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Immigrant Replenishment and the Continuing Significance of Ethnicity and Race: The Case of the Mexican-origin Population

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the effect of immigrant replenishment on ethnic identity formation by considering the case of the Mexican-origin population. The literature on immigration, race and ethnicity largely assumes that the symbolic, optional, and consequence-free nature of ethnic identity found among white ethnics is a function of the measures of assimilation that sociologists commonly deploy: socioeconomic status, residential location, language abilities, and intermarriage. But this literature fails to adequately explain the role of immigration patterns in the formation of ethnic identity. Using 123 in-depth interviews with latter-generation Mexican Americans in Garden City, Kansas and Santa Maria, California, cities with large latter-generation Mexican American and Mexican immigrant populations, this paper explores the ways that Mexican immigrant replenishment shapes the social boundaries that distinguish Mexican Americans from other groups. Findings suggest that immigration patterns are central to understanding identity formation after the immigrant generation. Mexican immigrant replenishment sharpens these boundaries through the indirect effects of nativism, by contributing to the continuing significance of race in the lives of Mexican Americans, and by refreshing rigid expectations about ethnic authenticity that Mexican Americans face. This paper also illuminates the role that declining immigration waves played in the onset of a symbolic, optional, and consequence-free form of ethnic identity among white ethnics.

INTRODUCTION

The growth of the immigrant population in recent decades has raised questions about whether today's immigrants and their descendents will integrate into Americans society. Social scientists often frame their questions by comparing today's immigrants to the large wave of European immigrants that came to the U.S. during a previous era (Foner 2000). With respect to the latter, their assimilation seems unremarkable from today's standpoint, but perhaps more like a "miracle" (Greeley 1976) considering the inferior place they once occupied in American society (Higham 1963 [1955]; Roediger 2005). For the European immigrants and their children, ethnicity and indeed race once significantly structured daily life, determining access to schools, labor unions, marriage partners, neighborhoods, and their quotidian interactions with the native-born population (Higham 1963 [1955]; Jacobson 1998; Roediger 2005).

Yet, with the birth of each new generation in the United States, race and ethnicity for these "white ethnics" declined in salience. The structural aspect of their assimilation – movement out of ethnically concentrated neighborhoods, college attendance, intergenerational gains in occupational status, and most significantly, exogamy – ultimately led to a thinning of ethnicity's importance in their lives (Alba 1990; Gordon 1964; Waters 1990). Today, the ethnic identity of white ethnics is largely symbolic, characterized by "a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior" (Gans 1979: 9). Indeed, it is a consequence-free, aspect of their social identity that they invoke optionally (Waters 1990).

Social scientists have largely assumed that the symbolic, optional, and consequence-free nature of ethnic identity is a function of the measures of assimilation that sociologists commonly deploy: socioeconomic status, residential location, language abilities, and intermarriage (Waters and Jiménez 2005). But this assumption fails to adequately explain the role that immigration patterns play in ethnic identity formation. The symbolic, optional, and consequence-free ethnic identity witnessed among white ethnics today formed against a backdrop of radically reduced levels of immigration. World War I, restrictive immigration laws passed in 1924, the onslaught of the Great Depression in 1930, and World War II combined to slow European immigration to a trickle. The virtual cessation of European immigration meant that each generation born after the immigrant generation came of age in an American society that was decidedly less immigrant in character and these American-born ethnics had less contact with individuals who carried a "thicker" (Cornell and Hartmann 1998) form of ethnic identity. Yet, the literature on immigration, race, and ethnicity is relatively silent on explaining *how* the halt of immigration contributed to the racial and ethnic identity formation of white ethnics. Hitherto, social scientists have merely asserted that immigration patterns affect ethnic identity (Alba and Nee 2003; Massey 1995) or their claims about its effect are wrapped in polemical arguments about immigration restriction (Huntington 2004).

The lack of explicit theorizing is perhaps due to the dearth of sociological research on the ethnic identity formation of latter-generation individuals from groups that experience large scale immigrant replenishment.[1] If ethnic identity takes a symbolic, optional form after immigration ceases, what form does it take when the immigrant population is replenished? This paper takes up this question by considering the case of the Mexican-origin population in the United States. The paper is primarily concerned with the effect of immigrant replenishment on the boundaries

[1] Mia Tuan's (1998) analysis of latter-generation Japanese and Chinese origin Americans is a notable exception. However, her analysis demonstrates the ways in which immigration from all Asian countries (not just Japan and China) shapes her respondents' ethnic identity.

that distinguish ethnic groups as opposed to the cultural "stuff" the boundaries enclose (Barth 1969). Ethnic boundaries are perceived differences between groups based notions of ethnic and racial difference. In practice ethnic boundaries provide a basis on which individuals distinguish "us" from "them."

