

CHASING THE ILLUSIVE AMERICAN DREAM: AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS
OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND CULTURE

A Senior Honors Thesis

By

ARWEN EUGENE HAM

Submitted to the Office of Honors Programs
& Academic Scholarships
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April 2004

Major: Psychology

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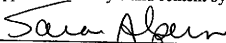
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ABSTRACT

Chasing the Illusive American Dream:
An Historical Analysis of Mexican-American
Education, Employment, and Culture. (April 2004)

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The objectives of this study include the identification of the effects of history on contemporary Mexican immigration in the areas of education, employment and culture. Beginning with a detailed historical background of Mexican immigration, including information concerning female Mexicans coming to America, I have explored the current situation of Mexican-Americans in relation to their situation throughout the twentieth century. This thesis also addresses issues in the education of Mexican-Americans, including difficulties faced in receiving formal education, the effectiveness of bilingual education, and educational legislation. Another chapter focuses on Mexican-American levels of employment, dual wage systems, and other obstacles involved in the ability of this ethnic group to find and retain employment. Also considered are the changing roles of Mexican-American women within the family,

racism against Mexican-Americans, and the position of Chicanas within the Chicano Movement.

Using a literature review of archival texts, oral histories, social and political historical works, and journal articles, I have extrapolated and analyzed the given data in order to recommend legislative and social actions that could improve the problems facing Mexican-Americans. Also, I have proposed suggestions for future research, including areas of information where there is a lack of documentation and studies that might be conducted to better comprehend various aspects of Mexican immigrant life.

To my grandmother for her unconditional love
To my parents for their unconditional support
To my sister for her unconditional benevolence

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Before there were Anglo settlers and African slaves, they were here. Of Spanish origin and with Indian ancestry, Mexicans settled the Southwest only to be methodically driven south to Mexico by the United States. The opening of the twentieth century found only tens of thousands of Mexican-Americans, concentrated in the southwestern states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. The 1900s would become the time for an exodus of Mexican immigration where in the nineteenth century Europeans and Asians had filled the ranks of immigrants.

Escaping economic and political turmoil in Mexico, Mexican immigrants have moved north in search of the “American Dream.” They have been met by prejudice and discrimination, hatred and fear. The majority Anglo population of the United States has reacted in various negative ways, often leading to situations that leave Mexican immigrants without recognition of their civil and human rights. But Mexican-Americans have fought back. After decades of institutionalized segregation, repatriation efforts, and legislation that adversely affected them, Mexican-Americans have found their voices in citizen-based organizations. Focusing on issues involving everything from the rights of Mexican-American veterans to the disparity of community funding for minority neighborhoods, Mexican-Americans have made their views known to the American public.

Inequalities in the areas of education and employment have greatly affected Mexican-Americans and their ability to successfully function in the culture of the United States. Mexican-American students have been segregated into inferior schools, taught that use of their native language will negatively affect their overall education, ignored by school administration, and relegated to remedial classes. The combination of these factors invariably leads to difficulties in attaining higher education or even graduating from high school. This lack of educational achievement, in turn, predisposes Mexican-Americans to jobs with low wages, long hours, and discriminatory practices. Strikes in the agricultural, food production, and mining industries have demonstrated the malcontent of Mexican-American workers.

During the first thirty years of the twentieth century, male Mexican immigrants outnumbered females by a margin that could reach 260 to 1.¹ But as the 1900s progressed, whole families began to cross the border in search of educational opportunity for their children and means of employment for themselves. Fighting not only language and cultural barriers, but also gender discrimination, Mexican-American women deserve special attention. Against the triple oppression of gender, race, and ethnicity, Chicanas have led strikes, held the Mexican-American family together, maintained binational networks, encouraged their childrens' education, and contributed to American culture. The average Mexican-American woman faces daily difficulties because of her race and gender, and an understanding of her contemporary situation

¹ Teresa A. Sullivan, "The Occupational Prestige of Women Immigrants: A Comparison of Cubans and Mexicans," *International Migration Review*, Women in Migration 18, no. 4 (Winter 1984), 1045.

through historical study may elucidate ways to improve her experience and to help her attain the “American Dream.”

Literature concerning Mexican-Americans, while abundant, tends to stem from the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s. This leaves much of the twentieth century of Mexican-American activity without sufficient documentation or interpretation. Female Mexican-Americans have received even less attention, in a society which focuses on citizens with more prominence, in this case, males. Their low levels of immigration in the early part of the twentieth century and the subsequent neglect of some historians leaves gaps in the literature concerning Chicanas.

History can teach us not only about the past, but also about the present and future. In the case of Mexican-Americans, their history in the United States needs further study on account of the profusion of issues that they continue to face. The history of the twentieth century is rife with injustice, prejudice, and discrimination, but with greater knowledge of their plight, Mexican-Americans can be assisted in their crusade for full civil and human rights.

CHAPTER II

“VOY BUSCANDO PORVENIR”: THE HISTORY OF MEXICAN IMMIGRATION
TO THE UNITED STATES²

Mexican immigration during the twentieth century can be divided into three separate periods. The early 1900s saw an unprecedented increase in Mexican immigration just as the immigration from Europe and Asia was decreasing. The 1940s began another stage of immigration during which Mexicans crossed the border as a result of American war labor shortages and the *Bracero* Program. Legislation in the second half of the century led to a sharp decline in Mexican immigration, although many illegal “aliens” continued to come to the United States during this time.

Building the Southwest: Mexican Immigration through the 1930s

During the 1880’s, Asian immigration slowed to a trickle as fewer and fewer Americans would hire them. The Literacy Act of 1917, as well as the laws concerning immigration quotas in 1921 and 1924 significantly lowered the numbers of Europeans coming into the United States. Mexican immigrants were exempted from the head tax and literacy tests in 1917, and while they were included in the 1921 law, their quotas were not enforced. During these years of lax rules, Mexican immigrants began to pour into the country through the southern border, and the United States government did little to stop the flow.³

² Marilyn P. Davis, *Mexican Voices/American Dreams: An Oral History of Mexican Immigration to the United States* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990), 141.

³ Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988), 142-143, 160.

At the turn of the twentieth century, nearly seventy percent of Mexican-Americans resided in Texas, with Arizona and California holding another twenty percent of the Mexican-American population. Even with almost 50,000 Mexicans immigrating to the United States during the first decade of the 1900s to work in the transportation industry, Mexicans still constituted less than one percent of immigration. Ironically, the railroad system built by thousands of Mexicans became the major mode of immigration for this racial group after the Mexican Revolution. Other Mexican immigrants used automobiles to move their families and to sell in Mexico where American cars fetched a high price.⁴

The start of the Mexican revolution marks the beginning of two decades of Mexican immigration into the United States. In 1910, Mexican refugees flooded the Southwest after losing their common land to the Mexican government and the enclosures of the hacienda system.⁵ The population of Mexico continued to rise, reaching 15 million by 1910. The inflation and lowered wages that followed urbanization in Mexico helped to push Mexicans toward the United States border. In the United States, large growers lobbied for the Reclamation Act of 1902 that put thousands of acres of land into agricultural production. These capitalists desired Mexican immigrants to work in agriculture, as they would request lower wages, work only seasonally, and would be easily deported, if the need arose. Many of these early immigrants worked on commercial farms where they faced racist attitudes and segregation. Mexican-

⁴ Ricardo Romo, "Responses to Mexican Immigration, 1910-1930," In *Latino Employment, Labor Organizations and Immigration*, ed. Antoinette Sedillo López (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1995), 26-28.

⁵ Robert J. Rosenbaum, "The History of Mexican Americans in Texas: A Preliminary Survey," In *Texas History*, ed. Walter L. Buenger (Boston: American Press, 1983), 56-57.

Americans also engaged in sharecropping, an activity that required the entire family to toil in the fields.⁶

The *peones*, or poor Mexican immigrants, came to the United States for jobs in agriculture, mining, and the railroad industry with the intention of eventually returning to Mexico and their families. The United States offered Mexican immigrants not only a method of earning money, but unskilled laborers in the United States earned five to ten times what they would have grossed in Mexico. Differential wages, economic development and labor demands created a “pull” in the United States which coincided with the “push” of the Mexican Revolution. In addition, immigration quotas for Asian and European immigrants failed to restrict the influx of Mexican immigrants, allowing for the migration of over a million Mexican-Americans in the early years of the twentieth century, fifty to seventy-five percent of these illegal.⁷

Many Mexican communities were already established, especially in the border regions of the southwestern United States. Many immigrants proceeded through Texas to the north and east, while many remained close to the Texas border or in the barrios in cities such as Houston and San Antonio.⁸ San Antonio grew exponentially during this time, creating more jobs for recent immigrants. Political expatriates and religious refugees helped the Mexican-American population swell to 70,000 in San Antonio by 1910. Some of these new immigrants were part of the middle and upper classes, but most remained in extreme poverty. Their housing and schooling was insufficient for the

⁶ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 143-152.

⁷ Romo, “Responses to Mexican Immigration,” 25-30.

⁸ Rosenbaum, “The History of Mexican Americans,” 57-58.

population, but the poll tax kept Mexican-Americans from voting to improve their conditions. Forty percent of Mexican immigrants lived in urban areas during the 1920s, leading to the beginnings of a professional middle class based on division of labor and specialization.⁹

The 1920s brought a wave of migrants from the borderlands to Milwaukee, Chicago and Detroit in hopes of steady employment as factory workers.¹⁰ Mexican-Americans earned lower wages in Texas because of the proximity of Mexico and its seemingly endless supply of cheap laborers. As Mexican-Americans moved to the Midwest, large growers employed more recent immigrants or used scare tactics like debt peonage to retain the workers who wished to relocate. However, the railroad lines had finally extended from Mexico City all the way to Chicago, aiding in the northward migration through northern Mexico and the southern United States.¹¹ These droves of immigrants were hardly affected by the desire of the Mexican government to curtail the extensive emigration of Mexicans to the United States. The Mexican government attempted to convince its citizens that immigrants were unable to find jobs and housing in the United States. Nevertheless, Mexicans immigrated, knowing that their chances of prosperity in America could hardly be worse than those in Mexico.¹²

At first, Mexican immigrants were welcomed in the sense that their employers preferred workers to whom they could pay little and who would not remain in the community longer than the growing season. The need for cheap labor was high during

⁹ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 143-144, 169.

¹⁰ Ellwyn R. Stoddard, *Mexican Americans* (New York: Random House Inc., 1973), 22.

¹¹ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 154, 180-182.

¹² Romo, "Responses to Mexican Immigration," 37.

this time of increased agricultural production, especially after the Mexican-American move toward urbanization.¹³ However, as Mexican communities grew and a sense of immigrant permanency set in, Anglo-Americans began to mistreat the recent immigrants through social withdrawal and raids by the Texas Rangers. In an effort to retain their rights, Mexican-Americans in Texas fought back with "social banditry," leading to the idea for the Plan de San Diego.¹⁴ This uprising of minorities with the goal of the execution of white male adults was supposed to take place on February 20, 1915, but the plan was never fulfilled. The extremism of the plan did, however, give Anglo-Americans a "feasible" reason to harass Mexican-Americans.¹⁵

The Immigration Restriction League pushed a new immigration law through Congress in 1917, demanding a literacy test for all immigrants entering the United States. As agricultural and railroad industries began to feel the lack of cheap laborers, lobbying commenced to exempt Mexicans from the new law. Under continued pressure, the United States Secretary of Labor allowed for the exclusion of Mexican immigrants from the head tax, literacy test, and contract labor clause of the immigration law. The Johnson Act, passed in 1920, held immigration of certain nationalities to three percent of the existing population in the United States. Mexicans were not included in these immigration quotas, nor were they included in the European Immigration Law of 1924. Opponents and defenders of Mexican immigration debated the issue as more and more Mexican crossed the international line. One side argued that Mexicans took jobs Anglos

¹³ Stoddard, *Mexican Americans*, 21; Acuña, *Occupied America*, 168.

¹⁴ Rosenbaum, "The History of Mexican Americans," 62-63.

