

# Mexico

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People of Mexican origin occupy a unique status in contemporary American society: they are among the newest and oldest of ethnic groups within the U.S. The roots of permanent settlement by people of Spanish and Mexican origin in what is now New Mexico dates back nearly 400 years, to the founding of Santa Fe two years after the Jamestown colony was founded. While some New Mexicans can claim to be 16th-generation Americans, others crossed the U.S.-Mexico border yesterday. Indeed, people from Mexico have continuously migrated north and in the process have shaped and reshaped the demographic contours of the nation's second largest ethnic minority. Especially over the past 100 years, Mexican immigration, in four successive waves, reinforced the group's geographic concentration in the American Southwest, where the great majority of Mexican-origin people have always lived. Yet the constant flow of international migration and the internal migration of Mexican-origin people have resulted in a diaspora that extends into the Midwest, the Pacific Northwest, and, within the past two decades, the Southeast and Northeast. The past 30 years constitute a high-water mark of immigration from Mexico, a phenomenon that has propelled the Mexican-origin population to unprecedented numbers. This fourth wave of immigration has contributed to the formation of one of the most diverse and fastest-growing groups in contemporary America.

## Origins of Mexican American Society in the Southwest

Before the mid-19th century the trek north from Mexico was made by settlers seeking a new life in the far northern frontiers of New Spain and Mexico. Though the circumstances prompting migration, both in Mexico and within the U.S., have changed drastically over the centuries, one unifying theme binds all who moved northward: improving their quality of life and searching for opportunity. These ba-

desires motivated Spanish colonists and Mexican citizens alike to relocate from the early 17th century through the first half of the 19th century. Today these same desires drive hundreds of thousands of Mexicans each year to enter the U.S., legally and clandestinely, in search of opportunities unavailable to them at home.

An obvious historical benchmark to begin any discussion about Mexican Americans is the U.S.-Mexico war of 1846–1848, which was settled by treaty and resulted in the annexation of a vast territory and its people by the U.S. Both Mexican settlers and indigenous tribal societies were encompassed within the “new” Southwest after 1848. But to make this the legal point of departure for the origins of Mexican American history is to miss an important context for understanding subsequent migrations, immigrations, and settlement patterns. Though Spanish explorers had trekked through what is now the Southwest in the 1540s, it was not until the 1580s that Spain embarked on establishing permanent colonies in the region. Paranoia and religious fervor combined to set in motion the settlement of northern New Spain. The perceived military need to fortify a defensible area between the center of the colonial empire in Mexico and foreign threats to the north (English, Russian, and later American) prompted Spain to move soldiers and recruit civilians to settle on the frontier. Military and civilian personnel alike were given incentives of land grants and other resources to relocate. They were joined by Catholic missionaries sent to harvest Indian converts, a cornerstone of Spain’s colonizing efforts throughout the Americas. The few thousand hardy souls who carved out settlements stretching from Texas to California migrated north in part because new opportunities were promised by superiors. Mexican Americans’ heritage in the region thus dates from the Spanish colonial period, but it continued after Mexico’s independence from Spain in 1821.

The fledgling colonies of the Spanish borderlands were small but viable settlements despite their great distance from the political center of Mexico. Subject to colonial administration under Spain and later by provincial governments under Mexico, they were largely self-sufficient and insular, guided by Catholic traditions and familial networks tied to kinship. The change in sovereignty from Spain to Mexico affected land ownership and governmental oversight, and introduced new settlers from Mexico, but the most important change was the lifting of the ban on foreign trade and immigration of American settlers into Mexico. These new developments caused irrevocable demographic and political changes that culminated in Americans, and a handful of their Mexican allies, proclaiming an independent Texas in 1836, an event that precipitated war with Mexico a decade later.