I argue that immigrant replenishment is a significant factor determining ethnic identity formation among latter-generation individuals and in shaping the extent to which ethnicity is a symbolic, optional and consequence-free aspect of identity. Employing interviews with latter-generation Mexican Americans in Garden City, Kansas and Santa Maria, California, and participant observation in these two locales, I show that although Mexican Americans exhibit significant signs of structural assimilation, the influx of Mexican immigrants sharpen the boundaries that distinguish Mexican Americans from non-Mexicans, and even highlight boundaries between respondents and Mexican immigrants and their children. The boundaries that immigrant replenishment sharpens restrict the extent to which Mexican Americans' ethnic identity is symbolic, optional, and consequence-free in comparison to their white ethnic counterparts.

The data reveal three significant ways in which respondents experience these boundaries. The first is when Mexican Americans experience the indirect effects of nativism aimed at immigrants. Mexican immigrants are the primary targets of anti-immigrant antipathy, and expressions of this antipathy has the indirect effect of sharpening the group-differentiating boundaries that circumscribe all people of Mexican-descent, including Mexican Americans. Second, Mexican immigrant replenishment refreshes the salience of race in the lives of Mexican Americans. In a context of heavy Mexican immigration skin-color serves as a cue of ancestry, nativity, and in some case, legal status. Mexican Americans' experience of race is largely defined by instances in which they are mistaken for immigrants. Even Mexican Americans with lighter skin are marked by non-Mexicans as foreign when the latter uses surname as an indicator of ancestry and nativity. Finally, Mexican Americans face high expectations from Mexican immigrants, the second generation and non-Mexicans about group authenticity. Mexican immigrants define Mexican ethnicity, and Mexican Americans are treated as inauthentic when they are unable to live up to the criteria for group membership that others impose.

In what follows, I show why the Mexican-origin population is an appropriate case for understanding the role of immigrant replenishment in ethnic identity formation by briefly highlighting the history of Mexican immigration to the United States. I then describe the data and research methodology, followed by an overview of the sample from which the interviews derive. I then describe three significant ways in which immigrant replenishment affects Mexican American ethnic identity formation. I conclude with a summary of the findings and a discussion of how they inform the relative importance of immigration patterns to the formation of ethnic identity among white ethnics, and the significance of this research for understanding the intersection of immigration, race, and ethnicity.

THE MEXICAN-ORIGIN POPULATION AND IMMIGRANT REPLENISHMENT[2]

Mexican immigration has been continuous for over 100 years. The first significant presence of Mexicans in the United States dates to 1848, when the U.S. and Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ending the U.S.-Mexican War. The Treaty stipulated that Mexico cede what is today the southwestern U.S. for $15 million. Under the Treaty the roughly 75,000 –

[2] For a thorough and concise history of Mexican immigration, see chapter three in Massey, Durand and Malone (2002).

100,000 ethnic Mexicans who lived in the southwestern territory became American citizens (Gutiérrez 1995: 20). Yet, the first significant waves of Mexican migrants began entering the U.S. shortly after the turn of the century. The Mexican Revolution, combined with a growing agricultural economy in the U.S., American labor shortages during World War I, and a growing social and legal antipathy for Chinese and Japanese immigrant labor "pulled" Mexicans northward in search of work. In Mexico, agrarian reform induced mobility among Mexican peasants, while an expanding rail system linked Mexican and the U.S., easing the movement of migrants northward (Cardoso 1980).

Even as the U.S. Congress passed restrictive immigration laws in 1917 and 1924 to drastically reduce levels of European immigration, Mexican immigrants received an exemption. Law-makers and rank-and-file Americans saw Mexicans as a preferred source of labor since it was widely believed that they eventually return to Mexico. But the onslaught of the Great Depression cast Mexican immigrants as low-wage replacements for Americans workers and soured perceptions of Mexican immigrant labor. In response, the U.S. government sponsored mass repatriations of Mexican immigrants. The 1930s was the only decade during which Mexican immigration decreased.

World War II, and a growing agricultural industry in the western U.S. created a new demand for Mexican immigrant labor. Beginning in 1942, the U.S. and Mexico entered into a bi-lateral guest worker program, known as Emergency Farm Labor Program, but more popularly called the Bracero Program. For more than two decades, the Bracero Program supplied low-wage labor to American agriculturalist primarily in the American Southwest (Calavita 1992). The program ended in 1964, and a year later Congress passed sweeping immigration reform that allocated visas more equitably across countries and regions of the world. The reform included a cap on nations in the Western Hemisphere, including Mexico. This cap represented the first such limitation on Mexican immigration.

The post-Bracero program era touched off a period of undocumented Mexican immigration that continues to the present. After the program ended, many Mexican Braceros stayed in the United States, providing a rich source of social capital for subsequent Mexican migrants (Massey, Durand and Malone 2002: 42). Several powerful forces closer to the present time helped to perpetuate the recent rise in undocumented Mexican immigration, the most notable of which is the passage of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). Among its most significant provisions, IRCA provided amnesty to more than two million undocumented Mexican immigrants, added border security, and penalized employers who hired undocumented immigrants. As Massey et al. (2002),[3] each of these provisions had the unintended consequence of perpetuating mostly undocumented Mexican immigration. Furthermore, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), a tri-lateral accord between Canada, the U.S., and Mexico, further integrated U.S. and Mexico, adding the conditions that initiate and perpetuate migration (Massey 1999).