¹⁵ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 161-162.

would not accept, while the other side disputed the desirability of Mexicans in the United States. Restriction Leagues formed in response to the Mexican immigration question, and organized labor continued to fight against the flow of Mexicans into the Southwest.¹⁶

With the advent of World War I, labor shortages became even more acute, and the United States government began a program in 1917 that allowed the admittance of farm laborers on a temporary basis. Recession from 1919-1923 led to repatriation efforts, especially in Texas where repatriation focused on rural areas where the majority of Mexican-Americans still lived and worked. In Fort Worth, Texas ninety percent of Mexican-Americans were unemployed during the recession, and many were compelled to flee or submit to the violence of Anglo-Americans.¹⁷ Immigration started to increase once more and peaked in the 1920s with nearly 500,000 Mexicans crossing the border during this decade. Mechanization of farming combined with the economic troubles of the 1930s led to a drop in immigration and difficulties for those already here. Without welfare, many Mexican-Americans were forced, through necessity and in some cases deportation, to return to Mexico.¹⁸

Congress discussed two separate quota provision bills in 1926. One focused solely on Mexican immigrants, causing disagreements between restrictionist and those that supported immigration from Mexico. Both sides utilized reasoning that was heavily tinged with nativism and bigotry. The Harris Bill, proposed in 1930 cited "widespread

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 180-190.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 185, 205.

¹⁸ Stoddard, *Mexican Americans*, 21-23.

unemployment, racial undesirability and un-Americanism” as grounds for a restrictionist stance toward Mexican immigration.¹⁹ In support of this legislation, a medical doctor described Mexican-Americans as “fairly intelligent collie dogs,” one of the many insults that spread nativist sentiments during the Depression.²⁰ Nevertheless, the House did not consider this bill in light of the lack of immigration from Mexico during the years following Black Tuesday. In 1931, Secretary of Labor Doak solicited the use of federal funds for the deportation of the nearly half a million immigrants who had entered the country illegally.²¹

Repatriation between 1929 and 1933 repealed the original invitation for farm laborers and led to raids and interrogations of legal and illegal immigrants alike. By the mid-1930's more than 100,000 Mexican immigrants had been sent back to Mexico.²² Some estimates of deported and repatriated individuals show as many of 500,000 immigrants returning to Mexico, and this would constitute nearly one-third of the Mexican immigrant population.²³ In Texas alone, an estimated 250,000 Mexican-Americans were repatriated or deported during the decade from 1929-1939. In the Midwest and California, officials focused on urban repatriation programs and were largely successful since Mexicans already faced job discrimination and exclusion. Another factor in the triumph of repatriation was the labeling of all Mexican-Americans as “aliens,” and the insistence by authorities that repatriation was a “money-saving

¹⁹ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 201.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 201.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 201-203.

²² Rosenbaum, “The History of Mexican Americans,” 67-68.

²³ Vicki L. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’: Acculturation, Adolescence, and the Mexican-American Women, 1920-1950,” in *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigrants in the United States*, ed. David G. Gutiérrez (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1996), 138.

device.”²⁴ Unemployed Mexican Americans were urged to return to Mexico, even if they had children who were born in the United States. Voluntary repatriation was urged by many, including the artist Diego Rivera, but those that took the offered transportation to the United States-Mexico border were often summarily left without money, food or shelter.²⁵

The failure of American cotton as a result of international competition led to continued deportation and repatriation in the 1940s. The Texas Cotton Acreage Control Law of 1931 and the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 both decreased the number of acres devoted to cotton production. Other factors affecting this area of agriculture included implementation of the New Deal, a large number of natural disasters that devastated crops, and increased mechanization which lowered the necessity for temporary agricultural workers. Many Mexican-Americans lost their jobs and were forced to return to Mexico because a lack of citizenship equaled a refusal of federal relief.²⁶

Even with all of these facts pointing to unrest and struggle, the period from 1910 to 1941 has been referred to as the “cultural accommodation era.” The superiority of the Anglo culture was rarely questioned, with the English language and Anglo-American principles as the basis for acculturation. The prominence of the acculturation ideal was

²⁴ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 201-204.

²⁵ Elliott Robert Barkan, *And Still They Come: Immigrants and American Society 1920 to the 1990s*, The American History Series (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson Inc., 1996), 45-47.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 204-206.

perhaps a standard for middle-class Mexican-Americans, while working class Mexican-Americans stressed strikes, uprisings, and the need for education.²⁷

From Repatriation to Recruitment: The 1940s and 1950s

With the advent of World War II, the population of Mexican-Americans had risen to nearly 2.7 million, and 375,000-500,000 Mexican-Americans served in the United States armed forces. However, events such as the Sleepy Lagoon case, the “zoot suit riots” and “Operation Wetback” demonstrated to Mexican-Americans that their citizenship did not allow them status as first-class citizens.²⁸

The Sleepy Lagoon case involved the jailing and subsequent conviction of Mexican gang members for allegedly murdering a young Mexican-American, a guest to a party at the Williams Ranch near Sleepy Lagoon in California. The media at this time stirred up hatred for Mexican-Americans with inflammatory headlines, and the Ayres report called Mexican-Americans violent on account of their “Aztec ancestry.” This report also proposed a statute to require the enlistment of Mexican-American males into the United States armed forces in the event that they were not currently employed. The defendants in the case were convicted of an array of crimes ranging from assault to first-degree murder in 1943, but the convictions were overturned a year later by the Second District Court of Appeals. The initial trial had been a gross violation of the defendants’ human and constitutional rights and reflected the racism and ethnic bias of the majority population in California.²⁹

²⁷ Stoddard, *Mexican Americans*, 183-185.

²⁸ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 253-254.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 255-256.

The “zoot suit riots” of 1943 showed a disturbing racist attitude held by the Los Angeles police force, as well as exhibiting the untouchable nature of the Anglo-American servicemen. Mexican-American gang members, often called *pachucos* or zoot suiters, suffered gang-banging by mobs of Anglo-American soldiers during the early summer of 1943. Each time the zoot suiters were arrested and the soldiers were depicted as heroes by the media. By June the attacks were escalating in light of the inaction of police towards the actual offenders, and soon after the military were forced to restrict access to the barrios for any military personnel. Although the riots were brought to a close, the racism of the people of Los Angeles had already been proved and Mexican-American hopes of equality shattered.³⁰

After the repatriation and deportation efforts of the Depression years, immigration did not increase again until World War II. At this time Mexicans were called upon to work in agriculture while most Anglo-Americans worked in the war production factories. Few Mexican-Americans held occupations in the United States defense industries, and those who managed to reach managerial positions were not given equal pay for equal work.³¹ The 1940s were also a time of economic boom in Mexico, as transportation improved and the population continued to rise, and many Mexicans did not immigrate to the United States for fear of being drafted into the armed forces. Fearing a loss of profit without a sufficient number of cheap laborers, large growers once again turned to Congress for help.³²

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 256-259.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 260-261.

³² Stoddard, *Mexican Americans*, 24-25.

Beginning in the war years and remaining a government project until 1964, the Emergency Labor program contracted agricultural laborers from Mexico. In the first five years of the program, over 200,000 *braceros* (“helping arms”) entered the United States. Texas growers were among the most vocal opponents of this operation because of the minimum wage requirements and housing protection afforded to the immigrant workers.³³ Between the end of World War II and the beginning of the Korean War, the program was unofficially continued, and many Mexican immigrant workers without contracts became legal citizens in order to remain in the country to work. In 1951, the Korean War caused the re-initiation of the *Bracero* Program and the contracting of over 4 million workers, mostly Mexican immigrants.³⁴ Various problems eventually ended this program, including the illegal immigration of farm workers to fill *bracero* jobs and the resentful Mexican-American citizens who received fewer benefits from their own government than did the *braceros*.³⁵

During the 1950s, immigration increased, especially the number of illegal immigrants. The Immigration and Naturalization Services opened the border when workers were in demand, but the number of immigrants crossing the border became a concern to restrictionists. In 1949, as well as 1953-1955, undocumented workers were rounded up and deported because of recessions in the United States economy.³⁶ The undocumented immigrants were termed “wetbacks” because of their tendency to swim the Rio Grande to reach the United States. “Wetbacks” engendered legislation in 1952

³³ *Ibid.*, 261-268.

³⁴ Barkan, *And Still They Come*, 83.

³⁵ Stoddard, *Mexican Americans*, 24-25.

³⁶ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 267.

against assisting illegal immigration, as well as creating the drive for a 1954 Special Force Operation that included search and seizure.³⁷ Operation Wetback was led by the Immigration and Naturalization Services under the command of Lieutenant General Joseph Swing, whose efficiency led to the repatriation of more than one million illegal immigrants.³⁸ The McCarran Act of 1950 was passed by restrictionists who wish to keep the United States racially “pure,” while the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 set the standards for the ability to deport and denaturalize Mexican-American citizens. The second act, though vetoed by President Harry Truman, was approved by Congress. Truman continued to criticize the act, as did the President’s Commission on Immigration and Naturalization. Under both acts and in the climate of fear toward un-American activities, many Mexican-American groups and individuals were branded as Communist and subversive.³⁹

In Texas, the 1940s and 1950s brought huge increases in the population of Mexican-Americans, especially in El Paso and San Antonio. Suffering from insufficient public housing, as well as high levels of poverty, crime, and infant mortality in the Mexican-American neighborhoods in El Paso, Mexican-Americans looked to local officials for assistance. Mexican-Americans in San Antonio suffered from similar problems of overcrowding and also a tuberculosis outbreak during World War II. By 1960, Mexican-Americans made up almost half of the population of San Antonio with many working on military bases and nearly thirty percent of Chicanas working outside

³⁷ Stoddard, *Mexican Americans*, 25-26.

³⁸ Barkan, *And Still They Come*, 84.

³⁹ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 169-171.

the home because of family poverty. Statistics on the El Paso barrios confirmed 71 people per toilet in 1948 and seventy percent of Mexican-American housing dilapidated in 1960, showing little improvement as a result of the lack of federal urban renewal funds and housing codes. Gains in the area of politics were seen when Henry B. Gonzalez became a City Council member in San Antonio in 1951 after running a grass-roots campaign. Five years later he was voted in as a State Senator, and in 1961, he won a seat in Congress. Raymond Telles became El Paso's first Mexican-American mayor in 1957 after ninety percent of Mexican-American citizens voted in the election. This level of success by Mexican-American candidates demonstrated the desire of this ethnic group for change and for a strong political voice.⁴⁰

Finding the Chicano Political Voice: The 1960s to the Present

Illegal immigration from Mexico jumped to record numbers with the end of the *Bracero* program. The number of individuals apprehended for illegally crossing the border eclipsed those admitted legally by more than six million, though many were apprehended more than once. The conditions in Mexico were creating a "push" once again, with high levels of poverty and unemployment, while the United States were "pulling" immigrants into the Southwest and Midwest to fill agricultural and industrial jobs.⁴¹

With the end of the *Bracero* Program and the increased mechanization of agriculture, Mexicans began to find immigration more difficult and less rewarding. The Immigration and Reform Act of 1965 amplified these problems. However, legal

⁴⁰ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 281-284.

⁴¹ Barkan, *And Still They Come*, 124-126.

immigration continued until 1976 when an amendment to the original act set the annual quota of immigration to 20,000 people per Western country, including Mexico. Nevertheless, illegal immigrants comprised nearly two-thirds of the immigrant population in the 1980s. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) attempted to decrease the immigrant flow by providing border patrols and restrictions against hiring undocumented laborers.⁴² As immigration became less plausible, Mexicans began moving toward the United States-Mexico border to become part of “commuter labor,” augmenting the economic concerns of these already overpopulated towns.⁴³

The Chicano movement, a current in the larger civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, involved Mexican-Americans working toward political recognition and a preservation of their ethnic identity. Most of those within the movement were born in the United States, especially in the Southwest. In an effort to secure a Chicano political voice, the Southwest Voter Registration Project and the National Council of La Raza registered Chicano voters and assisted with citizenship papers. A lack of citizenship and higher education, as well as Anglo-American opposition, led to very gradual political changes, especially in areas with lower Chicano populations.⁴⁴

The growth of Mexico’s economy because of oil production ended in a depression in 1981. By the mid-1980s, over forty million Mexicans were in poverty. Whole families began to migrate to the north and work in service and industry instead of

⁴² Georges Vernez and David Ronfeldt, “The Current Situation in Mexican Immigration,” *Science*, 8 March 1991, 1189-1190.