As the ink on the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo dried in 1848, approximately 100,000 Mexican citizens had the option of remaining on their native land and becoming American citizens. Few, if any, actually opted to move south of the imaginary border that now separated the U.S. from Mexico. For generations Mexicans in the region traveled freely between provinces and settlements on both sides of the

Rio Grande, and U.S. sovereignty did nothing to halt this practice. Indeed, the movement of Mexicans north increased when gold was discovered in California in 1849, as about 10,000 prospective miners from Sonora set out for the Sierra Nevada foothills. After being driven out by Americans who detested the competition of Mexicans and other foreign miners, many drifted back to Mexico. Others settled among compatriots in the pueblos (towns), neighborhoods that afforded both shelter and a buffer zone as Americans gained numerical ascendancy in California and throughout much of the region.

Aside from the fortunate few who managed to hold on to some wealth and political influence in the decades following the war, Mexican Americans were subject to a racial ideology and a sociopolitical environment in which most were cast as inferior nonwhite people and thus excluded from the culture and institutions that Americans brought with them to the Southwest. Confined to the pueblos-turned-barrios in the burgeoning towns and rural villages across the arid region, Mexican Americans became a submerged ethnic subculture. The borderlands of the Southwest—a region where most people of Mexican origin continued to live and work as a marginalized ethnic minority—persisted through the late 19th century, serving as cultural and linguistic links for millions of immigrants from Mexico, who continued to migrate north during the 1900s and into the 21st century.

### The First Great Wave of Immigration

Mexicans crossed the U.S. boundary line in relatively small numbers during the last two decades of the 19th century, but during the first three decades of the new century, especially after the Mexican Revolution began in 1910, the trickle turned into a tsunami. As much as a tenth of the entire population of Mexico, perhaps as many as 1.5 million people, relocated to the U.S. The devastating effects of civil war in Mexico together with the prospect of employment in the U.S. prompted the wholesale movement of people from the central plateau and northern states of Mexico. The great majority entered through Texas border towns and cities; El Paso was the most widely used port of entry. Those who opted to formalize their status paid a head tax of a few dollars at an immigration station, but those who wished to enter without paying simply walked across the border or waded across the Rio Grande. Before the establishment of the U.S. Border Patrol in the late 1920s, the 2,000-mile international boundary was unguarded; well into the 1940s, those wanting to enter illegally could do so easily.

The overwhelming majority of Mexican immigrants settled in cities, towns, and small agricultural colonies in the Southwest. The regional economic boom in the agricultural and transportation industries relied heavily on Mexican labor at the time, especially during and after World War I. Texas was the preferred state of settlement for Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans during this period, with

Arizona, California, and Colorado far less favored destinations (historically, relatively few immigrants have settled in New Mexico). Over time, however, California began to attract an ever-increasing share. A small number of Mexican immigrants—probably fewer than 5 percent—also ventured to more northern destinations, especially in the Great Lakes region. For example, small communities of Mexicans began to appear in Chicago, Detroit, and Gary, Indiana, during the 1920s. In addition, Mexicans settled in smaller agricultural towns in the Great Plains and in cities such as Omaha and Kansas City.

During the interwar period, more and more Mexican immigrants opted for city life and the opportunities that urban areas afforded them. Rural-to-urban migrations continued to fuel the growing populations in Texas cities such as San Antonio and Houston and California ones such as San Diego and Los Angeles. For several generations San Antonio was home to the single largest concentration of Mexican-origin people in the U.S., a distinction eclipsed during the 1920s by Los Angeles, a city with a population of over 100,000 Mexicans by 1930.

The number of Mexican immigrants paled in comparison to that of European immigrants during the first two decades of the 20th century. Between 1910 and 1914, Mexicans accounted for less than 2 percent of all immigrants in the U.S. However, between 1925 and 1929 they accounted for 16 percent of the total, as a result of the Immigration Act of 1924, a policy that effectively halted immigration from Europe and reinforced restrictions against Asian immigration. In the Southwest, Mexican-origin people constituted the largest ethnic group, a distinction they have held to the present day.

