation of the Zoot-Suit Riots. The explanation—that there was no prejudice or discrimination against people of Mexican ancestry—was hardly

convincing. The war effort of the United States had been damaged; the allies of the United States had been given yet another reason to wonder about the strength of this country's commitment to racial and ethnic equality; and the enemies of the United States had been given a powerful weapon of propaganda that they did not hesitate to employ.

The Mexican American Civil Rights Movement

During all this time, Mexican American youths (and even some noncitizen aliens) were subject to the wartime military draft in the United States (Scott 1974:134). Considering the level of discrimination against these young men at the time, they seemed more eager to serve and fight for the United States than might have been expected. As in the case of The Nisei, the displacements and humiliations experienced by the Mexican Americans during the early war years appeared generally to heighten their desire to prove their loyalty and worth rather than the reverse. As a result, a disproportionately high number of Mexican Americans served in the armed forces. They also comprised a disproportionately high share of the casualty lists and were frequently cited for their outstanding fighting qualities and contributions to the war effort. The first Congressional Medal of Honor awarded to a drafted enlisted man during World War II went to José P. Martinez of Los Angeles. Altogether, 39 Mexican Americans received the Congressional Medal of Honor (Scott 1974:140). Although in the early days of the war Mexican American servicemen frequently had been shunned or harassed by other servicemen as disloyal, undisciplined *pachucos*, their valor earned them acceptance on equal terms.

On this basis, Mexican Americans fully expected their position in civilian life after the war to be far better than it had been before the war. Their return to civilian life, however, was marked by bitter disappointment. They found mainly that the prejudices and the various forms of discrimination they had encountered before the war remained. They still might be refused service in a restaurant, they still had difficulty obtaining work outside of the occupations that traditionally had been assigned to them, and they still saw that the young people of *La Raza* typically attended segregated schools (Scott 1974:141). The reality of the continuation of prejudice and discrimination against them came as a severe shock to many returning veterans. Despite their loyal and costly services to the country, they remained second-class citizens. This discovery jolted not only the Mexican American veterans but their friends and families as well. Since the entire Mexican American community was affected, an increased awareness of their collective problem as a minority group was stimulated. Hence, in the period since World War II—and especially the 1960s—Mexican Americans launched a distinct phase of the civil rights movement. This movement was marked by a sharp increase in organized political and protest activities by Mexican Americans in all of the main sectors of American life.

For roughly 75 years after the end of the war between Mexico and the United States, Mexican Americans in the Southwest contended with segregation in the public

schools; segregation and discrimination in public facilities such as restaurants, movie theaters, swimming pools, and barbershops; primary election procedures that prevented them from exercising their right to vote; and discrimination in housing. They also suffered discrimination in the administration of justice that prevented them from serving on juries and treated violence against them as so common as to pass almost unnoticed (Garcia 1989:27). Mexicans had long protested discrimination in the United States through mutual-aid societies and the Mexican consulates, but a growing middle class of Mexican Americans began to think about integration into the American political system. The most famous and successful organization of Mexican Americans—the League of United Latin-American Citizens (LULAC)—was formed in 1929. LULAC emphasized both assimilation and the elimination of discrimination. Its leaders felt it was the duty of Mexican Americans to develop “true and loyal” citizens of the United States (Cuéllar 1970:143; Garcia 1989:30; Marquez 1987). LULAC members reaffirmed the need to maintain bilingualism, but voted English as the organization’s official language and to exclude Mexican nationals. We should not be surprised to learn, however, that even with these principles and the presumably uncontroversial goal of developing “the best, purest and most perfect type of a true and loyal citizen of the United States of America” (Garcia 1989:31), LULAC aroused the fear in some Anglo Americans that the “Mexicans” were forgetting “their place.”

The years of World War II brought significant changes in the Mexican American community. In the first place, as noted earlier, a large number of Mexican Americans served in the armed forces. This experience permitted them to work side by side with Americans from different regions of the country and from different socioeconomic origins. In the process, they learned a great deal about the opportunities and privileges that most American citizens took for granted. These veterans felt “completely American.” As such, they were unwilling to think of themselves as “Mexican” or to accept the inferior status generally accorded Mexicans. As expressed by Alvarez (1985:44), they were more likely to argue, “I am an ‘American’ who happens to be of Mexican descent. I am going to participate fully in this society because, like descendants of people from so many other lands, I was born here.” In short, they accepted the immigrant model.