Today, Mexico is the primary source of immigration to the United States. Mexican immigrants make up nearly 30%, or 9.8 million, of the total foreign-born population (Passel 2004). Furthermore, a large proportion of the Mexican immigrant population is undocumented. Passel (2004) estimates that more than half, or 5.3 million of all Mexican immigrants are in the U.S. without documentation.

[3] Cornelius (2005) shows how border security policy during the 1990s similarly contributed to the rise of undocumented crossings during that decade.

Mexican migration to the U.S., then, stands apart from other immigrant groups in both size and history. In addition to being the biggest immigrant group today, no other group displays a pattern of persistent immigration throughout the 20th Century.

Figure 1: Number of Foreign-born from Mexico and Other Selected European Countries, 1990-2000

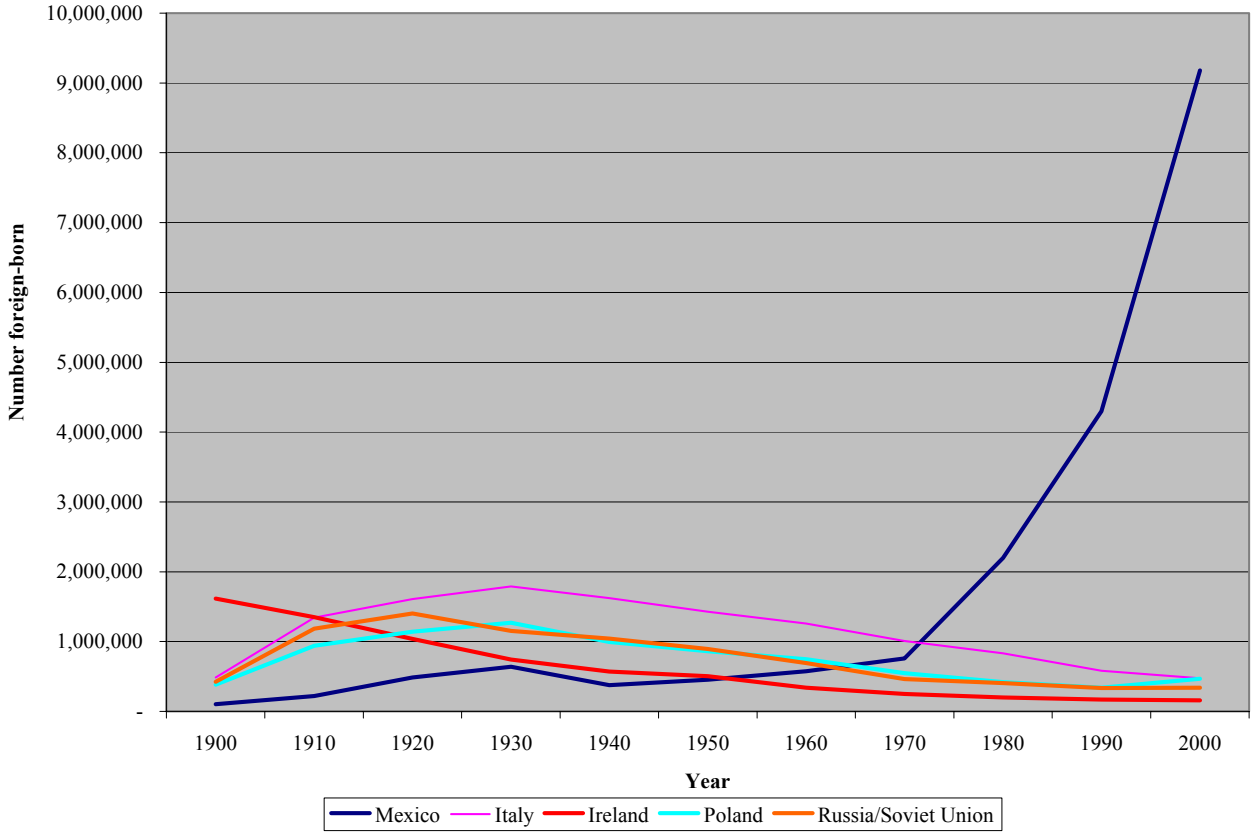

Figure 1 is a longitudinal look at the number of foreign-born Mexican immigrants and the number of foreign-born from several prominent sending countries during the Great European migration. What is especially noteworthy is that Mexican immigration continued after European immigration declined. After 1970 the foreign-born Mexican population spiked, while the number of foreign-born individuals from European countries continued its downward path. This pattern of immigration means that latter-generation Mexican Americans who descend from early waves of Mexican immigration live in an American society where migration from their ancestral homeland remains prominent.[4] In contrast, the white ethnic population is defined much more by the native-born, latter-generation individuals than its shrinking foreign-born population.