Like other immigrants, Mexicans adapted to life in the U.S. in a variety of ways. They formed mutual aid societies and associations to provide social and cultural cushions as they adjusted to living in America. They attended church services in an increasing number of Catholic parishes established in and near barrios. Their children attended mostly segregated schools or classrooms, but despite this racial separation, became Mexican American. They incorporated many of the characteristics that increasingly defined them as American into their daily lives—the English language, popular culture in the form of music and entertainment, clothing styles, and other features that set the young apart from their elders.

Adaptation to American life also brought restrictions of the kind that set Mexicans apart from most of their white immigrant counterparts. Educational segregation was only one manifestation of a type of “Jaime Crow” discrimination and ethnic isolation directed at Mexicans in the Southwest. It was common in the pre-World War II era, for example, for Mexican Americans to face restrictions that kept them from patronizing certain restaurants, community swimming pools, movie theaters, and other public places, which effectively put them on the opposite side of the color line from whites. Housing segregation became more acute as racially restrictive covenants in deeds of sale determined who could and could not buy prop-

erty in certain neighborhoods. Social discrimination was most severe during the 1930s and early 1940s, when Mexicans were targeted as contributors to the economic problems of the Great Depression and as dangers to the health and welfare of American citizens. The response to these perceived problems was a large-scale voluntary repatriation and an involuntary deportation program orchestrated by the U.S. Department of Labor and local police and welfare relief agencies. As a result, perhaps as many as 750,000 Mexican immigrants and their American-born children left the region during the worst years of the depression. During the so-called Zoot Suit Riots in Los Angeles in June 1943, white military personnel from area bases descended on downtown and East Los Angeles (where the large majority of Mexican Americans lived) and provoked the largest race-related riots in the West before the Watts riots in 1965.

### *Braceros* and "Wetbacks": The Second and Third Waves

The economic troubles of the Great Depression and the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Mexican-origin people during the 1930s coincided with a cessation of further immigration from Mexico. But World War II and the postwar years gave rise to two new waves of immigration. The first was regulated; it became commonly known as the *bracero* program (the term is derived from the Spanish word *brazo* and refers to those who work with their arms). The war drained much-needed labor from agricultural industries during a time when farmers were expected to expand production to meet wartime exigencies. Looking to its neighbor to the south, the U.S. entered into an agreement with Mexico to supply workers on a seasonal, temporary basis to meet the demands of the emergency. The Mexican government recruited the workers while the U.S. guaranteed transportation, housing, and other resources to support the program. However, as American farming interests grew dependent on Mexican *braceros*, the U.S. Congress extended the wartime measure of 1942. The number of workers during the war years was modest, reaching about 50,000 by 1945, but by the mid-1950s the program supplied nearly half a million workers annually to agribusiness, primarily in southwestern states.

The *bracero* program was not terminated until 1964, and by that year some 5 million *braceros* had entered the U.S. as temporary workers. Though most returned to Mexico, as called for in the agreement, many thousands left the program before their designated time in the U.S. expired and drifted to towns and cities where they could easily be absorbed into large Mexican American communities. Many thousands more married Mexican American women and legalized their status.

Unintentionally, Congress's cessation of the *bracero* program fostered a new wave of immigrants from Mexico, the vast majority undocumented. The termination of the program left hundreds of thousands of workers in Mexico seeking employment in the U.S. In addition to the former *braceros*, there were tens of thousands of others

who had been turned away from the labor-recruiting centers in Mexico. Problems in Mexico spurred an ever-increasing number of people to consider crossing the border illegally in search of wage labor. The land reforms instituted after the Mexican Revolution never reached their intended goals of providing land and resources so poor rural Mexicans could make a go of family farming. Furthermore, Mexico's attempt to industrialize attracted far more workers to its cities than could be incorporated into their labor markets, thus creating even more pressure for workers to venture north. The introduction of irrigated large-scale farming in the northern Mexican states attracted thousands of eager workers, most of whom were disappointed when work did not materialize. Many headed to the burgeoning border cities. These factors, combined with the relative ease of crossing the border illegally in the 1950s, led to the first large wave of undocumented immigration when the U.S.-Mexico border was a guarded boundary line.