The war years did more than solidify the servicemen’s acceptance of American identity, however. The events of the war accelerated the movement of Mexican Americans into the cities. As a result, this traditionally rural population was brought into a more extensive and intimate contact with the Anglo Americans. Large numbers of these migrants were exposed to even more overt forms of discrimination than they had learned was customary—for example, the Zoot-Suit Riots. They learned in this way that the opportunities of the city, attractive though they were in many cases, were nonetheless severely limited for “Mexicans.”

The combination of continued, and even increased, discrimination against Mexican Americans on the home front and the new expectations of the returning servicemen set the stage for the emergence of some new, more aggressive, political and social organizations following the war. In the immediate postwar years, one such organization, the Community Service Organization (CSO), was formed in California; another, the G.I. Forum, was formed in Texas. Both of these groups have sought to represent the interests of Mexican Americans on a wide social, economic, and political front (Allsup 1982). As

the decade of the 1950s drew to a close, however, some Mexican Americans came to feel that organizations like LULAC, CSO, and the G.I. Forum were not pressing vigorously enough for equal rights. They thought, too, that the established organizations were not pursuing the correct strategy in the political arena. For these reasons, the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA), the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), and the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations (PASO) were formed with the intention of putting direct pressure on the major political parties, including the nomination or appointment of their members to public office. A spectacular example of the success of this approach may be seen in the election of Mexican Americans to various offices in Crystal City, Texas.¹⁴ These separate efforts were thought of as part of a larger movement, *La Causa* (Valdez 1982:271).

Another organization, The United Farm Workers Union (UFW), organized in California in 1962 by César Chavez and Dolores Huerta, was instrumental in publicizing the plight of Mexican Americans to a national public. Originally begun as an effort to gain collective bargaining rights and union recognition for Mexican American and Filipino farmworkers in California, the movement used nonviolent tactics and "emotionally charged ethnic symbols" such as a stylized black Aztec eagle flag and images of the Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe to attract members and publicity (Gutiérrez 1995:196). The UFW protested the use of undocumented Mexican workers to break strikes by American citizens and urged the repeal of the *Bracero Program*. This stand against immigration was criticized by other Chicano and Mexican American groups, and by the mid-1970s the UFW and other Mexican American organizations expressed solidarity on the immigration controversy arguing that many Mexican Americans would not be in the United States "if their fathers had not been illegal aliens" (Gutiérrez 1995:199). Many of the more conservative Mexican American organizations and the Chicano advocates became more united in the late 1970s as they focused on policies to regulate immigration. The groups feared that the negative feelings toward Mexican immigration would once again "open the door to discrimination against anyone who looked Latino" (Gutiérrez 1995:195).

In the late 1960s, Mexican American organizations turned to litigation as an instrument for political mobilization and incorporation. The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), established in 1967 by two attorneys, Pete Tijerina and Gregory Luna, with the help of the African American civil rights organizations and funding from the Ford Foundation, initiated an organized legal attack against the continued segregation of Mexican American students in schools. A series of cases were filed in the late 1960s and the 1970s demanding the desegregation of schools in the Texas cities of Houston, Dallas, El Paso, Del Rio, and New Braunfels, and in Portales, New Mexico, and Denver, Colorado. MALDEF also extended provisions of the Voting Rights Acts of 1965 and 1970 to the Mexican American community by challenging the political practice of using multimember voting districts that denied Mexican Americans representation in city and county elections in Texas and California. The *United States v. Texas Bilingual* case initiated by MALDEF in 1981 made Texas school districts implement bilingual programs and required the state to enforce the decision and evaluate the programs. In 1982 MALDEF won the *Phyllis v. Doe* case in the U.S. Supreme Court, a decision that determined it was unconstitutional for school districts to deny a free public education to undocumented immigrant children. Extending the struggle for improved educational