[4] The immigrant character of the Mexican-origin population was persistent throughout the 20th Century. As González-Baker et al. show (1998: 87), foreign-born people of Mexican descent made up at least 32.1% (and as much as 65.7%) of the total Mexican origin population throughout the 20th Century, except for 1970, when they constituted only 16.7% of the Mexican-origin population. Although the recent and heavy influx of Mexican immigrant represents an unprecedented upsurge in the absolute number of

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The continual influx of Mexican immigrants, and the fact that this influx has been particularly heavy in the last 20 years has created a Mexican-origin population that is a mix of immigrants, second generation individuals, and latter-generation descendents of earlier waves of Mexican immigration.

Table 1. Generational distribution of the Mexican-origin* population in the U.S., 2001

Generation	Number	Percent of total
1st	8,248,840	38
2nd	4,523,608	21
Mixed (2.5)**	2,034,859	9
3rd or later	6,860,380	32
Total	21,667,687	100

Source: Calculated from the March 2001 Current Population Survey. Weights used.
*Includes persons who self-identified as "Mexican American," "Chicano," or "Mexicano."
** 2.5 generation refers to U.S.-born individuals who have one U.S.-born parent and one Mexican-born parent.

As Table 1 shows, the Mexican-origin population is both large and generationally diverse. While the overwhelming numbers of Mexican immigrants are either first- (immigrants) or second-generation (children of immigrants), nearly one in three are third or later-generation (grandchildren and beyond). As Figure 1 and Table 1 make clear, ethnic identity formation for latter-generation Mexican Americans takes shape against a backdrop of heavy immigrant replenishment.

The composition of the Mexican-origin population, the long history of Mexican immigration and their history of colonization *and* immigration has led sociologists to diverging conclusions about whether or not they exhibit evidence of integration that conforms to the canonical theory of assimilation built on the experiences of European immigrant groups. A lion's share of the research suggests that ethnicity and indeed race structure the life chances of Mexican-origin population, even into latter generations. This research points to the historical circumstances under which Mexican were first incorporated into the United States racialized their status, affecting their place in American society today (Acuña 1972; Almaguer 1994). Many studies of Mexican American intergenerational progress in education and wages support such a view. These studies note an increases in education and wages from the first to second generation, but a flattening of progress from the second to the third (Bean et al. 1994; Livingston and Kahn 2002; Ortiz 1996). Survey findings also show that phenotype shapes the life-chances of people

foreign-born Mexicans in the U.S., the current Mexican immigrant population does not represent an unusually large percentage of the total Mexican-origin population relative to previous eras.

of Mexican-origin. Mexican Americans with darker skin tend to have lower wages (Telles and Murguía 1990) and lower levels of educational attainment (Murguía and Telles 1996) than their lighter-skinned counterparts. Research on the assimilation of today's Mexican second generation adds to the pessimistic view presented in other research. Indeed, some suggest that the Mexican second generation represents the ideal type case of "downward assimilation" (López and Stanton-Salazar 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).[5] While this line of research does not directly address the question of ethnic identity formation among latter-generation Mexican Americans, it implies that ethnic boundaries between people of Mexican descent and the rest of society remain rigid and that these boundaries impede the formation of an optional, consequence-free ethnic identity.

Yet, there is a growing chorus of social scientists who argue that previous research is unduly pessimistic about the assimilation prospects of Mexican Americans and that the boundaries Mexican Americans experience may not be all that rigid. Recent studies show that Mexican Americans make significant intergenerational progress where income and education are concerned, though the third generation still lags behind their Anglo counterparts (Alba et al. forthcoming 2006; Reed et al. 2005; Smith 2003). Furthermore, the children of Mexican immigrants, the group that has attracted the most concern about downward assimilation, do not exhibit characteristics that conform to a strict definition of the underclass (Waldinger and Feliciano 2004). The clearest indicator of the rigidity of social boundaries is intermarriage, and recent findings show that Mexican Americans exogamy rates are high (Rosenfeld 2002) and on par with of European-origin groups (Perlmann and Waters 2004). These findings suggest that the social boundaries that might prevent Mexican Americans from gaining upward mobility are "blurring" (Alba and Nee 2003). If race and ethnicity are smaller barriers to mobility for Mexican Americans than previous research suggests, what remains unclear is if these gains translate into a symbolic, optional form of ethnicity for latter-generation Mexican Americans.

METHODS, RESEARCH SETTING, AND RESPONDENTS

Data for the paper come from 123[6] in-depth interviews and participant observations that I collected in Garden City, Kansas and Santa Maria, California, during 2001 and 2002 over a period of nine months. I interviewed respondents whose ancestors have been in the U.S. since 1940 or before, who are of Mexican descent on both their mother's and father's sides of the family, and who have lived in their respective city for most of their lives. I interviewed people whose families have been in the U.S. since before 1940 because I was interested in finding a population that roughly paralleled the latter-generation white ethnics who have been studied in other research on ethnic identity (Alba 1990; Waters 1990). Since being of mixed ethnic origins complicates identity formation in unique ways (Harris and Sim 2002; Jiménez 2004; Salgado de Snyder, Lopez and Padilla 1982), I chose not to include multiethnics and multiracials in my sample so as not to conflate unique identity processes owing to multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds with identity processes of Mexican Americans, who consider themselves to be only of Mexican descent in America's racial and ethnic schema. Intermarriage is a key feature of assimilation accounting for the onset of a symbolic, optional ethnic identity found among

[5] Survey research may not accurately capture mobility among people of Mexican-origin because of attrition from the population over time. As Alba and Islam (2005) show, a significant proportion of Mexican-origin individuals "drops out" of the population over time, and attritions is positively correlated with education and income.