One way to gauge the extent of illegal immigration from Mexico is to look at the data from the Immigration and Naturalization Service's "Operation Wetback" program during the early 1950s. "Wetback" was a derogatory term referring to those who crossed the border illegally—literally, those who crossed the Rio Grande and emerged on the U.S. side with wet backs. (In fact, most undocumented immigrants did not cross the river at this time; instead they entered through the arid regions along the California-Mexico border.) In 1953 alone, some 875,000 Mexicans were caught by the INS and deported as illegal immigrants. For many, if not most, the return to the other side of the border prompted another attempt to enter illegally. Despite the efforts of the INS, tens of thousands of unauthorized Mexicans found their way to the towns and cities of the Southwest. There they joined an increasing number of immigrants from Mexico who were admitted legally in the post-*bracero* program era (for example, between 1955 and 1959 some 214,000 Mexicans were admitted, 15 percent of all immigrants). These were the pioneers of the largest immigration of Mexicans in the 20th century—a movement of people that has continued unabated for over 40 years.

### The Fourth Great Wave

In 1970 the population of Mexican Americans was about 4.5 million. In 2005 that figure stood at over 25 million (see Table 1). Mexican-origin people constitute the great majority—about 63 percent—of the 40.4 million Hispanics in the U.S. Obviously, the last third of the 20th century witnessed a spectacular rise in the Mexican-origin population, a product of sustained mass immigration and natural increase. According to the 2000 Census, over 9.3 million people indicated their country of birth as Mexico, a group that constituted 37.2 percent of all Mexican-origin people in the U.S. By contrast, in 1960 only about 15 percent of all Mexican-origin people in the Southwest were foreign-born. Since 1970 the number of immigrants from

Table 1 Mexican-origin population, 1960–2005

| Year | Number                 | Percentage of U.S. population |
|------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2005 | 25,467,000             | 8.8 <sup>a</sup>              |
| 2000 | 21,207,000             | 7.5                           |
| 1990 | 13,393,000             | 5.4                           |
| 1980 | 8,740,000              | 3.9                           |
| 1970 | 4,532,000              | 2.2                           |
| 1960 | 1,736,000 <sup>b</sup> | 1.0                           |

Source: Adapted from Frank D. Bean and Gillian Stevens, *America's Newcomers and the Dynamics of Diversity* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2003).

a. Figure from *Hispanics—A People in Motion* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center, January 2005).

b. Number calculated as a sum of the Mexican-born population and natives of Mexican parentage.

Mexico has steadily increased each decade, accounting for a huge part of the demographic explosion of Mexican Americans. For example, of all Mexican immigrants in the U.S. as of 2000, nearly half (48.7 percent) entered the country during the 1990s. About 29 percent entered during the 1980s, while 15 percent immigrated in the 1970s and a mere 5 percent in the 1960s. Unprecedented rates of immigration were matched by high fertility rates among Mexican-origin women, rates that are among the highest of any major immigrant population in the U.S.; in 1995, for example, the fertility rate for Mexican American women was 60 percent higher than for U.S. women in general. This demographic trend is revealed in the number of families with five or more people: 31 percent of all Mexican American households, as compared with only 11 percent of non-Hispanic white households.

Any profile of the Mexican immigrant population must consider both those who are in the U.S. legally and those who are not. In 1966, two years after the *bracero* program was terminated and one year after the Immigration Act of 1965 (which eliminated the long-standing quota system based on national origins established in the 1920s) was passed, slightly more than 45,000 Mexican immigrants were admitted legally. The number of Mexican workers granted legal immigrant status soared in subsequent decades. About 680,000 immigrants from Mexico entered the U.S. legally during the 1970s, but in the first half of the 1990s alone, some 2.2 million Mexicans obtained legal documents to work in the U.S. The volume of those who entered illegally was nearly as large. In 2005 it was estimated that about 57 percent of the roughly 11 million unauthorized immigrants currently in the U.S. were born in Mexico. This number rose from 1,310,000 in 1980 to 5,900,000 in 2005 (see Table 2).