opportunities, MALDEF filed the *Edgewood v. Kirby* case in 1984 that, when it was finally won in 1991, reformed the Texas school finance system by making the distribution of money for schools more equitable. The *Edgewood* case moved more money toward school districts with a poor tax base and high concentrations of Mexican American youth. In 1992, MALDEF won the *LULAC v. Richards* case that declared the system of financing higher education in Texas unconstitutional. Although the decision was reversed by the Texas Supreme Court in 1993, the case resulted in changes in the ways all universities and professional schools were funded in Texas and doubled the budgets for universities serving geographic areas with high concentrations of Mexican American students. The efforts of MALDEF and other community-based organizations to serve as advocates for Mexican American interests, train leaders, and register voters helped reduce structural barriers to assimilation. At the same time, these struggles heightened the consciousness of Mexican Americans regarding their ethnic identity and sense of community.

The Post-Chicano Era

As many of the Chicano activists have moved into the middle class, the push for cultural nationalism has largely subsided, although there continues to be strong advocacy for structural assimilation (Richardson 1999). Richardson conducted a large study of the border area in Texas and found strong evidence of both pluralism and cultural assimilation among Mexican Americans in South Texas. In the "post-Chicano era" social behavior and attitudes were closely related to social class. For example, wealthy Mexican immigrants were much less likely to report prejudice and discrimination from Anglos than were lower-income Mexicans. Although many Mexican immigrants reported some difficulties with Mexican Americans, they felt more acceptance and less prejudice from them than from Anglos. Young people found the lifestyle of the United States appealing, but proximity to Mexico and the constant contact with Mexico, Mexican immigrants, and Mexican shoppers were counterpressures to maintain elements of Mexican culture. Many Anglos and Mexican Americans in South Texas had no problems with a mixed identity; Mexican Americans especially felt a strong cultural loyalty to the United States but maintained a cultural identity that was neither Mexican nor Anglo. Richardson called South Texas a "stirring pot" (Richardson 1999:244), an area in which many diverse groups give, take, and create new culture; they participate in a central culture, but retain basic elements of their own. Anglos, Blacks, Mexican Americans, and Mexicans recognized the importance of learning both English and Spanish. Richardson concluded that the Anglo culture was enriched, not destroyed by this pluralism. The younger generations knew little about the historical border conflicts and segregation, looked past the discrimination, and participated in the many cultures present in the area.

We may summarize by saying that the prominent early Mexican American organizations moved gingerly into the political arena. They took great pains to reassure Anglo Americans that they only wanted to make Mexican Americans into "better" (i.e., more Anglicized) citizens. As time passed, different organizations formed for the purpose of placing greater pressure on the dominant society to gain more equal treatment. In this way, a renewed emphasis on cultural nationalism emerged as a central feature of the Mexican

American movement beginning in the 1960s. The increased immigration from Mexico in the 1980s and 1990s, which has resulted in intergenerational experiences among recent Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans, and the cultural and structural assimilation that has occurred for many Mexican Americans have brought into sharp relief many of the issues that are of greatest interest to us here. We will consider the usefulness of the colonial and immigrant models as we continue to explore the issues of assimilation as applied to the experiences of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chapter 9.



Reality Check

INTERVIEW WITH EDDIE

Eddie was born in El Paso, Texas, and grew up in the small town of Canyon, Texas. His grandparents did not complete elementary school. Both parents dropped out of high school. His grandfather participated in the *Bracero Program*. Eddie is a college freshman considering a social work major.

How do you refer to yourself in terms of racial or ethnic identity?

It depends on the situation. Most times I'll say "Hispanic," "Latino," "Mexican American," or "Mexican." When I first meet somebody, I don't want to go into a huge explanation about how I identify myself because that would probably just turn people off. I don't have a problem with any of those terms but it's hard to find one. With "Mexican American" or "Mexican" I feel like I'm in-between. In terms of recognizing my Mexican background it's hard to find a term that fits me. "Latino" really acknowledges the Latin American influence but there are so many Latin American backgrounds. Some say, "Well, how about Hispanic"? But "Hispanic" seems more Americanized. I'm a first-generation American citizen. My mother comes from Mexico and Spanish is my first language, but I grew up here, so my experiences are different from Mexican Americans who lived here for generations. Some things I can relate with the Mexican culture more, other things it's the Mexican American culture. Some people try to be more politically correct so they don't say "Mexican."