[6] A list of respondents and their key demographic characteristics is available upon request from the author.

white ethnics. Recent research shows Mexicans exhibit high rates of intermarriage (Perlmann and Waters 2004), and intermarriage is part and parcel of this group's assimilation. By excluding the offspring of these unions, this paper may underestimate the extent of Mexican American assimilation, and overestimate the effect of immigrant replenishment on the assimilation. Yet, Jiménez's (2004) study of the offspring of Mexican-Anglo unions shows that the salience of Mexican ethnicity presents challenges to freely asserting an ethnic identity for multiethnics individuals in ways similar to those I find among Mexican Americans in this paper.

Garden City is a small beef-packing town located in the southwestern corner of Kansas. The 2000 U.S. Census reports that of the town's 28,451 residents, 9,865, or 34.7% are of Mexican-origin. Roughly half of the Mexican-origin population is foreign-born. The history of Mexican immigration to Garden City can best be described as interrupted. Between roughly 1900 and 1930 Mexican immigrants came to the area to build the railroads and work the sugar beet fields (Avila 1997). But Mexican immigrant settlement shifted away from Kansas to other states in the middle of the 20th Century, and there was a nearly 40-year hiatus of Mexican immigration to the state (see Durand, Massey and Charvet 2000). In 1980, beef-packing plants opened in Garden City and in combination with changes in federal immigration laws that spurred a Mexican immigrant diaspora (see Durand, Massey and Charvet 2000), Garden City saw a resurgence of Mexican immigration (Stull 1990).

Santa Maria is an agricultural city located on the central coast of California. According to the U.S. Census, of Santa Maria's 77,423 inhabitants, 40,719, or 52.3% are of Mexican origin. Like Garden City, roughly half of the Mexican-origin population is foreign-born. Unlike Garden City however, Mexican immigration to Santa Maria was constant throughout the 20th century. While there was an immigrant hiatus in Kansas, California became an increasingly popular destination for Mexican immigrants in the middle of the last century (Durand, Massey and Charvet 2000). Agricultural work has always attracted Mexican immigrants to Santa Maria, but advances in agriculture in recent years have created a year-round demand for the inexpensive labor that Mexican immigrants provide (Palerm 1994; 1997). Mexican immigrants are the primary, if not the only source of agricultural labor in the city. The differences in patterns of immigration between Garden City and Santa Maria yield some differences in the identity formation of respondents in the two cities, but the differences have a much smaller affect on Mexican Americans' ethnic identity than I expected. In the end, the heavy Mexican immigrant influx to both cities in the last 20 years suppresses any pronounced differences related to the question in this paper.

I chose Garden City and Santa Maria because both cities are relatively small in size, thus maximizing interactions between Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans. Respondents range in age from 15 to 98. I interviewed people from a wide array of occupational and educational backgrounds in order to have a broad cross-section of Mexican Americans in each city. I obtained respondents using the snowball sampling technique. I relied on a few key informants in each city to recommend several initial respondents. After interviewing these initial respondents, I asked them to recommend others whom I might be able to interview. I made efforts to minimize sample-selection bias by using several different "snowballs." When possible, I interviewed family members from different generations in order to understand how Mexican American identity varies across generation within families.

Interviews lasted between one and four hours and I conducted them in the place in which the respondents felt most comfortable (in most cases this was the respondent's home). I tape-recorded all interviews and a professional transcriber transcribed them. I analyzed the

interviews using ATLASti,[7] a computer software package that allows users to attach coding categories to relevant parts of the transcripts in order to compare similarly coded portions of text across interviews. Data collection and analysis were simultaneous processes in this project. I began analyzing my interviews during data collection in order to explore more deeply in future interviews theoretical insights and nuances that I identified earlier interviews (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Weiss 1995).

Data also come from participant-observations that I conducted during the time that I lived in each city. I took copious fieldnotes on my observations in the major high school in each city, at city-government meetings, at holiday-celebrations, in some respondents' place of work, on my interactions with respondents before and after interviews, and through the course of my daily life in each city.

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC VIEW OF MEXICAN AMERICANS

Before proceeding with the findings it is important to consider the overall position of Mexican Americans in Garden City and Santa Maria. I use ethnographic data to describe the Mexican American population in general terms, and to describe the structural aspect of their assimilation. I do not assert that Mexican Americans in my sample are statistically representative of Mexican Americans in Garden City, Santa Maria, or nationwide. Yet, the patterns I identify are not anomalistic. Studies employing representative samples show that Mexican Americans nation-wide exhibit patterns of structural assimilation similar to those I observed among Mexican American respondents in Garden City and Santa Maria.