⁴³ Stoddard, *Mexican Americans*, 29.

⁴⁴ Barkan, *And Still They Come*, 173-174.

agriculture.⁴⁵ Mexican students have also been immigrating to the United States with more than 100,000 arriving during the 1980s. Most eventually apply for permanent visas. Mexican immigration, both legal and illegal, continued through the end of the twentieth century because of the “push of Mexico and the “pull” of the United States.⁴⁶

“Arriba, Raza Dormida”: Mexican-American Organizations⁴⁷

As the population of Mexican immigrants in the United States grew, ethnically-based organizations began appearing. *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista* (the First Mexican Congress) formed in 1911 under the direction of Nicasio Idar. This *mutualista* was founded in response to Anglo-American mobs, educational exclusion, and unreasonable application of Texas laws toward Mexican-Americans. During the same year, *La Agrupación Protectora Mexicana* (the Mexican Protectors) formed in San Antonio, Texas in defense of Mexican-American human rights, and in 1915, the Plan of San Diego, a call for uprising by oppressed Chicanos led to riots that were brutally suppressed by the Texas National Guard and the Texas Rangers. San Antonio also played host to *La Orden de Hijos de América* (The Order of the Sons of America), a group created in 1921 to work toward full constitutional rights for Mexican-Americans.⁴⁸

One of the most well-known and successful Mexican-American organizations formed in May of 1929 because of the segregation faced by Mexican-Americans in Texas. Given the name League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), this

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 125-126.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 164-165.

⁴⁷ Davis, *Mexican Voices*, 245.

⁴⁸ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 160-162; Rosenbaum, “The History of Mexican Americans,” 63-65.

middle class association issued a number of demands, including a respect for Mexican-American human and constitutional rights, greater civic awareness and participation by Mexican-Americans, and access to equal education for Mexican-American adults and children. Originally, LULAC was the result of a merging of the Order of Sons of America, the Order of Knights of America, and the League of Latin American Citizens. The middle class background of all three led to the aspiration of LULAC for assimilation and integration of Mexican-Americans under the guidance of American values and norms.⁴⁹

In March of 1948, Dr. Hector Garcia assisted in the creation of various chapters of the American G.I. Forum (AGF), focusing on Mexican-American veterans. The AGF concentrated on citizenship, voter registration and a firm opposition to migrant labor during its years in operation. The Viva Kennedy Clubs took an even more political approach in 1960 as Mexican-Americans aided in the election of John F. Kennedy Jr. However, Kennedy failed to create programs to ameliorate the situation of Mexican-Americans, and in response, the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations (PASO) split over the Texas gubernatorial election two years later. Many leaned towards the conservative candidate because of insults from the liberal candidate concerning the ability of PASO to affect change. In 1963, Crystal City, Texas set a new precedent when the Mexican-American population voted in a full slate of Mexican-Americans to city political positions.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Ibid., 200, 239; Ibid., 65-67; Stoddard, *Mexican Americans*, 184.

⁵⁰ Rosenbaum, "The History of Mexican Americans," 69-73.

As the Civil Rights Movement progressed, the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) formed in 1967 around the idea of cultural and ethnic pride. Three years later, *La Raza Unida* (The United Race) mixed this pride with political goals under the direction of Jose Angel Gutiérrez in Crystal City, Texas. The ultimate objective of *La Raza Unida* was to influence state and national politics by strategically affecting local policy.⁵¹ The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) pushed for Mexican-American civil rights in the early 1970s, while the Chicano Moratorium Committee spread its antiwar views in 1970 under the direction of Rosalio Muñoz.⁵²

Mexican-Americans continued to face many of the same problems as they faced at the turn of the century. City funding in San Antonio did not go to the oldest barrios with drainage problems, unpaved roads and poorly funded schools. Instead, the undertaxed, wealthy, and usually Anglo residents received the most benefit from the city. Mayor Walter McAllister, in 1970, simply held the Mexican-American citizens responsible for their own deplorable living conditions, causing the formation of Citizens Organized for Public Service (COPS). After four years of picketing, attending City Council meetings and voicing their demands, COPS had improved their community with \$100 million in city funds.⁵³

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 75-77.

⁵² Barkan, *And Still They Come*, 173-174.

⁵³ Carmen Tafolla, *To Split a Human: Mitos, Machos y La Mujer Chicana* (San Antonio: Mexican American Cultural Center, 1985), 28-31.

Chicana Immigration in the Twentieth Century

During the early decades of the century, the majority of Mexican immigrants were single men. But as more Mexican women began to cross the border, Chicana leaders spearheaded the creation of Chicana-based organizations, and racism started to include this double minority.⁵⁴

Women's clubs, such as the Pan American Round Table and the Good Neighbor Clubs stressed intellectual and cultural activities for Chicanas.⁵⁵ The *Congreso Mexicanista* (Mexican Women's Congress) aided in the formation of *La Liga Femenil Mexicanista* (The Mexican Women's League), a group of schoolteachers led by Jovita Idar, while Maria Luisa Garza founded *Alma Femenina* (Feminine Soul), a *mutualista* for Chicanas. Beatriz Blanca de Hinojosa and Aurora Herrera de Nobregas advocated the end of the double standard for women in their newspapers, *La Prensa* and *La Epoca*, respectively. Emma Tenayucca became a central Chicana figure with her work in support of the pecan shellers' strikes and her organization of the unemployed in the Workers' Alliance. Called *La Pasionaria*, Tenayucca also wrote extensively concerning "The Mexican Question in the Southwest."⁵⁶

Chicanas endured extensive racism and hardship during the nineteenth century. Supporting the view of Mexican-American women as sexual creatures, Dr. Roy Garis of Vanderbilt University claimed that the only difference between higher and lower classes of Chicanas was the higher class's ability to be "more sneaky in adultery."⁵⁷ In San

⁵⁴ Romo, "Responses to Mexican Immigration," 29.

⁵⁵ Stoddard, *Mexican Americans*, 184.

⁵⁶ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 161, 169-170, 225-226.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 201.

Antonio in the 1930s, the Mexican-American inhabitants were declined in their requests for food, clothing and welfare funds. The West Side, the main San Antonio barrio, endured epidemics of tuberculosis, as well as a relatively high rate of infant mortality. Many Chicanas were forced to work outside the home during this time, leaving their eldest daughters to care for the family. During World War II, the majority view of Chicanas as “loose women” was demonstrated by the servicemen in Los Angeles that treated Mexican-American women like prostitutes.⁵⁸

The 1960s and 1970s brought women into leadership roles in many organizations and civil rights efforts, such as the Citizens Organized for Public Service (COPS) in San Antonio led by Mrs. Hector Alemán and Beatrice Gallego in efforts to improve the streets, schools, and drainage systems of the West Side. Dr. Blandina Cárdenas worked as the Civil Rights Commissioner and Federal Director of Administration for Children, Youth and Families, while Virginia Músquiz served as the County Clerk of Zavala County in Texas. Irma Rangel became a Texas Representative, and Dr. Judith Ann Lozano acted as a School Superintendent.⁵⁹

During the 1980s, Mexican immigration showed males to be the majority of those entering the United States. Once this exodus started to taper off, the Mexican-American males began to petition for their wives and children, leading to increased female migration in 1993. This trend of balanced or majority female Mexican immigration continued through the end of the twentieth century.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ibid., 222-223.

⁵⁹ Tafolla, *To Split a Human*, 28-31, 92.

⁶⁰ Barkan, *And Still They Come*, 129.

Mexicans throughout the twentieth century fled to the United States to escape poverty and revolution. From their beginnings as agricultural laborers, they dealt with rampant segregation, and they feared the power of nativists. Now Mexican-Americans are realizing that they have a long way to go in their search for equality of opportunity.

CHAPTER III
FOR THE SAKE OF THE FUTURE: THE EDUCATION OF MEXICAN-
AMERICANS

Equal opportunity has been a cornerstone of democratic ideals in the United States for hundreds of years. However, the extension of this right to equality of education has been significantly lacking for cultural and ethnic minorities. Dealing with *de facto* segregation, monocultural curriculums, and monolingual educators has caused the educational attainment of Mexican-American students to suffer. After one hundred years of educational changes, Mexican-American students remain excluded from their educational environment, a situation which in turn affects their employment options later in life.

Cultural and Linguistic Exclusion in American Schools

The twentieth century opened with Chicanas gathering Mexican-American children in their homes for informal schooling because of the total lack of funding for “Mexican schools.” The few schools that were geared toward Mexican-Americans used the “No Spanish Rule” to eliminate different languages and cultures within the school environment. Texas even institutionalized this rule by making it law until 1969. Although many studies have pointed to full proficiency in more than one language as a positive element for cognitive development, Anglo-dominated schools have often refused to establish bilingual and/or bicultural education programs.⁶¹ The lack of bilingual teachers and administrators affects the parents as well as the children with very

⁶¹ Tafolla, *To Split a Human*, 63-68.

few parents getting involved with their child's education, though this is also a result of low parental education.⁶²

Cultural failings in the educational system abound with curriculum and administration problems causing the most difficulties for Mexican-Americans. Many textbooks used in American schools show little respect for Mexican-Americans and rarely even mention their culture and history. Stereotypical Mexican activities, dress and food are the only Mexican cultural information cited in these texts, and minority females, including Chicanas, are seldom discussed unless in a domestic role. With this monocultural approach which focuses on Anglo-American history and culture, Mexican-Americans are likely to feel left out. They watch as their traditions of familial importance and binational networks are ignored by the majority population. The "cultural distance" created by this curriculum can cause acculturation, in the form of the rejection of Mexican culture. For many Mexican-Americans, however, "cultural distance" simply leads to failure to complete high school. One suggested method of ameliorating this situation is to educate teachers and school personnel to understand and appreciate the culture of other ethnic groups. With this increased recognition of the Mexican-American culture, however, educators need to also become more attuned to the individuality of each student within these racial groups.⁶³

The "poverty culture" of many Mexican-Americans can have a detrimental effect on childrens' abilities to matriculate from high school. Factors, such as lack of adequate

⁶² Denise A. Segura, "Slipping Through the Cracks: Dilemmas in Chicana Education," in *Building with Our Hands: New Directions in Chicana Studies*, Adela De La Torre and Beatriz M. Pesquera (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 200-201.

⁶³ Tafolla, *To Split a Human*, 68-73; Segura, "Slipping Through the Cracks," 207-208.

nutrition and health care, large families with unmet financial needs, and insufficiency of study time, can lead to the Mexican-American children being placed in remedial and special education classes. Mexican-American teenagers have shown the desire for higher formal education and better careers, but their early socialization teaches them to accept that these goals might be unattainable based on the supremacy of Anglo-Americans within the education system.⁶⁴

Often a major obstacle for Mexican-American students is their school population and the quality of education they receive. Most Mexican-Americans are urbanized and attend racially mixed schools. The minority makeup and urban nature of these schools tend to provide sufficient reason for majority political groups and education boards to refuse funding for academics and extracurricular activities at inner-city schools. Mexican-Americans that attend schools with a high Anglo-American population have been shown to succeed at a far greater rate than those that attend mostly minority schools, possibly because they are more "culturally literate." Their immersion in and understanding of the majority culture gives them an advantage in institutional procedures, such as placement testing and student tracking.⁶⁵ Schools, especially those lacking in sufficient funds, tend to push for uniformity in teaching methods and academic standards, a practice which frequently damages chances for Mexican-Americans to succeed. Insufficient funds can lead to a lower quality of employees that are insensitive to individual needs and cultural differences and expect very little academic progress from minority children. However, the fault does not always lie with

⁶⁴ Stoddard, *Mexican Americans*, 139-141.