What stands out as most important to you about your racial/ethnic group?

The thing that stands out is the struggle we went through to get to where I am. I feel that getting where I am now is my greatest accomplishment. I look at all the things my mother has been through. They couldn't put food on the table, that's why they came over here. That instinct to survive and to be successful is the main thing I get from my background because there are a lot of people, Mexicans and Mexican American, who are really just trying to make it. That's the thing that makes me the proudest of my background.

When did you first become aware of racial and ethnic differences?

The first time I became aware on a surface level was when I was in elementary school. It was a predominantly White school, and some of the kids were calling me "Mexican, Mexican" and I didn't even know what they meant. I went crying to my mom. I guess that would be the first time I became aware of it. I was just like, "Oh, okay, I guess I'm Mexican" and that was it.

Have you ever experienced any uncomfortable situations dealing with racial/ethnic relations?

When I got older, in high school, I commented to my mom about things I saw. Mostly just sharing bad experiences. In college, there was a guy who lived in my dorm who had a confederate flag, a KKK mask, and a rope hanging on his wall. This past year, I went out with people from my dorm, and we passed a police officer. A girl commented that because I was in the car, we were going to get pulled over and stopped by cops. And there are uncomfortable situations when people try to be funny. When it comes to racial or societal jokes based on socioeconomic status, I don't think they're funny.

Tell me about your friends.

The majority of my friends are not from my background. I have African American, Indian, and Asian friends, just a variety from different backgrounds. It's beneficial because I've learned about different cultures and groups. I've noticed things I can relate to in different cultures.

Is it acceptable to marry someone outside of your ethnic racial group?

It is definitely acceptable, but I don't know if that is what I want. I would prefer to marry someone of my background, not necessarily someone who is Mexican but someone from a similar background. I experienced the Mexican culture growing up so I want my kids to have the same thing. I don't want to ignore any race, I just want my children to be able to have the same culture I had. I want them to speak Spanish. I want them to go to Mexico. I want them to identify with my grandparents.

Did you begin school speaking a language other than English?

I spoke Spanish as my first language because my mother didn't speak English. When I started school, I learned English. I wanted to have blond hair and blue eyes. During that time my mom remarried and her husband was Caucasian and it made it difficult to speak Spanish around the house. I started speaking Spanish again in high school and didn't learn to read or write Spanish until then. That's basically all I speak with my mom. I have family who don't speak English so I speak Spanish to them. Some Latinos don't know Spanish that well and some don't speak it at all, so I don't speak Spanish much on campus. I speak Spanish with the food service and gardening staff.

(continued)

Tell me about your high school.

There were about 800 people in my high school. The graduating class was 90 percent White. There were maybe two Latinos in my class, so it was really hard to segregate. There were just so many White students, you just got used to it. In high school I was definitely in the minority. I had a hard time identifying. I isolated myself in a way, like going into a shell inside of me. I withdrew from everyone else.

What experiences have you had with racial and ethnic relations on campus?

The majority of the bad experiences have had to do with socioeconomic background. The majority of the people in college are from a higher socioeconomic background than I am. Often I hear something and it bothers me. Sometimes I interject. It often has to do with socioeconomics rather than race. For example, people refer to things as being "ghetto." If something isn't done right they will say, "That's ghetto." If a car doesn't look nice, they'll say, "That's ghetto." They look down on anything that is associated with low socioeconomic status. I don't feel that it should be that way. The other night we were with a group. They left a six-dollar tip minimum and I don't just have money to give out. They'll look at me like "You're so cheap." To me it's being economical. In that group it's like you're a cheapskate and it carries a bad connotation.



Discussion Questions

Why does Eddie consider himself "in-between" Mexican and Mexican American?

In what ways has Eddie maintained his ethnic cultural identity?