Mexican Americans in Garden City and Santa Maria are anything but a socially isolated group. They exhibit the structural forms of assimilation that Gordon (1964) argues leads to the thinning importance of ethnicity in daily life. Changes from one birth cohort to the next reveal their structural assimilation. Birth cohort and generation are highly correlated among latter-generation Mexican Americans such that the oldest respondents (age 56 and older) tend to be the children of immigrants, respondents from the middle cohort (ages 36-55) tend to be the grandchildren of immigrants, and the youngest cohort (ages 15-35) is comprised mostly of the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of immigrants. I thus organize my description of Mexican Americans by cohort both because of the correlation between age and generation and because historical events (i.e., World War II, Civil Rights Movement, etc.) that individuals experience as part of a cohort help explain their structural assimilation (Alba 1988; Waters and Jiménez 2005). In what follows, I outline in very general terms the educational, occupational, residential, and marital dimensions of Mexican Americans in these two cities.

Where education and occupational status are concerned, Mexican Americans have improved on the position of the previous cohort. Individuals from the oldest cohort of respondents completed only a high school education, worked mostly in blue collar labor, and achieved middle class status through blue collar employment.[8] Many bought homes in working class, largely Mexican American neighborhoods that now contain a large number of Mexican immigrant residents. Marriage across racial and ethnic lines is a rarity for these oldest respondents, as social taboos and their modest mobility mitigated exogamy (Kalmijn 1998).

[7] See www.atlasti.de for more information.
[8] Similarly, Ortiz (1996) finds that Mexican Americans in Los Angeles have entered the middle-class largely through blue collar work.

The middle cohort of Mexican Americans I interviewed has made gains on the position of the preceding cohort. They have generally improved their education attainment and occupational status. Among the middle cohort of respondents are judges, politicians, lawyers, engineers, doctors, architects, small business owners, teachers, and bankers. They exhibit the kinds of residential assimilation found among their European-descent counterparts (Alba 1990; Massey 1985). Most live in middle-class neighborhoods, away from the poorer section of town where immigrants concentrate. The taboo against partnering with non-Mexicans experienced by the oldest cohort does not seem to factor in how the middle-cohort respondents choose their significant others. Partnering across racial and ethnic lines is in fact common.[9]

The experiences of the youngest cohort (ages 15-34) further reflect a pattern of upward mobility. Many of these respondents have completed or are currently in college, while those still in high schools express college aspirations.[10] Those still in school are active in extracurriculars, similar to the latter generation Mexican American students that Matute-Bianchi (1986: 239) describes in her research in a California high school. While I cannot be certain about the future occupational fortunes of respondents still in school, they have high aspirations, suggesting they are likely to move ahead of their parents. Those who have careers are among the middle and professional classes in each city, and include teachers, lawyers, doctors, school administrators, and clergy. Like the middle cohort, dating and marriage across racial and ethnic lines is common, as not a single respondent describe race and ethnicity as being significant factors in their choice of marriage partner.[11]

The patterns of structural assimilation I report in this ethnographic overview do not appear to be unique to Mexican Americans in Garden City and Santa Maria. Indeed, the experiences of Mexican Americans in this research reflect recent findings that employ representative samples. Particularly with respect to intergenerational improvements in educational and wages (Alba et al. forthcoming 2006; Reed et al. 2005; Smith 2003), residential mobility (South, Crowder and Chavez 1996), and intermarriage (Perlmann and Waters 2004; Rosenfeld 2002), the structural assimilation of Mexican Americans in Garden City and Santa Maria appear to be well within the range of what would be expected given findings from survey research.

IMMIGRANT REPLENISHMENT AND ETHNIC BOUNDARIES

Given that Mexican Americans in Garden City and Santa Maria show significant structural assimilation, canonical theories of immigration, assimilation and ethnic identity would predict that Mexican Americans experience ethnicity as a symbolic, optional, and consequence-free aspect of identity. Yet, I find that such a form of ethnicity is not present for Mexican Americans.

[9] Many respondents did, however, note that their Mexican background impeded them from dating or marrying non-Mexicans in an earlier era.

[10] While aspiration (what one hopes for) and expectations (what one can reasonably expect) are not the same, many students with whom I spoke are well on their way to realizing their aspirations.

[11] A drawback of place-based research is that I was not able to interview Mexican Americans who have left Garden City and Santa Maria but who otherwise fit the sample-selection criteria. Individuals often leave a city to pursue better educational and occupational opportunities. These individuals have effectively moved “up and out” of Garden City or Santa Maria. This movement is an important part of assimilation for any ethnic group. Time and financial constraints prevented me from interviewing those who have left Garden City and Santa Maria, and I am unable to fully capture how those who left compare in their ethnic identity formation to those who stayed.

Instead, this research reveals that Mexican Americans experience rigid ethnic boundaries resulting from immigrant replenishment.