⁶⁵ Segura, "Slipping Through the Cracks," 200.

the teachers. They are forced to contend with a lack of professional respect, low wages, community and parental stipulations, and little to no encouragement to gain certifications in areas such as bilingual education.⁶⁶

Mexican-Americans face early employment and social segregation in addition to the regular burdens of being teenagers and obtaining an education. Programs to assist lower-class adolescents in earning extra money for themselves and their families were utilized by nearly eighty percent of the Chicanas surveyed.⁶⁷ Placed in youth employment by school counselors, struggling students are likely to drop out of high school. This trend is explained by the combination of factors. Counselors tend not to review the academic progress for those in the youth employment programs, and nearly all Chicanas do not attend college preparatory classes, making the possibility of college less likely than continued employment. Socially, many Mexican-Americans feel cast out of majority peer groups and instead seek other adolescents with similar ethnic and racial backgrounds. This often leads Mexican-Americans into patterns of “segregatory social behavior” and an inability to communicate with peers of different ethnicities.⁶⁸

“The Problems Did Exist”: Mexican-American Education in the Twentieth Century⁶⁹

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Mexican-American children remained segregated with regards to their education. According to professor of Chicano studies, Rodolfo Acuña, “the Chicano community fought segregation, inferior schools and

⁶⁶ Ibid., 200-201; Tafolla, *To Split A Human*, 72-74.

⁶⁷ Segura, “Slipping Through the Cracks,” 209.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 207-209.

⁶⁹ Davis, *Mexican Voices*, 360.

education, the discrimination of IQ exams, poor teaching, the lack of Mexican teachers, and the socialization process that condemned them to failure and then conditioned them to accept it.”⁷⁰ As early as June 4, 1910 was there a serious protest by parents against the education system’s discrimination. Centered in San Angelo, Texas, this parental dissent demanded a male teacher, as well as better desks, books, and school buildings. By September of 1910, Mexican-American parents refused to send their children to school, leading to the opening of a Presbyterian mission school in 1912.⁷¹

During the 1920s and early 1930s, Mexican-American parents and children faced the “No Spanish Rule,” and they endeavored to supplement Mexican school districts in response. Forty Mexican school districts were in existence by 1932 to support the education of the large population of Mexican-American students. By this time, Mexican-American students comprised more than thirteen percent of the Texas student population.⁷² The 1930s also brought about one of the first examinations of Mexican-American difficulties in schooling. The “myth of equal opportunity” was uncovered as IQ tests showed a definite slant toward Anglo-Americans. Most textbooks and many teachers displayed negative attitudes toward the history of Mexicans, as well as their culture and language. Dr. George Sanchez and Dr. H.T. Manuel, both historians and educators, pushed for school integration and bilingual education.⁷³

By mid-century, Mexican-Americans still fell behind Anglos in formal education, educational level, and number of years in school. In 1950, Mexican-Americans with no

⁷⁰ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 157.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 157-158.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 171-172.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 235-236.

By mid-century, Mexican-Americans still fell behind Anglos in formal education, educational level, and number of years in school. In 1950, Mexican-Americans with no formal education reached eighteen percent, compared to 2.1 percent for Anglos, but by 1960 the numbers had improved to only 10.9 percent for Mexican-Americans.⁷⁴ Texas held the lowest rank for Mexican-American education level for the southwestern states, but the number of drop-outs was staggering. Sixty percent of Mexican-Americans were dropping out before their high school graduation, a number partly explained by their relatively early marriages and pregnancies. Indeed, drop-out rates largely reflected the Mexican-American teenagers' early attention to the opposite sex relative to Anglo-American adolescents. Reference group changes from guardians and administrators to peers also influenced students' success rates. These individuals may either help or hinder a child's education by reinforcing standards of achievement. And although Mexican-American parents emphasize formal education, teens are more susceptible to peers spouting the ideal of autonomy that comes with dropping out of high school.⁷⁵

The area of Mexico from which immigrants came showed in their educational levels with rural Mexicans ranking lowest in average number of school years completed. In 1960, these farm workers completed 4.1 and 5 years of formal schooling for males and females, respectively. During this same time period, the Spanish-speaking population of Texas had reached a sixth of the total population, and Mexican-Americans remained under-represented in higher education with a 330 percent increase needed to match a

⁷⁴ Stoddard, *Mexican Americans*, 124.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 125-141.

sixth of the state's college enrollment. Texas also held the dubious distinction of having 23 percent of Mexican-Americans over 25 years of age in the "no schooling" category.⁷⁶

The 1970s demonstrated that Mexican-Americans had yet to achieve what they felt would eventually lead to social equality: educational equality. The system's failings led to an even higher drop-out rate in the late 1970s and increased segregation of urban schools. However, recruitment programs like the Educational Opportunities Programs (EOP) helped Mexican-Americans to reach higher education at a vastly improved rate in the mid-1970s. Ethnic studies programs began to appear at universities all over the Southwest, but budget cuts in 1973 shut down many of them. The EOP continued to recruit Mexican-American students regardless of national economic problems in the mid to late 1970s. However, as aid decreased more and more, these students found it difficult to remain in school.⁷⁷ In an attempt to equalize education, Mexican-Americans stood up for their educational rights as early as 1969 when students boycotted their school in Crystal City, Texas for not allowing minorities to engage in extracurricular activities. Supported by *La Raza Unida Party (LRUP)*, politically mobilized Mexican-Americans filled city council and board of education seats with Mexican-American candidates in the elections of 1970.⁷⁸

The Chicano student movement was at its peak during the 1960s and early 1970s through organizations such as the Mexican-American Student Movement (MASA). By the end of the 1970s, though, the movement began to fade as Chicano professors failed

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 123-127.

⁷⁷ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 388-391.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 339-340.

to encourage the younger generation and students opted for business and professional careers instead of involving themselves with behavioral and cultural studies. Poor students were not recruited, and most were forced to attend community colleges which led to inferior job opportunities. As affirmative action became less of a concern in the 1970s, Mexican-American students attempted to push forward to professional degree programs but fell short without financial aid.⁷⁹

During the time period between 1970 and 1994, Mexican-American enrollment in Texas schools grew by more than 130 percent. Isolation and segregation continued to be issues for these students, with the percentage of Mexican-Americans in minority schools at 43 percent. However, Mexican immigrants use a “dual frame of reference,” believing that since their lives have improved after immigrating that the situation of isolation is satisfactory. Their language and cultural barriers tend to marginalize Mexican-Americans and keep them from analyzing their concerns from within the American culture.⁸⁰

The Debate Concerning Bilingual Education

The passage of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 was a major step toward the equalizing of educational opportunity. However, teachers and peers tend to be the deciding factor in a child’s educational experience, and people’s stereotypes remained unchanged by the new law. The different language and culture of Mexican-Americans feed stereotypes upon which many teachers and students base their interactions with

⁷⁹ Ibid., 391-393.

⁸⁰ Enrique T. Trueba, “The Education of Mexican Immigrant Children,” In *Crossings: Mexican Immigration in Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 255-258.

these students. According to educational researcher, David Ballesteros, Anglo-American students receive more positive attention from their teachers than do Mexican-Americans. In addition, many textbooks and standardized tests respect only the culture and language of the majority Anglo population without regard to the needs of Mexican-American students. Most IQ and placement tests equate “linguistic ability to intellectual ability,” an equation that sends many Mexican-Americans to remedial and special education classes.⁸¹

Many nativists believe in the superiority of the English language, and they argue that Mexican-Americans utilize the education system of the United States and should learn English. By the end of the 1970s, little change had taken place in the drop out rate and reading ability of Mexican-American students, but bilingual and English as a second language (ESL) programs were reaching only a small fraction of the Mexican-American population. Those that supported these programs hoped that both English and Spanish would be learned, but the 1970s saw that many “mentally retarded” Mexican-American students simply did not speak English. The “No Spanish Rule” prevailed in many schools in the Southwest, and bilingual programs, although well funded by the government, failed to attract certified and completely bilingual teachers.⁸²

By the early 1970s, Anglo-American children were graduating from high school at a rate twenty-six percent higher than that of Mexican-Americans. Mexican-American children struggled to learn English while other children focused on academics, leading

⁸¹ David Ballesteros, “Bilingual-Bicultural Education: A Must for Chicanos,” In *The Chicanos: As We See Ourselves*, ed. Arnulfo D. Trejo (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1979), 153-155.

⁸² Acuña, *Occupied America*, 386-387.

Mexican-Americans to repeat grades, read below grade level, and often drop out of school. In light of this situation, changes in teacher training and parental involvement were suggested. The Mexican American Education Project was established at California State University at Sacramento in 1968 in an effort to promote alternatives in educational curriculum. The University of Texas created the Teacher Corps in 1970 in order to educate teachers in methods of understanding and supporting Mexican-American students. Programs like these attempted to enhance the Mexican-American students' educational experience by calling for community participation, parental assistance with school work, curriculum changes, consideration of the differences between Anglos and Chicanos in the areas of language and culture, and bilingualism in school personnel.⁸³

Ronald Reagan's administration cut federal funds for the bilingual programs by nearly forty percent even though Mexican-Americans reported that bilingual education received too few funds to function properly. During the early 1980s, Mexican-Americans averaged about ninety percent in support of bilingual education throughout the southwestern United States. Supporters began to organize in groups, such as the California Association of Bilingual Educators and the National Association of Bilingual Educators.⁸⁴

During the 1990s, Hispanics were found to be second in population only to Anglo-Americans, with Mexican-Americans as the largest subgroup in the United

⁸³ Ballesteros, "Bilingual-Bicultural Education," 160-163.

⁸⁴ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 387-388.

States.⁸⁵ By 1990, California schools were fifty percent ethnic and racial minorities and projections for the year 2030 show that Hispanic student populations will continue to grow, reaching forty-four percent of enrolled students. Other projections suggest that a quarter of the youth population of the United States will be Hispanic by 2020. Even with these impressive numbers, educational issues remain unaddressed, problems unresolved.⁸⁶

Media coverage of Mexican-Americans has recently been focused on a debate concerning the concept of bilingual education, which many support as the only method of equalizing education for Anglos and Mexican-Americans. In addition to the idea of bilingual education, scholars have suggested bicultural elements in education. This system would allow for the use of two languages and two cultural points of view within the curriculum, as well as at home. Dr. George Sanchez advanced this concept in the 1930s in an effort to bring Mexican culture into American schools and to assist Mexican-American students in learning on the same level as Anglo-Americans.⁸⁷

In a study conducted by professor of sociology, John Robert Warren, using the 1990 Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) for the Southwest, social-origin variables, such as migration history, parents' education levels, and English-language ability were documented. These variables were analyzed in conjunction with four educational transitions, including the three from grade to grade in high school and the transition from ninth to twelfth grade. Differences in these variables accounted for many of the

⁸⁵ John Robert Warren, "Education Inequality among White and Mexican-Origin Adolescents in the American Southwest: 1990," *Sociology of Education* 69, no. 2 (April 1996), 142-143.

⁸⁶ Trueba, "The Education of Mexican Immigrant Children," 254.

⁸⁷ Ballesteros, "Bilingual-Bicultural Education," 152-153.

difficulties encountered by Mexican-American students when attempting to finish high school and move on to higher education. In addition, formal schooling has been connected to participation in the labor market at any level with social background being the main reason behind success or failure in the educational arena.⁸⁸ Because of the psychological connection between culture and identity, Mexican-American students are at a disadvantage in American schools. In the "Anglo-dominated society" of the United States, many Mexican-American adolescents struggle with their self-image while standardized tests reflect their socio-economic status and linguistic ability more than their intelligence or academic ability.⁸⁹

Migration during the formative school years was shown to disturb an adolescent's ability to accept rules and social control. During the five year period studied, Mexican-American students were more likely to have migrated. Also, over sixty percent of Anglo parents had completed a year of college, while only thirty percent of Mexican immigrant parents completed nine years of formal schooling. This disparity in parental education leads to different careers and incomes, a fact which has an effect on the education level of Anglo-American and Mexican-American children. Language ability in both parents and students seems to be the most important deciding factor in the completion of high school. Fifteen percent of Mexican-American parents speak little to no English. At the beginning of high school, their children, who often do not speak English fluently, have less than fifty percent of the chances of English-speaking students of completing high school, even if they finish the ninth grade. Indeed, Mexican-

⁸⁸ Warren, "Education Inequality," 142-145

⁸⁹ Ballesteros, "Bilingual-Bicultural Education," 155-157.