As the total population of Mexican-origin people skyrocketed, the demographic distribution of this group began to shift. Before 1940, Texas was the primary gateway state and home to the largest proportion of Mexican immigrants; California

Table 2 Unauthorized Mexican immigrants as percentage of Mexican foreign-born and Mexican-origin populations, 1980–2005

| Year | Estimated number of unauthorized Mexican immigrants | Percentage of Mexican foreign-born population | Percentage of Mexican-origin population |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 2005 | 5,900,000                                           | 53.0                                          | 23.2                                    |
| 2000 | 3,900,000                                           | 45.9                                          | 18.6                                    |
| 1996 | 2,700,000                                           | 40.4                                          | 15.0                                    |
| 1990 | 1,321,000                                           | 30.7                                          | 9.9                                     |
| 1980 | 1,131,000                                           | 51.4                                          | 12.9                                    |

Sources: Jeffrey S. Passel, *Estimates of the Size and Characteristics of the Undocumented Population* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center, March 21, 2005); Frank D. Bean and Gillian Stevens, *America's Newcomers and the Dynamics of Diversity* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2003).

and Arizona were far behind. These three southwestern states accounted for 85 percent of all immigrants from Mexico, a percentage that held fairly constant through 1960. But by the 1940s, California had reached near parity with Texas, and between 1950 and 1960 it surpassed the Lone Star State as the most popular destination among Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans. The emergence of California as the principle gateway state and as the home to the largest population of Mexican-origin people is attributable to three developments. First, a disproportionately large number of *braceros* worked in California agriculture (2 million were employed between 1942 and 1960). As a result, after thousands regularized their immigration status, they settled there and were joined by thousands of other former *braceros* who crossed backed into the U.S. as illegal immigrants. Second, the majority of undocumented immigrants, who had not been employed in the *bracero* program, also headed for the Golden State. Finally, California became a desirable location for transplanted Texas Mexican Americans, a trend that accelerated during and after World War II. Outside the Southwest, Illinois gained importance as a receiving state as both Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants were attracted to industrial jobs in and around Chicago (6 percent of the Mexican-origin population lived in Illinois in 1960).

The surge of Mexican immigration after the late 1960s cemented California's preeminence as the center of the Mexican-origin population in the U.S. By 1970, for example, California's Spanish-surname population (the vast majority of Mexican origin) numbered nearly 2.4 million, while Texas had 1.8 million. With regard to immigrants, as the proportions declined in all other states, California continued to be the primary destination for new migrants, claiming 57 percent of the total by 1980. Southern California cities and counties in particular experienced dramatic increases in the Mexican-origin population. Los Angeles has been the epicenter of demographic change since 1970. By 1980, Los Angeles County contained nearly half

of the state's 4.5 million Hispanics. Hispanics made up 28 percent of the county's total population.

By 2000 nearly 8.5 million Mexican Americans lived in California, 5 million resided in Texas, and 1.1 million lived in Arizona (the numbers were significantly smaller in the other southwestern states, with 450,000 in Colorado and 330,000 in New Mexico). Other important demographic trends manifested themselves during the 1990s, especially the growth of Mexican-origin communities outside the Southwest. Four factors help explain this diaspora. First, in the wake of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, two new policy directions signaled a change for substantial numbers of new immigrants from Mexico. Given increased sanctions against employers who knowingly hired undocumented immigrants and the saturation of traditional labor markets as a result of the amnesty provision of the law (which gave some 2.8 million former illegal immigrants from Mexico documented status), many Mexican immigrants began to favor destinations beyond the usual cities. Second, increased surveillance and patrol of the border by the INS made it more difficult and costly to enter California illegally. Third, an increasingly hostile environment for undocumented immigrants developed in California. This was reflected in Proposition 187, spearheaded by Governor Pete Wilson in 1994, which prohibited education, health care, and welfare services to these immigrants. Such developments sent a strong message to immigrants that other destinations were perhaps more amenable to those seeking work in the U.S. Last, the lingering economic recession of the early 1990s, which hit California particularly hard, encouraged immigrants to settle elsewhere in the nation. All of these factors tended to direct immigrants away from California and Texas, especially in the wake of a devaluation of the peso that resulted in a deep economic recession in Mexico, a development that drove even more Mexican workers to seek employment in the U.S.