The overarching perception among non-Mexicans in Garden City and Santa Maria is that the Mexican-origin population is a foreign-group. Because of their large numbers, concentration in agricultural occupations, high levels of poverty, and Spanish-language dominance, Mexican immigrants are the most visible among people of Mexican descent, and they are the most visible among immigrants in these two cities. The large proportion of undocumented immigrants also makes Mexican immigrants the center of much media and political attention, adding to their visibility both nationally and locally. Although there is a sizable foreign-born population from other countries, Mexicans have come to represent all immigrants because foreign-born Mexicans make up the overwhelming majority of immigrants in each city.[12] There is an overarching perception that to be foreign-born is to be Mexican, and to be Mexican is to be foreign-born, and likely undocumented.

Interviews with Mexican Americans make clear three primary ways in which the large immigrant presence reinforces the boundaries that make ethnicity less of a consequence-free, optional aspect of ethnicity: through the indirect effects of nativism aimed at Mexican immigrants, through the ways in which immigrants contribute to the significance of race in the lives of Mexican Americans, and by refreshing rigid expectations about ethnic authenticity.

INDIRECT EFFECTS OF NATIVISM AND ETHNIC BOUNDARIES

Because of their visibility and predominance, Mexican immigrants are the primary targets of anti-immigrant antipathy, or what John Higham (1963 [1955]) calls "nativism." According to Higham, nativism is "an intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e., 'un-American') connections (1963 [1955]: 4)." Non-Mexicans voice nativist sentiments in anti-Mexicans terms, tying generalized antipathy about changes resulting from immigration to Mexicans in particular. Mexican Americans become aware of these nativist expressions through interpersonal encounters and through the more public and highly visible expressions of nativism that abound in each city.

Although nativism is not directed at Mexican Americans, it sharpens boundaries between them and non-Mexicans. The extent to which the Mexican Americans are well integrated into the core social, political, and economic structures in each city provides ample opportunities for interactions with non-Mexicans. As Barth points out, "ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction and acceptance, but are quite to the contrary often the very foundations on which embracing social systems are built" (Barth 1969: 10). It is through these interactions that Mexican Americans get an up-close and personal view of nativism.

Nearly all respondents reported witnessing anti-Mexican nativism perpetrated by non-Mexican friends, peers, co-workers, and strangers. The experiences of Ryan Bradley[13] typify those of many respondents. Ryan is a sixteen year old high school student in Santa Maria who lives in a

[12] The 2000 Census indicates that 84% (20,622) of Santa Maria's foreign-born population (24,647) were born in Mexico. In Garden City, 76% (4,867) of the foreign-born population (6,404) was born in Mexico. Filipinos are the second largest immigrant group in Santa Maria, comprising only 7% (or 1,794) of the total foreign-born population. In Garden City, Vietnamese immigrants are the second largest immigrant group, also making up only 7% (or 451) of the total foreign-born population there.

[13] Names and identifying characteristics of respondents have been changed to maintain their anonymity.

large house in the upper-middle class sub-section of the city. He attends a private school where he is one of a handful of middle class, latter-generation Mexican Americans. Like many respondents, Ryan's ethnic identity becomes most important to him when he experiences the rigid boundaries that nativism makes clear:

> If there's a threat that's apparent on somebody else who is of the same descent that I am, and the other person is being totally racist about it and it's all just hate of color, that's when my background comes to be more important to me […] that's when [my ethnic background] steps up to me […] I have a friend, when we were in junior high we were just the same. And then when we hit high school he got all into the confederate flags and all the weird stuff and him and a bunch of the guys would always be drawing Nazi signs or whatnot and saying "KKK rocks" and stuff like that. And he was picking on this guy that I didn't know. And he was Mexican and they were bagging on him because he was Mexican and I'm just sitting there going, "Hey. I'm Mexican too." [He said,] "No, no, no, this doesn't concern you. You're cool. This guy is not." And I'm just like, "Hey back up." And I just totally got in his face because I was getting mad… they were calling him a wetback and just totally dissing on him because he was Mexican. I don't know if they had a problem with him because of who he was but that's not what I heard coming out of their mouths. And I didn't think that was cool at all.

Even thought Ryan's peer makes it clear that he is not directing the comments to Ryan ("No, no, no, this doesn't concern you. You're cool. This guy is not."), he presents his nativist leanings in a language that invokes ethnicity, sharpening the boundaries that circumscribe all people of Mexican descent. Like many respondents, Ryan interpersonal network contains many non-Mexicans. Yet, it precisely because of their ties to non-Mexicans that respondents witness nativism of the sort that Ryan recalls.

The increased use of Spanish resulting from Mexican immigration ignites nativist fears, sharpening the boundaries that Mexican Americans experience. Non-Mexicans are often quick to express their discontent about the proliferation of Spanish language use and about the inability of Mexican immigrants to speak English. Mexican Americans experience the indirect effects of nativism when they witness these expressions. Take the experience of Marcela Muñoz, a 19 year old college student in Garden City who works as a customer-service agent at a local retail store. Marcela relayed the following instance in which an Anglo customer expressed anger over the Spanish phone menu on the customer-service line.