How has social class affected Eddie's experiences?

Is the prejudice/discrimination Eddie has experienced a result of his ethnicity or his poverty?

Is Eddie being too sensitive about his college classmates' joking and behavior? Why or why not?

Is Eddie likely to marry someone outside of his ethnic group?

How important is it to Eddie and other Mexican Americans that their culture be strengthened and developed?

To what extent are the processes of assimilation affecting the distinctiveness and solidarity of the Mexicans and Mexican Americans?

 Key Ideas

1. The relations between Mexican Americans and Anglos represent a second kind of intergroup contact. Like American Indians and African Americans, Mexican Americans originally became part of the United States through force rather than through voluntary immigration.
2. The Spanish approach to colonization differed from that of the English. A key difference was that the Spanish included the Indians in the developing colonial society, whereas the English excluded them. As a result, the Indians of Mexico have moved much further toward full assimilation than have the Indians of the United States.
3. The Mexican American group emerged out of a long series of conflicts between the United States and Spain and between the United States and Mexico. Although the Texas revolution was not based on ethnic differences, the ethnic cleavage gradually deepened following Texas's independence. The Mexican American group emerged as a distinct minority group at the end of the Mexican-American War.
4. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo did not end hostilities between the Mexican Americans and Anglos in the borderlands. Continuous struggle, marked by intermittent open conflict, was a conspicuous element of border life well into the twentieth century.
5. Although the Mexican American group was created when the United States forcibly occupied the southwestern and western lands previously owned by Mexico, most of the present members of the group are not the descendants of that "Creation Generation." The Mexican American population of the United States has grown overwhelmingly through immigration from Mexico since the beginning of the twentieth century.
6. Since Mexican immigration reached its peak later than the peak of the second immigrant stream, many social analysts think of the Mexican Americans as having begun their stay in America near the end of that stream. The apparent slowness of the group to assimilate, therefore, may be due to the comparatively recent arrival of large numbers of immigrants in the United States.
7. Opponents of the immigrant model propose that Mexicans who move to the United States are better thought of as migrants rather than immigrants. From this viewpoint, the movement of Mexicans across an arbitrary political boundary into an area that is both geographically and culturally similar to their homeland is not to be compared to movements of Europeans across oceans into a country with a much different culture. Moreover, when Mexican nationals have reached the United States, the members of the dominant group typically have greeted them with even higher levels of prejudice and discrimination than usually have been directed toward European immigrants.
8. Three widely publicized examples of dominant-group discrimination against Mexican Americans are the repatriations of the 1930s, the "Zoot-Suit Race Riots" in the

1940s, and "Operation Wetback" in the 1950s. In each of these cases, some officials of the dominant group demonstrated that they made no real distinction between Mexican American citizens and Mexican nationals. They also revealed their belief that all people of Mexican ancestry were innately inferior. Many Mexican American citizens were illegally punished through deportation, intimidation, and physical assault.

9. The *Bracero Program* illustrates how the relations of the dominant group in America to its minorities may be altered by international events.
10. World War II and the Mexican Americans' active participation in it increased the group's commitment to full rights as American citizens and led many of its members to expect a sharp decline in prejudice and discrimination following the war. When the expected changes did not occur, the Mexican Americans demanded their civil rights. Those demands have been expressed in a higher degree of formal social and political organization, legal actions, and a sharp increase in interest in the goals of cultural pluralism.



Key Terms

barrios Ethnic communities with large concentrations of Spanish-speaking residents. In the southwest region of the United States these residents are usually Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants.

borderlands The region, originally a part of Mexico, that stretches inland from the U.S.-Mexico border to include the southwestern United States.

Bracero Program An agreement between the U.S. government and the Mexican government to allow Mexican agricultural laborers to work in the United States.

braceros Mexican agricultural workers who came to the United States as part of the *Bracero Program*.

Cortina Wars A series of border raids led by Juan Cortina, a Mexican leader. These raids heightened antagonisms between the United States and Mexico.

Creation Generation The original Mexican population who became U.S. citizens as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

La Raza A term used to refer to the Mexican American ethnic group.

mestizos The mixture resulting from intermarriage of indigenous Mexican Indians and the Spanish.