American students were forty percent less likely to complete high school as were Anglo-American teenagers, showing the relative importance of family background, continuing social and informational networks, and English-language ability in attainment of a diploma. But linguistic differences and migratory patterns do not tell the whole story of Mexican-American students. By creating social and economic situations that parallel those of Anglo-Americans, Mexican-American students could realize educational equality which would in turn lead to equality of opportunity.⁹⁰

“With Liberty and Justice for All”: Educational Legislation

As the population of Mexican-Americans has risen, the government has been forced to examine their needs as an ethnic minority, especially in the area of education where most children of Mexican origin attending American schools were born in the United States. The decision in *Vela v. Board of Trustees of Charlotte Independent School District* (1928) that children could not be segregated on the basis of race was unsuccessful in desegregating schools in the Southwest. Mexican-American students remained largely segregated into the 1960s. In 1968, *Serrano v. Priest* began with the intent of proving that majority, wealthy districts provided superior education to its students than did poor, minority districts because of unequal property taxes. By 1976, the United States Supreme Court had ruled in favor of *Serrano*, but the justices did not extend their decision to states other than California. As late as 1987, school funding

⁹⁰ Warren, “Education Inequality,” 145-158.

remained a problem in Texas. In *Edgewood v. Kirby* (1987), Mexican-Americans maintained that unequal funding leads to educational discrimination.⁹¹

In 1968, *San Antonio School District v. Rodriguez* resulted in a ruling that denied the United States Constitution promising equal education to its citizens.⁹² During the same year, the passing of the Bilingual Education Act demonstrated an endeavor on the part of Congress to engender better education for students who spoke English as a second language.⁹³ In the following years, cases such as *Serna v. Portales* (1973) and *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) showed that Mexican-Americans were unwilling to accept an inferior education for their children. Supported by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), *Serna v. Portales* suggested that New Mexico schools were in violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment by refusing to implement bilingual-bicultural educational programs. Mexican-American children also benefited from the Supreme Court ruling in *Lau v. Nichols* wherein language training was demanded for children whose education was affected by a need to attain greater English language skills.⁹⁴

“Reverse racism” became an issue of heated debate in 1976 with the *Bakke* case in which Alan Bakke alleged that the University of California at Davis special admission program discriminated against him. The program allowed for a fraction of the student body to be comprised of minority students, and Bakke felt that less qualified individuals had been admitted above him. The California Supreme Court ruled in favor of Bakke, a

⁹¹ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 172, 389, 426

⁹² *Ibid.*, 172, 389, 426.

⁹³ Ballesteros, “Bilingual-Bicultural Education,” 153.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 158-159.

ruling upheld by the United States Supreme Court because of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This decision, according to historian Rodolfo Acuña, simply led to lawful racism in schools and universities.⁹⁵

“Push-Outs”: Issues in Chicana Education⁹⁶

The 1970s saw a marked increase in the number of Chicanas holding leadership positions in the Chicano student movement and in organizations that promoted minority student rights.⁹⁷ During the 1980s, Mexican-American women were shown to be one of the ethnic/gender groups most in need of the assistance of educational reforms. Forty-five percent of Mexican-Americans dropped out of high school in 1984 with more than half of Chicanas leaving without a diploma. This lack of formal education has far-reaching consequences, including early pregnancy, early marriage, and work in unskilled or semiskilled jobs for seventy percent of Chicanas.⁹⁸ Indeed, Chicanas average less than twelve years in school compared to nearly thirteen years for Anglo-American women.⁹⁹

American society views formal education and especially higher education as an important step toward financial stability and social mobility. However, most Chicanas display an approach-avoidance condition when faced with higher education. College seems to be avoided in part because Chicanas are trying to follow their prescribed gender roles and in part because Chicanas must leave their families to attend college.

⁹⁵ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 393-394.

⁹⁶ Irene I. Blea, *La Chicana and the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 105.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 391-392.

⁹⁸ Segura, “Slipping Through the Cracks, 199, 209.

⁹⁹ Tafolla, *To Split a Human*, 61-63.

Separating from the family unit and immersion in majority culture can lead to a loss of ethnic pride and cultural consciousness. Even when Chicanas and their families realize the overall importance and usefulness of education for females and approach the first twelve years of schooling with this attitude, culture and gender seem to prevent college attendance.¹⁰⁰

When attempting to further investigate the phenomenon of Chicana drop-outs, psychological boundaries, institutional practices, failed teacher-student relations, and cultural issues come to the forefront. Often, individual students and their families are held responsible for the failure of the student to complete high school and move on to higher education. Drop-outs have also been referred to as “push-outs,” a term that encompasses a Chicana student’s feelings of oppression and despair.¹⁰¹ Even with the knowledge that dropping out of school can likely bring poverty for their lifetimes, Chicanas leave school to “receive affirmation as valued human beings” through work or marriage. In reality the trend of Chicana pregnancy causing students to drop out is a simple reflection of the need to belong with someone or within a group.¹⁰²

The family background and the norms of Mexican-American culture account for some of the difficulties Chicanas encounter in their quest for a high school diploma. Traditional gender roles for people of Mexican-origin include placing girls on the path to marriage, with enough education to improve their chances of marrying well. The focus of education for Mexican-American boys is different with a career as the final product of

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 61-63.

¹⁰¹ Blea, *La Chicana*, 105.

¹⁰² Ibid., 105-106.

formal schooling. While the majority of Mexican-American parents support their female children's educational efforts, they are rarely involved actively in what they consider to be the duty of teachers and other professionals. Over sixty percent of Chicanas are told by their parents to finish school in order to obtain a job, often reflecting the lack of skilled careers held by the parents. Traditional roles send a mixed message to Chicanas that desire a high school and college education. Why attend school when a girl is trained to take care of children and complete household tasks?¹⁰³

Mexican-American cultural values are often in direct opposition to American values especially in the case of women. While Chicanas are expected to be nurturers that respect and obey their elders, schools teach the "American" values of independence and ambitiousness. Chicanas are often seen in relation to men instead of through their own identity, and in keeping with their cultural norms, they will quickly become unable to function within the American educational system. However, Mexican-American women that find success in high school and even college begin to feel alienated from their family and culture. This situation often leads to guilt over dismissal of the familiar cultural demands. Sex-race tracking simply adds to these difficulties as the status quo is maintained through a lack of useful, job-related courses or vocational counseling. As laid out by counselors and administrators, their options include military service, secretarial jobs or domestic labor. In addition, the irrelevancy of college curriculums to Chicanas has led to recommendations for sociology and history courses specific to the

¹⁰³ Segura, "Slipping Through the Cracks," 200-204.

experience of Mexican-American women. With culture and tradition stacked against them, Chicanas find educational success a daunting task.¹⁰⁴

One of the most distressing statistics of recent years is the fact that although Mexican-American educational levels and rates of high school graduation and college matriculation have improved overall, Chicanas remain below Mexican-American men in all measures of educational achievement. From the 1920s to the 1970s, Mexican-American males have improved more than Chicanas in the percentage that have graduated from a four-year college. By 1976, only half of Chicanas were graduating from high school and Mexican-American men were graduating from college at a rate three times that of Chicanas. Also, median incomes seem to be based more on gender than on educational achievement with Mexican-American men earning more from four years of elementary school than a Chicana with a high school diploma.¹⁰⁵

Denise Segura conducted interviews in the early 1990s with Chicanas trying to earn their GEDs with a program in San Francisco. *Servicios Educativos para Adelantar* (SEPA) helps high school drop-outs to realize their potential with a bilingual system that promotes cultural diversity, inventive teaching methods, positive teacher-student relations, and individualized instruction. Most of the students were typically low achievers in high school and were funneled into semiskilled occupations after dropping out. Citing problems with apathetic teachers and counselors, language barriers, working while in school, and monocultural curriculums, these Chicanas became a forgotten

¹⁰⁴ Alfredo Mirandé and Evangelina Enriquez, *La Chicana: The Mexican-American Woman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 130-140.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 123-130.

statistic of drop-outs. Hoping to fulfill their original educational dreams, Mexican-American women attend programs such as SEPA to gain access to better jobs.¹⁰⁶

Mexican-Americans struggle daily with the apathetic attitude of school personnel toward culture and language and minority students, in general. Counselors rarely place Chicanas in college preparatory classes or courses that might assist these students to acquire higher status jobs. Instead, placement tests relegate Mexican-Americans to less challenging classes, a practice which serves to keep minority students segregated from Anglo-Americans. Ill-trained teachers remain indifferent to the learning experience of Chicanas, passing them whether or not they have mastered the course materials. Many of the Chicanas in the Segura study reported feeling like their teachers expected very little of them academically, and the students would begin to withdraw from classes to avoid humiliation and teacher detachment. Chicanas in this sample felt that they experienced fewer instances of positive feedback in an academic environment than did males, and they were almost never given praise for their intelligence or participation. The Chicanas that managed to graduate frequently leave high school with low level academic skills, and those that attended college have a twenty percent drop out rate in the first year.¹⁰⁷

With insufficient bilingual education programs and a lack of language-training for entering students, Mexican-Americans often find themselves without a high school diploma. Low educational achievement by Mexican-American students affects their social mobility and occupational options later in life.

¹⁰⁶ Segura, "Slipping Through the Cracks," 200-211.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 200-211.

CHAPTER IV

BURDENS AND BOONS: MEXICAN-AMERICAN EMPLOYMENT

It has been said that Mexican immigrant labor “built the Southwest,” and this indeed seems to be true since Mexican-Americans have had a hand in transportation, food production, and mining operations.¹⁰⁸ But workers of Mexican origin have struggled for social and economic mobility, forced to contend with discriminatory employment practices and the occupational marginalization that often results from low academic achievement. Through labor organizations and unions, Mexican-Americans have endeavored to improve their working conditions and their occupational prestige. Chicanas have organized as well, fighting the triple oppression of gender, race, and class, while trying to simultaneously maintain the Mexican-American family.

From Fields to Factories: The History of Mexican-American Employment

At the start of the twentieth century, Mexican immigrants held seasonal, transient jobs with long hours and low wages. Most Mexican-Americans worked in the agricultural industries or with the railroad. Their low wages did not allow them to strike for extended periods of time, and they were excluded from most unions. Instead of accomplishing their goals of increased wages and controlled work hours, Mexican-American workers were exploited as strikebreakers. By 1910, little had changed. In a Report of the Immigration Commission Mexican-Americans were shown to be the ethnic

¹⁰⁸ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 141.

group with the least pay and the most chance of deportation because of the temporary nature of their occupations.¹⁰⁹

World War I led the American Federation of Labor to see Mexicans as a threat to Anglos in terms of receiving employment, especially concerning the lowered wages and labor shortages brought on by cheap Mexican labor. The United States Department of Labor brought 20,000 Mexicans across the border to work in 1919, half in agriculture and the other half on the railroads.¹¹⁰ From 1917-1920, immigration from Mexico continued to increase because of the intense need for workers in the Southwest. By the economic downturn of 1921, Anglo-Americans were blaming Mexican-Americans for helping to create the unemployment crisis.¹¹¹

The Great Depression dealt a significant blow to immigration as well as to the Mexican-Americans already residing in the United States. Mexican-Americans were excluded from jobs and blamed for the country's economic difficulties. They found little solace in the New Deal, as Public Works projects rarely involved the agricultural areas in which most Mexican-Americans worked. Half of the Mexican-Americans in Texas worked on farms and fifteen percent were sharecroppers. At the start of the Depression, many were forced through necessity or Anglo-American brutality to return to Mexico. The Texas Rangers killed and imprisoned strikers, and agricultural corporations "made a sham of any semblance of human rights."¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 154-158.