Thus while California had been the magnet for Mexican immigrants for nearly 50 years, by the 1990s the percentage of immigrants in California dropped appreciably, the numbers in Texas also dipped, and the largest increases in Mexican immigration were recorded in areas outside the Southwest. For example, Illinois continued to attract immigrants, a fact that helped push the number of Mexican-origin people in that state past the 1 million mark by 2000. In addition, states that had very few Mexican immigrants in 1980 experienced marked growth. Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina together had a total population of people born in Mexico below 17,000 in 1980, but in 2000 the number of Mexican immigrants in these states surpassed 550,000—more than a 3,000 percent increase over two decades. Though many states in the Midwest did not experience comparable rates of increase, the gains were nonetheless impressive. Illinois is now home to the largest Mexican immigrant population in the Midwest, but Michigan also witnessed gains over the course of two decades (from about 11,000 Mexican-born residents in 1980 to nearly 61,000 in 2000). Mexican immigrants also ventured to states elsewhere in

the nation where few Mexican immigrants had lived before. In 1980 Nevada and Utah had a combined Mexican immigrant population of about 14,000; by 2000 it was 181,000. Similarly, in 1980 New York and New Jersey had a combined Mexican immigrant population of 14,000; by 2000 they were home to over 237,000 people born in Mexico. Even New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado recorded sharp increases during the last two decades of the 20th century. Never before had nontraditional, non-gateway states attracted such a large percentage of immigrants from Mexico. In the 21st century, the second largest ethnic minority group in the U.S. is distributed nationally, not just regionally.

Still, when considering the total number of Mexican-origin people in the U.S., and not just those born in Mexico, it remains true that the great majority of Mexican-origin people continue to live in the Southwest, with California and Texas accounting for 65 percent of the total. When Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado are included, nearly 75 percent of all Mexican Americans and their immigrant counterparts live in this region.

### A Profile of Mex-America Today

The phenomenal increase in immigration from Mexico since the 1960s added immensely not only to the total population of Mexican-origin people in the U.S. but to the diversity of the group as well. Any socioeconomic profile of Mex-America today must take into account this growing diversity. Forty or 50 years ago, observers of Mexican American society often identified major defining characteristics of this ethnic group. First and foremost, although they were a people of immigrant origins, by 1960 those origins were distant, as about 85 percent were U.S.-born. Second, the great majority (79 percent) were urban dwellers in 1960, and they were the most rapidly urbanizing group in the Southwest in the post-World War II decades. Although large pockets of Mexican Americans lived in rural areas, especially in south Texas and New Mexico, the growing trend was toward residence in the largest urban centers. Mexican Americans were also highly concentrated in the southwestern states, where over 90 percent resided in 1950. Third, in 1960, Mexican American educational achievement and jobs in higher-level occupations lagged far behind those of non-Hispanic whites. For example, 60 percent of women and 64 percent of men of Mexican origin held unskilled and semiskilled jobs in 1960. Some modest levels of occupational mobility appeared in the postwar years, but when compared to their white counterparts, Mexican Americans were disproportionately represented on the bottom rungs of the Southwest's labor market. In schooling, they seemed to be even further behind their white and nonwhite counterparts in the Southwest; the median school years completed for Mexican Americans in 1960 was 7.1, while for whites it was 12.1 and for nonwhites 9.0. Although some of these socioeconomic trends have been slow to change, Mex-America has experienced a pro-

found reshaping, not only because of renewed mass immigration from Mexico but because of social changes that deeply affected the recent history of the group.