Migrant Generation The group of Mexicans who came to the United States between 1900 and 1930.

pachucos Another term used to refer to the zoot-suiters, often associated with gang-related youth and youth rebellion against both Mexican and American cultures.

repatriation The practice of rounding up and deporting Mexican-origin residents to Mexico. Both Mexican American citizens and immigrants were affected by the deportations.



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Sleepy Lagoon Trial A well-publicized trial of young Mexican Americans convicted of murder in Los Angeles. The case was eventually dismissed for lack of evidence and biased procedures.

Tejanos The native Mexicans living in Texas when it broke away from Mexico to become an independent republic; also applied to all contemporary Mexican American Texans.

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo The treaty signed in 1848 between the United States and Mexico that ceded nearly one-half of the territory of Mexico to the United States. The Rio Grande was established as the boundary of Texas. Mexican citizens who resided in the territory were given the right to retain Mexican citizenship or acquire U.S. citizenship.

Zoot-Suit Riots Confrontations between Anglo servicemen and Mexican American youths who wore distinctive outfits called zoot suits.



Notes

1. Probably no other American ethnic group has been more absorbed by the question "What shall we call ourselves?" The members of this group vary widely in their specific histories, geographic locations, and social characteristics; a term of identification adopted by one segment of the group may be considered inaccurate or offensive by others. In addition to *Mexican American*, the terms *Chicano*, *Latino*, *Latin American*, *Spanish American*, *Spanish speaking*, *Hispano*, *Spanish surname*, *Mexican origin*, and *Mexicano* have been prominent as identifiers. Each has a specific connotation that distinguishes it. Government documents often use the term *Hispanic*; but it refers not only to Mexican Americans but also to Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and others of Spanish ancestry. The term *Mexican American* appears to be the most widely accepted and is used in this text to refer to all those who trace their ancestry to Mexico. For discussions of terms of self-reference see Garcia (1981), Nostrand (1973), and H. Romo and R. Romo (1985: 318-321).

2. George I. Sanchez, quoted by Grebler, Moore, and Guzman (1970:545).

3. Diseases played a very important role in the conquest. Crosby (1972:52) stated in this regard that "we have so long been hypno-

tized by the daring of the conquistador that we have overlooked the importance of his biological allies."

4. Had the official policy of Spain been followed in general practice, the status of the Indians would have been higher. The Laws of the Indies, promulgated in 1542, stated that "Indians are free persons and vassals of the crown. . . . Nothing is to be taken from the Indians except in fair trade" (quoted in McNickle 1973:28).

5. Nine of the defenders killed in the Alamo were *Tejanos*.

6. An additional 54,000 square miles along the southern border of the New Mexico Territory was bought from Mexico in 1853. Moore and Pachon (1985:19) stated that "as it happened (and no Mexican thinks it accidental), the Gadsden Purchase . . . included some of the richest copper mines in the United States."

7. Pachon and Moore (1981) stated that there were around 75,000 Mexicans in the Southwest in 1848, whereas Griswold del Castillo (1990) estimated 100,000.

8. The rate of naturalization among Mexicans has been, in Moore's opinion, "extraordinarily slow" (Moore 1976:49; see also Moore and Pachon 1985:135).

9. For an analysis of some of the specific forces lying behind these broad currents, see Acuña (1981:194-206) and Barrera (1979:67-75).

10. Portes and Rumbaut (1990:17) point out that these "invasions" occur because employers in the host society are willing to hire new workers.

11. The consular officers began to apply strict standards to determine whether an applicant for a visa was likely to become a public charge in the United States (Moore and Pachon 1985:136).

12. Although Mexican labor had been brought to the United States initially to perform mainly rural tasks, by 1930 the majority of the Mexican-origin population lived in cities (see, e.g., R. Romo 1983).

13. These orders were given after the Mexican government protested and the U.S. State Department ordered the Navy to act (R. Romo 1983:167).

14. For accounts of the Mexican American movement in Crystal City, see Camejo (1973) and Gutiérrez and Hirsch (1973).