¹¹⁰ Romo, "Responses to Mexican Immigration," 183-187.

¹¹¹ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 185-189.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 199, 208-209.

When pecan manufacturers cut wages in February of 1938, thousands of pecan shellers in San Antonio, Texas, led a strike. After walking off the job and striking for over a month, the pecan shellers gained a monetary settlement, even without the support of local organizations, officials and religious institutions. Soon after, the Fair Labor Standards Act of June 1938 was passed and seemed like a victory for minority workers. The new act set a minimum wage for workers, leading to a quickening of the agricultural industry's move toward mechanization. Automation of the pecan shelling process soon ended the Mexican-American workers' dreams of good wages and fewer hours by terminating their employment.¹¹³

A labor shortage occurred during the years of World War II, brought on by the Japanese agricultural workers being sent to relocation camps and the urbanization of Mexican-American field workers. The Emergency Labor Program started to pull contracted Mexican workers directly from Mexico in 1942, and more than 200,000 laborers entered the United States by 1947. These *braceros* worked in the railroad and agricultural industries and provided American corporations with another means of breaking strikes and decreasing worker pay. Although the Mexican government attempted to protect itself and its citizens from exploitation, the United States failed to control the border in 1943, letting thousands of illegal immigrants pour into the Southwest.¹¹⁴

Major growers in Texas represented the most fervent opposition of the Emergency Labor Program. Initially refusing to allow regulation of their cheap Mexican

¹¹³ Rosenbaum, "The History of Mexican Americans," 68-69.

¹¹⁴ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 261-265.

labor, Texas agricultural companies started to request *braceros* in 1943 but were unsuccessful in attaining them until October of 1947. The Mexican government was wary of the racist attitudes of Texas Anglo-Americans even after attempts by the Texas governor to pass the Caucasian Race Resolution and the creation of the Good Neighbor Commission.¹¹⁵

As early as the Second World War, Mexican-Americans began to migrate away from the low wages, discrimination, and violence they had suffered in Texas. Many moved to the northwestern states, especially to Washington's Yakima Valley, while others drifted to the Midwest in search of jobs. The late 1940's brought a surge of migration with farm workers leaving in light of the incoming *braceros*. The more *braceros* that Texas contracted, the more Mexican-Americans migrated out of Texas. Those that remained leased farmland or migrated only during the growing season. The war forced many to work in service jobs and the oil industry in Texas, where discrimination continued, and Mexican-Americans struggled to stay employed.¹¹⁶

The *Bracero* agreement was renewed after the war, and the Mexican government remained unable to stem the flow of Mexican citizens across the border. At the same time, the United States gave fewer housing and wage guarantees to those that immigrated. In 1953, the United States renewed the contract on terms that failed to account for the wishes of the Mexican government. Threatening to open the border if Mexico did not comply, the United States refused to raise *bracero* wages, violating the negotiations called for by international law. By this time, the program had been

¹¹⁵ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 261-264.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 275-276.

institutionalized by Public Law 78 in 1951, but in the following years, mechanization, economic troubles, and the Mexican governments' resistance led the United States not to renew the *bracero* contract in 1964.¹¹⁷

The 1970s and 1980s saw a trend toward industry and factory work for Mexican-Americans. However, many Mexican-Americans have remained in agriculture. Nearly a sixth of Mexican-Americans in 1990 retaining agricultural occupations while other minorities have slightly more than one percent in the farming business.¹¹⁸

La Unión: Mexican-American Labor Organizations

The original form of organization that served the needs of Mexican-Americans was the *mutualista*, a group of citizens assisting each other with labor woes, financial needs and educational improvement. Their motto of "Patria, Unión y Beneficencia" showed their ethnic unity and gave a basis for their attempts at collective action. The *mutualista* began to fade as an organizational form as Mexican-Americans formed specialized groups, such as the Mexican Mutual Aid Association and the National Farm Labor Union.¹¹⁹

After forming in 1905 with the support of local Mexican-American workers, the Federal Labor Union led strikes in Laredo, Texas in 1906 and 1907. This was one of the first specialized labor groups. By the 1910s various groups worked for the rights of Mexican-American laborers. *La Union Transitoria* (The Transitory Union) was established in San Antonio in 1917 in the hopes of abolishing labor contracts, followed

¹¹⁷ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 265-266.

¹¹⁸ Barkan, *And Still They Come*, 163.

¹¹⁹ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 157.

in 1925 by the International Labor Defense (ILD), a Communist-based organization to defend minority workers in legal matters.¹²⁰ By the end of the 1920s, the *Unión Trabajadores del Valle Imperial* (Union Workers of the Imperial Valley) and the *Confederación de Uniones Obreras Mexicana* (Confederacion of Unified Mexican Workers) had formed in response to worker grievances. Most early strikes led by these groups failed because of the power of local officials and police.¹²¹

The 1930s saw a rise in union activity and strikes with actions against discrimination, long hours and low wages in agriculture, mining, and factory work. The Imperial Valley Strike in California, led by the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) in 1930, failed because of a split between the Agricultural Workers Industrial League (AWIL) and the Mexican Mutual Aid Association (MMAA). The MMAA included many illegal workers who disagreed with the Communist-led AWIL over the ideology and goals of the strike. More militant strikes began in 1931 led by the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (CAWIU) and in 1934 led by the Sheep Shearers' Union in Texas.¹²²

The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) formed in 1935 in response to the Wagner Act (National Labor Relations Act) and in opposition of the American Federation of Labor which excluded Mexican-American workers. The same year, migrant farm workers, nearly ninety percent of whom were of Mexican origin, started being recruited and given jobs by the Texas State Employment Service, undoubtedly a

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 156, 164, 199.

¹²¹ Stoddard, *Mexican Americans*, 185.

¹²² Acuña, *Occupied America*, 210-220.

reaction to the high unemployment level of the United States at that period in history. The Texas Agriculture Organizing Committee was created two years later to assist in the organization of farm laborers. In the late 1930s, *La Asociación de Jornaleros* (The Day Laborers' Association) organized and held a strike in Laredo, Texas, while *El Nogal* and the Pecan Shelling Workers Union of San Antonio protested wage cuts and working conditions for pecan shellers, many of whom were female Mexican-Americans.¹²³

The National Farm Labor Union (NFLU) became active in the 1940s and remained a force in agriculture until 1960 when their charter expired. In California, this union struck against the Di Giorgio Fruit Corporation in 1947, leading to the issuance of a report by the California Federation of Labor which claimed that the Mexican-American workers had no genuine complaints concerning labor conditions. The politicians involved with this report were found later to have issued the report to end the strike, regardless of the falsification of information that it entailed. During the 1950s, the NFLU fought against the Emergency Labor Program because of the ease with which growers used *braceros* as strikebreakers. By 1960, however, the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) had supplanted the failing NFLU.¹²⁴ From 1972 to 1974, workers at the Farah Garment Plants in El Paso, Texas, struck against the discrimination and injustices suffered at work. Eighty-five percent of the four thousand strikers were Chicanas, and they helped to organize the strike effort, including picketing

¹²³ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 199-225.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 272-275.

and demonstrations. They wanted changes in the maternity leave policy and the quota system of the Farah plants which negatively affected their ability to work.¹²⁵

“A Woman’s Work Is Never Done”: Chicanas in the Work Force¹²⁶

The capitalist economic system of the United States places the most importance on increased profits, with the interests of the workers being least important. This dichotomy causes class stratification which accounts for the different interests of middle class Anglo women and typically lower class Mexican-American females. While middle and upper class women focus on profits and maintaining the status quo, lower class women must put their energy into survival and hopefully changing their deplorable situation in life.¹²⁷

Although traditional gender roles relegated Chicanas to the dual occupation of mother and wife, many immigrant women were forced by economic circumstances to enter the workforce. Finding employment in the garment industry, food production, agriculture, and laundries, Mexican-American females suffered under the dual wage system with Anglo-American women earning more for equal work. Gustave Duerler, the “Pecan King,” preferred the labor of Mexican-American women because their wages were lower than the cost of mechanization, and by 1919, the Texas Industrial Welfare

¹²⁵ Laura E. Arroyo, “Industrial and Occupational Distribution of Chicana Workers,” In *Essays on La Mujer*, ed. Rosa Martínez Cruz (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Center Publications, 1977), 165-167.

¹²⁶ Tafolla, *To Split a Human*, 86.

¹²⁷ Rosaura Sánchez, “The Chicana Labor Force,” In *Essays on La Mujer*, ed. Rosaura Sánchez (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Center Publications, 1977), 5-6.

Commission in El Paso showed Chicanas to be the “lowest-paid and most vulnerable workers in the city.”¹²⁸

During the Depression, sixteen percent of Mexican-American women were working outside the home to help support their families. Young women stayed with their families to care for younger siblings or worked instead of attending school to avoid economic crisis. Nearly eighty percent of Chicanas were forced to toil in industrial occupations because of the dual discrimination of gender and race faced when attempting to find other jobs. The deplorable work conditions which Chicanas endured led to a significant number of strikes in the turbulent 1930s.¹²⁹

During the 1930s, a fifth of agricultural workers were part of strikes, and in factory work, many Chicanas joined the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA) as well as the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU). By 1939, ILGWU memberships had reached almost 1500, with more than eighty percent of these Chicanas. Organizations such as these led strikes against San Antonio garment industries, including Dorothy Frocks Company, Shirlee Frock Company, and A.B. Frank Plan. This series of Texas strikes were relatively successful with the first agreeing to a worker contract, the second instituting a minimum wage, and the third stopping production for lack of workers. At the Finck Cigar Company, a strike in 1933, led by Mrs. W.H. Ernst brought federal mediators to resolve

¹²⁸ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 168.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 170, 225. Barkan, *And Still They Come*, 28.

the issues of the workers. However, each time they struck over the next few years, the mediators would come and when they left, union leaders would be fired.¹³⁰

World War II stopped organizational efforts for a decade, but by the 1950s and 1960s women were striking against large corporations once again. Georgia Montalbe and Sophie Gonzales led a walk-out in San Antonio in 1959. They managed to strike in protest of working conditions and wages at the Tex-Son garment industry for three years before the ranks of strikers dissolved. The role of women in affecting change became internationally known after the "Salt of the Earth" strike in New Mexico.¹³¹ During this strike, the workers at the Empire Zinc and Grant Company in New Mexico stopped production from October of 1950 to January of 1952 in protest of the treatment of Mexican-American workers. The National Guard was called in, and when workers were banned from picketing, the wives and mothers of Grant County began to protest and block the road to the mines. Although the company finally settled, the Mexican-American workers received only a few of their requests and many, including the members of the women's auxiliary, were forced to serve time in jail for their participation in the strike.¹³²

Society's concept of work has often led women to see their duties as secondary to the careers of men. Household chores and the caretaker role are given little status, no pay, and a complete lack of recognition. Thus, when circumstances force mothers, wives and single women to seek outside employment, they are really adding a second

¹³⁰ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 221-224.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 278.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 277-279.

job. These workers face guilt over their insufficient time spent mothering and cleaning, over their inability to fit the mold of a “good wife and mother.” Unfortunately, Mexican-American women add another level of guilt with the need to follow the norms of familial importance and gender roles in Mexican-American society.¹³³

Chicanas have traditionally been concentrated in blue collar jobs, with only a small percentage in the white collar category. At the end of the 1960s, nearly half of working Chicanas in Texas were in the blue collar sector, while less than forty percent worked in the white collar sector. Most of the Chicanas holding white collar jobs were in office and clerical work. Those in the blue collar sector occupied industries involving textiles and food production. Texas Chicanas also held nearly fourteen percent of the service jobs at that time.¹³⁴ By the beginning of the 1980s, Chicanas remained in menial jobs with only about eight percent reaching the professional and managerial level of employment. Their wages were lower than Chicanos and Anglo women, showing the combined effects of race and gender. Their families, if the Chicana was in the role of breadwinner, fell below the poverty level with only \$7,000 a year incomes.¹³⁵

Many eligible Chicanas have remained unemployed in the United States because of cultural and educational issues. At the end of the 1970s, Chicano women suffered from a fourteen percent unemployment rate, a number explained by a lack of education and English-language skills, as well as discrimination at work. However, Mexican-American women hold jobs at a rate of over forty percent of the Chicana population, a

¹³³ Tafolla, *To Split a Human*, 85-91.