The arrival of large numbers of new immigrants in existing Mexican American communities was reminiscent of the first three waves of immigration. New immigrants had an impact on how Mexican Americans viewed themselves and how they were viewed by the larger society. New immigrants strengthened ties to families and communities on both sides of the border and reinforced the use of the Spanish language and cultural traditions from Mexico. They also often competed with their U.S.-born counterparts for low-wage work, for low-cost housing, and for other resources tied to education, health care, and welfare. Though tensions and mistrust often characterized relations between native-born and foreign-born, over time the larger Mexican American population absorbed new immigrants. The fourth-wave immigration of the past 30 years has continued these historical patterns, but the volume of immigrants has set in motion some new dynamics as well. Three developments stand out: the growing internal diversity of the group, the restriction of immigrant populations to barrios, and the educational and occupational stratification of newcomers.

Perhaps the most obvious impact of the fourth wave of immigration from Mexico involves the internal diversity of people of Mexican origin. Many generations of native-born and foreign-born people now coexist in the U.S., creating more diversity than in any previous era. Mexican American generational cohorts, for example, include elders who immigrated in the early 20th century and their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, who comprise at least three or four generations of native-born Mexican Americans. In addition, those who immigrated during the *bracero* program and in the 1950s, both legal and undocumented, also produced two or three generations of Mexican American offspring. To this diversity we must add the millions of immigrants who have arrived since the late 1960s. However, we cannot lump all these newer immigrants together, for they arrived during different decades, and each successive wave was larger in number than the preceding one. For example, of the over 11 million immigrants from Mexico who resided in the U.S. in 2004, 56 percent were estimated to have entered during the 1990s. Obviously, the social and economic adaptation of these immigrants and their children is at a different stage than that of those who immigrated during the 1970s. Indeed, mass immigration over the past 30 years (1980s–2000s) has contributed further to the differentiation of various native-born Mexican American cohorts. It is not surprising, therefore, that terms used by Mexican-origin people today, more than at any time in the past, reflect the growing diversity of this population. Those who still hold deep attachments to Mexico may call themselves “Mexicanos” or “Mexicans,” while others prefer “Mexican American” or “Chicano” (a historical term revived during the 1960s as a term of political and social/cultural awareness, especially for younger people who rejected assimilation). Others prefer “Hispanic” or “Latino,” terms that

include all Spanish-origin people in the U.S. Some identify with multiple terms, while others reject any label that references national origin or ethnic identity. As immigration from Mexico continues on a large scale, the great diversity that characterizes Mexican-origin people will surely continue.

Another important development is the geographical and demographic profile of Mex-America. Three patterns are noteworthy. First, although prior immigrants maintained connections to sending communities in Mexico as they traveled and settled in the U.S., the fourth wave of immigrants has maintained stronger binational orientations owing to chain migration and routine visits to see family in Mexico. Despite the expense and difficulty of going to Mexico and back on a regular basis—especially for illegal immigrants—immigrants now more than ever are members of an increasingly international community renewed and rejuvenated by constant travel across the border. Second, in the past immigrants not only tended to migrate to the towns and cities where Mexicans historically resided but were involved in establishing new communities of Mexican-origin people in agricultural areas, rural towns, and metropolitan suburbs in western cities. Much smaller numbers coalesced in neighborhoods in cities of the Midwest. Most recent immigrants have contributed to these patterns, though with some modification. They too have settled in existing Mexican American urban barrios and towns, primarily in the Southwest, but they are also prime movers in the establishment of newer metropolitan barrios throughout major urban areas of the Southwest and Midwest. For example, in East Los Angeles, an area that historically has had the highest proportion of Mexican-origin residents in the U.S., newer immigrants initially settled there but moved to suburbs throughout greater Los Angeles and were joined by those with the means to move to neighborhoods with better schools and housing. A new development attributable primarily to immigrants after 1970 is the establishment of ethnic neighborhoods in small towns and cities in the Southeast and Northeast (about 25 percent of all Mexican-origin people now live outside the Southwest). The availability of steady low-wage and service-sector jobs fed this geographical distribution. The increasing concentration in and distribution of the Mexican-origin population within metropolitan regions (in 1990, Mexican Americans, and Hispanics in general, were among the most highly concentrated ethnic groups within metropolitan areas and central cities) has led some observers to label this phenomenon the “browning” of America. Indeed, both the growth and the distribution of the Mexican-origin population lend some credibility to this metaphor. Between 1990 and 2000, for example, the Mexican-origin population increased by 53 percent (58 percent for all Hispanics), whereas the rate of increase for the U.S. as a whole was 13 percent. In addition, the percentage of Mexicans among all immigrants in the U.S. has steadily risen since the 1970s (Mexicans accounted for 22 percent of all immigrants who entered during the 1980s, 27 percent between 1991 and 1996; in 2004 they constituted about one third of all immigrants). Considering the increases of