¹³⁴ Arroyo, “Industrial and Occupational Distribution,” 152-160.

¹³⁵ Tafolla, *To Split a Human*, 85-91.

number higher than most other Hispanic groups. Chicanas earned an average income of less than \$3500 in 1977, with less than four percent earning more than \$10,000 yearly.¹³⁶ When Mexican-American families are led by women more than fifteen percent of the time, this low earning level leads to poverty for more than half of the families.¹³⁷

Triple oppression, a term signifying the “unique class, race, and gender subordination of women of color,” has been used to explain wage differentials and a lack of occupational opportunity for Chicanas in the United States.¹³⁸ The effects of this oppression have shown that although the occupational status and earning potential of Anglo women has improved, Chicanas have gained little from the women’s liberation movement. Though more are employed, Chicanas remain in menial jobs, with many working as secretaries and domestic workers.¹³⁹ By 1980, Chicanas in California who worked outside of the home nearly equaled that of Anglo women. This fact demonstrates significant growth in the participation of Chicanas in the labor market.¹⁴⁰

Triple oppression is also apparent in the yearly wages of Chicanas which remain below those of Mexican-American men and Anglos. By the 1980s, little had changed in the distribution of occupations among Chicanas with most still working in clerical and service jobs and less than fourteen percent in white-collar jobs. Chicanas earned fifty cents for every dollar an Anglo man received. In addition, Chicanas showed a high rate of unemployment often because of job instability. This instability is a result of the

¹³⁶ Mirandé and Enriquez, *La Chicana*, 118-123.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

¹³⁸ Denise A. Segura, “Chicanas and Triple Oppression in the Labor Force,” in *Chicana Voices: Intersections of Class, Race, and Gender*, ed. Teresa Córdova (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 47.

¹³⁹ Mirandé and Enriquez, *La Chicana*, 130-131.

¹⁴⁰ Segura, “Triple Oppression,” 47-54.

concentration of Chicanas in jobs easily affected by economic changes. Division-of-labor within the home mirrors that of Mexican-American males and females in the work force with women remaining subordinate to men. This points to gender role socialization as a major reason for the low employment status of Chicanas.¹⁴¹

With the rise in working Chicanas comes a reassessment of the needs of children and spouses. Chicanas are realizing that traditional jobs are not always the best for the individual's skills and psychological needs and often add stress to marriages and lifestyles that do not fit the prescribed roles. Chicanas must now consider their safety, working amongst pesticides or dangerous factory equipment. They are refused the financial assistance of Social Security because they are filed under their husbands' or fathers' names. Strikes in El Paso, Texas, have shown the efforts of Chicanas to improve their working conditions with little success.¹⁴²

With over forty percent of married Chicanas working in 1982, the domination-submission traditional model of marriage might no longer be widely applicable in Mexican-American families. Although many have explained the move toward a more egalitarian marriage structure as the result of acculturation, Lea Ybarra suggests instead that this change has occurred in reaction to economic and occupational changes within the family and society.¹⁴³ Generally speaking, employment of wives and mothers usually leads to a minimal increase in the husband's care giving and household duties, and this is almost exclusively the result of full-time, not part-time work. Also, decision-

¹⁴¹ Segura, "Triple Oppression," 54-61.

¹⁴² Tafolla, *To Split a Human*, 85-98.

¹⁴³ Lea Ybarra, "When Wives Work: The Impact on the Chicano Family," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 44, no .1 (February 1982), 169-171.

making seems to become more a shared task when the wife works outside the home. While the conjugal role patterns of Mexican-American families still show great variation, female employment seems to push the family toward a joint-role structure. Most Mexican-American males, when interviewed, admit that household duties should be shared if the wife is employed, and more than half said the same in the case of a housewife. Wives that do not work outside the home reported a lack of paternal participation in childrearing activities.¹⁴⁴

Nearly eighty percent of the Mexican-American men and women felt that women could juggle the triple role of working woman, wife and mother, but more men than women felt this could not be accomplished. Working Chicanas and Mexican-American men with working wives looked on the experience and its affect on the family more positively than housewives or their husbands. This tendency to rationalize an employed wife as positive probably is because of the necessity of the situation, while most expressions of negativity stemmed from the thought that children suffered when their mother was employed. Psychologically speaking, Chicanas enjoy the independence and financial status that working gives them, and most found value from this role as they did from the nurturer role.¹⁴⁵

Occupational prestige, which helps to indicate success level in the labor market, does not travel across cultures. Because of language differences and the need to acculturate to new labor market practices, occupational prestige must be negotiated after immigration to the United States. This task proves especially difficult for immigrant

¹⁴⁴ Ybarra, "When Wives Work," 171-177.

¹⁴⁵ Ybarra, "When Wives Work," 171-177.

women over the age of twenty-five because their educational attainment and employment status reflect the cultural norms of their native country. Also, these women are usually finished with their educations, a fact which makes re-training more difficult. Using variables such as educational attainment, occupation inheritance, age, seasonality of employment, regional location, citizenship, and gender, Hode-Siegel-Rossi prestige scores were assigned to Cuban immigrant men and women and Mexican immigrant men and women. The group of interest, Mexican-American females, had a score of twenty-five, showing a lower occupational prestige than the other three groups. This can be explained by U.S. experience not being as lucrative in many of the occupations held by Chicanas, familial responsibility and gender roles that prevent upward mobility, and the lack of acceptability of foreign credentials and education levels.¹⁴⁶

Through the efforts of strikers and labor organizations, Mexican-American employment options and wages have improved during the twentieth century. Chicanas, though, remain unable to overcome the triple oppression of race, class, and gender, staying in careers with low wages and low status.

¹⁴⁶ Teresa A. Sullivan, "The Occupational Prestige of Women Immigrants: A Comparison of Cubans and Mexicans," *International Migration Review*, Women in Migration 18, no. 4 (Winter 1984), 1045-1062.

CHAPTER V

THEN AND NOW: MEXICAN-AMERICAN CULTURAL ISSUES

Immigration economist, George Borjas, has suggested the idea of “declining quality” as the reasoning behind many of the problems facing Mexican-Americans. According to Borjas, Mexicans, because of their high rate of immigration and low level of formal education upon entry into the United States, have brought about a lower rate of financial solvency. In other words, without an increase in income to match the increase in Mexican immigrants, Mexican-American children will find social and economic mobility nearly as difficult as their parents did after immigrating.¹⁴⁷ In addition to these financial arguments, cultural issues concerning the Mexican-American family and Anglo-American racism, have significantly affected the success of Mexican-Americans in the United States.

“No Mexicans Allowed”: Racism and Segregation in the Twentieth Century¹⁴⁸

Minorities in the United States have faced racism and segregation since before the signing of the Constitution. The waves of immigrants in the eighteenth century had continued the tradition of racism that had previously been directed toward the black slaves. The twentieth century brought little change for minority populations, including Mexican-Americans. Signs that read “No Mexicans Allowed” hung in public establishments throughout the Southwest, symbols of the segregation that remained institutionalized into the 1920s and 1930s. Mexican-Americans, regardless of citizenship or class status, were barred from entering theaters, swimming pools, and

¹⁴⁷ Trueba, “The Education of Mexican Immigrant Children,” 262-263.

¹⁴⁸ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 143.

many other public facilities. By World War II, Texas remained publicly segregated in 150 towns, regardless of the veteran status of many Mexican-Americans.¹⁴⁹

Forced by necessity to construct their own restaurants, grocery stores, and theaters, Mexican-American communities, often called *barrios*, formed. Fed by the nearly constant stream of immigrants from Mexico, the *barrios* provided Mexican-Americans with a cultural haven. Within the confines of these urban communities, Mexican-Americans could practice Catholicism, speak Spanish, and share their ethnic identity in a way that they could not among the majority population. Another aspect of barrio life that appealed to Mexican-Americans was the feeling that although they all had to deal with racism in their work and their schools, within their community they were safer from the hostility of Anglo-Americans.¹⁵⁰

Nativists fought against the growing population of Mexican-Americans with arguments pointing to the inferiority of the Mexican race. The majority of the population of the United States followed the Protestant faith, and the fervent Catholicism of Mexican-Americans frightened those that opposed religious melding and change. Nativists also charged that many of the immigrants from Mexico were radical in their political stances, which might cause an upheaval in American government as the Mexican-American numbers grew.¹⁵¹ Labor arguments came to the forefront during the 1920s as Mexican-American populations were rapidly expanding. Nativists called for immigration restrictions, claiming that the family farm system of the southwestern states

¹⁴⁹ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 143, 260; Trueba, "The Education of Mexican Immigrant Children," 253.

¹⁵⁰ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 235.

¹⁵¹ Rosenbaum, "The History of Mexican Americans," 67-69.

would disintegrate under the onslaught of corporate growers and their ranks of Mexican laborers. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) complained that Mexican-Americans would take needed jobs, causing unemployment to increase.¹⁵²

Corporate growers that relied on Mexican immigrant labor attempted to convince the United States government that restricting the influx of Mexican immigrants would lead to the failure of federally funded agricultural operations. Large growers also claimed that manual labor was not a desired profession for Anglo-Americans, and Mexican-Americans were biologically pre-disposed to this sort of work. When labor arguments did not completely convince the American public and legislators of the positive nature of Mexican immigration, growers threatened to turn to less desirable racial groups, such as Puerto Ricans, to fill the labor need in the Southwest. Mexicans were promoted for their “docility” and their relatively low wages compared with other racial groups, including Anglo-Americans.¹⁵³

Nativists, in turn, used racial arguments as their basis for immigration restriction. They appealed to the ideal of purity, claiming that the Spanish and Indian blood of Mexicans should not be mixed with the Nordic blood of Anglos. Miscegenation remained absolutely taboo in the United States, and nativists feared the creation of “mongrels” that would deteriorate America’s racial purity.¹⁵⁴ Citing the fact that Mexican-Americans had more children than Anglo-American women, nativists pointed

¹⁵² Mark Reisler, “Always the Laborer, Never the Citizen: Anglo Perceptions of the Mexican Immigrant during the 1920s,” in *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigrants in the United States*, ed. David G. Gutiérrez (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1996), 33-36.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 33-36.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 30-32.

out how Mexican women were beginning to immigrate at a rate that would allow them to affect the nation's racial makeup.

In Mexican culture, marital status of women is validated by the presence of children, which allows them to fulfill their traditional role as mother. While Chicanas that participated in the American labor force or attained high levels of education showed a trend toward fewer children, rural Mexican-Americans continued to have large families during the 1900s. Chicanas marry earlier and want more children in their marriages than do Anglo women, a feeling demonstrated by a 1974 statistic showing Mexican families had an average of five people and nearly half of Mexican-American women expected to produce five or more children.¹⁵⁵ Because of this high rate of fertility, racist politicians pushed for immigration quotas to impede the social division growing between Anglo-Americans and Mexican-Americans. They feared the creation of a racial group similar to the slaves, as an inferior caste that threatens the homogeneity of the American population. Those who favored restriction even claimed that Mexicans, especially those with Indian ancestry were indecent and dirty, and the concerns of "race biology" should provide the basis for restriction.¹⁵⁶

Educational achievement, which affects the employment options and psychological well-being of Mexican-Americans, suffers from segregation and racism. From the beginning of formal schooling, Mexican-American students that are not fluent

¹⁵⁵ Sánchez, "The Chicana Labor Force," 13.

¹⁵⁶ Reisler, "Always the Laborer," 31-33; Rina Alcalay, "Hispanic Women in the United States: Family and Work Relations," In *Latino Employment, Labor Organizations and Immigration*, ed. Antoinette Sedillo López (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), 127; Sánchez, "The Chicana Labor Force," 12-13.

in English are at a severe disadvantage. Life in the *barrios* leaves Mexican-Americans ill-prepared for academic work. These students become marginalized as a result of their linguistic isolation, a situation not helped by their lack of cultural literacy. Like their parents, many Mexican-American children are unsuccessful in navigating the complex social system of the United States, causing them to drop out or fall behind their peers. Their identity becomes an issue as they receive mixed messages concerning their cultural norms and language. Often this confusion leads to isolation or rejection of Mexican culture to attempt to fit into the majority culture. Mexican-American students often feel like outsiders in both their parents' culture and Anglo-American culture. Without a sense of belonging, academic as well as social skills suffer. Successful Mexican-American students show a tendency toward cultural appreciation, as well as social flexibility. While independent, they maintain positive relationships with their families and the Church. These students also show an ability to survive in both cultures, while preserving their connections with their ethnic group and its culture.¹⁵⁷

Sociocultural issues are often exacerbated by the poverty in Mexican-American communities, brought on by low wage occupations, the cost of immigrating, and high urban taxes. This situation can lead to malnourishment, dysfunctional family life, and parental neglect. The lack of available welfare forces Mexican-American parents to work long hours to provide for their children, while the deficiency of child care in urban areas leaves children without parental supervision and guidance. In an attempt to survive social isolation, many Mexican-American teenagers join local gangs or drop out

¹⁵⁷ Trueba, "The Education of Mexican Immigrant Children," 268.

of school in order to gain independence through employment. The combination of poverty and cultural rejection can force some families to migrate back to Mexico for the remainder of their child's education.¹⁵⁸

Gender Roles within the Mexican-American Family

The Mexican-American family in the United States has been viewed by the majority Anglo population as one of male dominance and female subservience. This concept of patriarchal marriage stems from the male-female patterns of behavior among the unions of Indian women and Spanish conquistadores. Mary, the virgin mother, was used as the ideal example of a woman's behavior, leading to women being classified as good (subservient mother and wife) or bad (independent, self-serving) with no gray area.¹⁵⁹ Chicana mothers must traditionally remain self-sacrificing and even if they become employed during their lifetimes, they often endeavor to hold a job that extends this nonassertive role. In many cases, the Mexican culture pushes female Mexican-Americans to view marriage as some sort of outlet for their nurturing needs, a way to gain financial insurance and personal security. However, using this role structure to judge contemporary Mexican-American families can overlook the importance of the Chicanas.¹⁶⁰

Mexican-American mothers are important to family survival, especially after immigration to the United States. They become integral in preserving the Mexican culture and Spanish language of their family, while staying in touch with extended

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 257-260.

¹⁵⁹ Alcalay, "Hispanic Women in the United States," 124.

¹⁶⁰ Betty Garcia-Bahne, "La Chicana and the Chicano Family," In *Essays on La Mujer*, ed. Rosaura Sánchez (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Center Publications, 1977), 37-41.

family in Mexico and within the United States.¹⁶¹ The extended family in Mexican culture lives in close proximity to the nuclear family with each sharing responsibilities in communication and child care. The frequent inability of immigrant families to utilize their ties to extended family in Mexico for assistance during difficult times can cause health problems for Mexican-American housewives and working women. In addition, in Mexico, women are respected for their mothering abilities, and even those with careers receive more functional support in the form of day care and maternity leave. Added to the cohesiveness and assistance of the extended family, these support systems help Mexican mothers to deal with the stress of raising large families, especially while working outside the home.¹⁶²

In the United States, the Mexican-American family as a unit suffers from the rigid institution of societal norms, including the needs of a capitalist society. Chicana sexuality may only be expressed within the marriage, and single mothers are excluded from the ideal of a “good mother.” A large degree of independence on the part of Mexican-American females is usually seen as a masculine trait, moving too far from the established mode of conduct. Their responsibility to their families keeps many Chicanas from questioning their cooperation with and obedience to their husbands. The conformity advocated by the Mexican culture also emphasized masculinity versus femininity. Many Mexican-American women, however, are crossing that divide, becoming more “masculine” by working outside of traditional female roles.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Trueba, “The Education of Mexican Immigrant Children,” 265.

¹⁶² Alcalay, “Hispanic Women in the United States,” 125-127.

¹⁶³ Garcia-Bahne, “La Chicana,” 40-44.

While the lack of institutionalized support in the United States can cause familial problems, many Mexican-American women benefit from the independence of working outside the home. Their employment as a result of family need or single motherhood can lead to a renegotiation of gender roles and responsibilities within the family structure. Most Chicanas remain the primary housekeeper even if they are employed, but their ability to earn wages leads them to want some control in financial decisions. The idea of the dominant male explains the unwillingness of some Mexican-American men to let young mothers work as it shows them to be unable to properly provide for his family. However, family survival often depends upon the wages brought in by Chicanas, and traditional gender roles must be set aside.¹⁶⁴

Chicanas in the Chicano Movement

As the Chicano student movement began to take shape in the 1960s, Chicanas worked alongside the men. However, most Mexican-American women found themselves in traditional roles without leadership positions or a say in Movement activities. Chicanas were relegated to jobs that were unrecognized by the general Movement population, and they were usually seen in relation to a male relative or friend in the Movement. The mixed feelings of Mexican-American women toward these assigned sex roles within the Movement became evident in 1969 when only a small contingent of Chicanas questioned traditional role limitations at the Chicano Youth Conference. The remaining Chicanas at the meeting were not supportive of this voice of change, and the charges were not even considered in light of this lack of unity among

¹⁶⁴ Barkan, *And Still They Come*, 96, 129-130.

Chicanas. Many Chicanas remained non-participatory because of fear in breaking away from traditional roles and dividing the existing Chicano movement.¹⁶⁵

For those Chicanas who desired change, Chicana-led student and community groups emerged in the early 1970s, in response to the male refusal of equal roles in the Movement. In some of the Chicano student organizations Chicanas were given token leadership roles with titles but little power. This helped to prevent a threat to the control of Mexican-American males over Movement activities and goals. Those that broke away to groups that expressed their specific needs and desires as Mexican-American women were labeled as “Las Chicanas con pantalones” and were often referred to as “lesbians.”¹⁶⁶ California saw the most growth of Chicana-based organizations during this time with groups forming on campuses such as San Diego State University and Stanford University. The National Chicana Political Caucus and the *Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional* (National Mexican Women’s Commission) worked to organize conferences to address the issues facing Mexican-American women.¹⁶⁷

In Houston, Texas, the First National Chicana Conference of 1971 solidified Chicana goals of Church opposition, marriage role reevaluation, control of sexually-related issues, and improvements in Chicana education and employment. Awareness of the needs of Chicanas became more evident as conferences, such as the Chicana Regional Conference and *La Conferencia Femenil* were held in California. However, a split occurred during the Houston conference, leading many Chicanas to denounce the

¹⁶⁵ Sonia A. López, “The Role of the Chicana Within the Student Movement,” In *Essays on La Mujer*, ed. Rosaura Sánchez (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Center Publications, 1977), 16-24.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 24-27.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 24-27.

original resolutions and instead push for political work that allowed women to remain in their traditional role as wife and mother. Led by Francisca Flores, this offshoot of the conference discussed their own resolutions separately, and Flores went on to formed Chicana Service Action Center to help *barrio* women deal with poverty. In 1973, Flores actively opposed the Talmadge Amendment which required women on welfare to work but did not provide for day care.¹⁶⁸

During these conferences sexual issues were called to the attention of Chicana groups, and priority was given to education about rape, abortion and sterilization. After *Roe v. Wade* (1973), Chicanas called for federal funding to assist poverty-stricken women in getting abortions, if desired. Chicanas attempted to educate Mexican-American males about the seriousness of rape as a crime against women. Involuntary sterilizations were performed in large numbers by public hospitals in an attempt to limit the number of Mexican-origin children in the United States. Chicanas worked to stop this gross misuse of power and mockery of human rights. By organizing themselves, Mexican-American women were resolving issues of gender bias, sexual rights, and cultural limitations.¹⁶⁹

The Chicano Movement began in response to the racism, segregation and inequality of opportunity experienced by so many Mexican-Americans. Success in American society has required Mexican-Americans to reevaluate gender roles within their families as well as within the Movement. In addition, the Chicano movement has

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 24-29; Acuña, *Occupied America*, 394-395.

¹⁶⁹ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 395-396.

given Chicanas a greater awareness of the issues that affect them under the double bind of gender and ethnicity.

CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

An historical perspective on contemporary issues shows that little has changed for Mexican-Americans. As a group, they continue to face *de facto* segregation, inequality of educational opportunity, and discrimination in the workforce. Nearly every source concerning Mexican-Americans suggests areas for future research, demonstrating the dearth of information about Mexican-Americans relative to the majority population. Without more thorough investigation into the positive and negative effects of various factors on the lives of Mexican-American men and women, legislators, local officials, and other citizens cannot comprehensively ameliorate the current situation.

In the area of education, the sociological, cultural, and psychological effects of the education system in the United States should be considered. More specifically, what causes so many young Mexican-Americans to drop out of school? Are their cultural values to blame, or are the institutional practices of American schools causing this phenomenon? More Mexican-Americans are graduating from high school and attending college, and a focus on the conditions which have led to this improvement is necessary. Affirmative action should be explored in relation to Mexican-Americans, specifically to realize benefits and consequences of the program at colleges and universities. How much does the current lack of sensitivity to cultural issues within the administration and teaching staff of many schools across the country affect the educational achievement of Mexican-American students?¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Trueba, "The Education of Mexican-American Children," 254.

Also to be considered are the effects of education in the United States on the self-image of Mexican-American students. They are likely to feel torn between the culture of their parents and the culture surrounding them. How does this feeling lead to isolation and/or rejection of Mexican culture? Low educational achievement brings some parents to take their school-age children back to Mexico. This cultural change should be examined in terms of differential achievement in Mexican schools, as well as the effects of reverse acculturation and socio-psychological upheaval.¹⁷¹

Female employment outside the home brings to the forefront questions about structural changes within the Mexican-American family. A shift of focus is also required before these alterations can be understood. Studies on this topic have tended to take into account the idea of machismo, a traditional view which may no longer be correct in American society.¹⁷² Chicana employment should be studied from the perspective of the relegation of household duties, including cleaning, cooking, and child care. Does the employment of Chicanas result in a more egalitarian marriage structure? Also, does working outside the home give Mexican-American wives more power and prestige with their husbands? The effects of a female's employment on her children have been largely ignored, tending to focus on the effects on the female herself. How does a Mexican-American child's mother working negatively and positively affect the child's psychological (adjustment, attachment) and physical (nutrition, playing behaviors) growth?¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Trueba, "The Education of Mexican-American Children," 267.

¹⁷² Ybarra, "When Wives Work," 170-171.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 170.

In order for the legislation of the twentieth century to have great effect on the Mexican-American population, it must be enforced. The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 should be reevaluated to judge the usefulness of bilingual programs. English as a Second Language (ESL) programs should be scrutinized in terms of methods and the effects on a child's overall academic achievement. IQ and placement tests need to be evaluated for majority population slants, and programs like SEPA should be assessed for their ability to help Chicana drop-outs in gaining higher status employment. Youth employment programs deserve special attention to decide if they hinder academic success. Ethnic studies courses should become available at major universities and colleges, in order to support bicultural education. In addition, discrimination and civil rights laws for minority workers need enforcement, especially in areas where small numbers of Chicanas work. And because fear and hatred are often the products of a lack of cultural understanding, the American public should be educated about the benefits of Mexican culture within our society.

Without these changes, the history of Mexican-Americans has taught us nothing. Appreciation of their culture, as well as equality of opportunity in education and employment will pave the way for Mexican-American achievement. Otherwise, those who emigrate from Mexico will continue to unsuccessfully chase the "American Dream."

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