the Hispanic population in general over the past 40 years (from 3.9 percent of the total U.S. population in 1960 to 13.3 percent in 2000) and projections that it will account for about 25 percent of the nation's total population in 2050, the "browning" of American society is not a farfetched notion.

Unlike most immigrant groups in U.S. history, which tended to enter in one or two large waves during a concentrated period of years or decades, mass immigration from Mexico spans an almost uninterrupted period of nearly a century. Successive waves of Mexican immigrants thus make any analyses of group progress over time complicated and complex, unless very specific cohorts are considered based on such factors as nativity, time of immigration, age, citizenship, language, and other variables. With regard to social class profiles, using household income and occupation as two important indicators, aggregate analyses reveal that people of Mexican origin as a group have median family household incomes and occupational distributions that are significantly lower than those of non-Hispanic whites. For example, in 1996, 23 percent of all employed Mexican-origin males 16 years and older held professional, administrative, and sales-related jobs, while 77 percent were employed in service, skilled, and unskilled jobs. The distribution in these same occupations for non-Hispanic whites was 51 percent and 49 percent and for blacks 34 percent and 66 percent, respectively. However, because most immigrants enter the U.S. with little education and few occupational skills and are handicapped by lack of English-language ability, most social indicators for the group as a whole are lowered as a result. When we measure educational achievement, a similar trend is revealed. In 2002, for example, Mexican-origin people had the lowest percentage (50.6) of all Hispanic adults 25 years and older who had at least a high school education. The percentage for non-Hispanic whites was 88.7 percent. However, when we consider U.S.-born Mexican Americans, the percentage that completed high school increased to 67 percent, according to data published in 1997.

Though the social class and educational profiles surely improve when the second and subsequent generations are considered, there is still debate among scholars about how much mobility Mexican Americans have achieved over time in education, occupation, and income. There are also questions about how much progress Mexican immigrants and their children are likely to make in American society, given that certain avenues of mobility are less available today than in the past. For example, the increasing segregation of Mexican immigrant children and Mexican Americans in poor, minority-majority public schools is sure to have negative consequences for occupational mobility beyond low-wage, low-skill jobs.

As new immigrants from Mexico continue to enter the U.S. and as various cohorts of native-born Mexican Americans mature, this group will continue to experience dynamic growth and increasing diversity. To be sure, Mexican immigrants today enter an American society that is substantially different from the one their predecessors entered in the 1920s or 1940s. As a result of the civil rights struggles of

the 1950s and 1960s in general and the Chicano civil rights movement in particular, as well as subsequent social reforms that opened doors of opportunity previously shut to Mexicans, the life chances of Mexican Americans today are genuinely better than during any previous era. Immigrants now have access to legal services, health care, and other important resources that their peers even a generation ago could not have imagined. And yet a critical question remains about the future direction of the group: Will Mexican Americans over time be fully incorporated into the fabric of U.S. society, or will socioeconomic and educational disparities continue to characterize large segments of the group?

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