> [W]e have a Spanish recording. And a guest called and she was asking about American flags. [I said,] "No Ma'am. We're not scheduled to get any more until July. We're sorry for the inconvenience"[…] But she just opened her mouth and she was like "Oh and by the way, what is up with that Mexican crap?" Like that. So I of course was like, "Ma'am over half of our community understands Spanish." And she started going off on me. I was like "Ma'am, I'm Mexican American." And she didn't know what to say! She just hung up.

Because Marcela speaks without an accent and the caller could not see Marcela, the caller assumed that Marcela was Anglo and was therefore comfortable expressing her discontent. But the caller's nativist rant invokes ethnicity, as she voices her discontent with the phone menu as not just a problem related to the use of Spanish, but as a problem directly related to Mexicans ("Mexican crap").

Mexican Americans also become aware of a pervasive nativism through more public and visible proclamations. Established residents use public forums, such as public speeches, demonstrations, and the opinions section of local newspapers, to express nativist fears about

the ways in which Mexican immigrants have changed each city. These fears most often center around the increasing use of non-English languages, a perception that immigrants take advantage of misguided multicultural policies, and a belief that immigrants are a drain on public resources, especially where welfare, education, and health services are concerned (see Sánchez 1997).[14]

It is not the frequency of these public expressions, but their high visibility that makes them so powerful. Most notorious among the public denouncements of immigrants in Santa Maria are statements made by its then Mayor in 1990. A leader with a reputation for being brash and outspoken, the Mayor pointed to Mexican immigrants as the source of what he perceived to be growing blight in the city. Speaking to a local civic organization, the Mayor proclaimed:

> At this time in Santa Maria, we have a Mexican problem. We have a difficulty with scads of illegal aliens that have come across the border, and they've made our neighborhoods look not like Santa Maria neighborhoods. In certain streets people (are) gathered around drinking beer, smoking cigarettes. It's not a formidable experience for a lot of the older people who have been here for a long time…That's not speaking, of course, of our Santa Maria Mexicans that have been here forever. Those people came here with the idea of becoming Americans. (Sparks 1990)

Despite the Mayor's qualification that he was not speaking about long-time Santa Maria residents of Mexican descent, his proclamation that Santa Maria has "a Mexican problem" etched a lasting memory in the minds of Santa Maria's Mexican American population. Many respondents still referred to this verbal attack on Mexican immigrants in interviews I conducted nearly twelve years after the fact.

The statement ignited such a strong reaction in part because the Mayor couched his nativist worries in rhetoric of ethnicity. Identifying problems with blight as a "Mexican problem," the Mayor tied poverty, crime, and overcrowding to Mexicans and, in so doing, the statements reflect not just concerns about these issues, but also a general animosity toward all people of Mexican descent. Some respondents recall being upset by the Mayor's comments because he spoke about Mexicans as a group. As Gigi Bartolome, a 61 year old retired retail clerk in Santa Maria reflected, "[I]t kind of made me mad because he was talking about Mexicans. What he actually was talking about was illegals. But he said 'Mexicans,' so every Mexican in town took it as them."

Garden City has also seen its share of public expressions of nativism. During the 2002 campaign for the State Board of Education, won by a candidate who ran on an anti-immigrant platform, the local newspaper sponsored an on-line chat room where individuals could share their views on the general issue of education and undocumented immigration. Several people posted messages supporting the winning candidate's views, including the following:

> If they want to live in OUR country... LEARN THE LANGUAGE FIRST!!! You wouldn't catch me going to a foreign country without knowing their language. Mexicans can at least learn our language before they come over here, well enough [so] you don't have to keep asking them what they are saying. I don't feel that illegal or legal Mexicans should go to any of our schools, like the other person said, it puts a damper on OUR society! And further more, [no one], and I mean [no one], is going to tell me that this community belongs to the Mexicans now and that America belongs to them, as did one gentleman

[14] Since Mexican immigrants in each city concentrate in jobs for which there is next to no inter-ethnic competition, there is very little sense that Mexican immigrants are in competition for jobs or other forms of direct economic competition with native-born residents.

> in a college course I was taking did. It's like we're being taken over by aliens! (Posted 9/9/2002)

As with the Mayor's statement, the author directs anger about the proliferation of Spanish, and about the large influx of Mexican immigrants toward "Mexicans." Indeed, the author's anti-immigrant sentiment is in essence an anti-Mexican expression.

Common to all of these nativist proclamations is that their impetus comes from changes, either social or economic, that Mexican immigration brings about. The comments do not express antipathy for Mexican Americans directly, for as I point out earlier, Mexican Americans do not exhibit levels of poverty, residential concentration, and social isolation readily found among Mexican immigrants. But nativist expressions employ an all-encompassing language that tightly links antipathy about immigration and immigrants to the Mexican-origin population. Couched in this a way, the antipathy is seemingly directed at anyone with a Mexican background, including Mexican American respondents.

Internalizing Nativism and Boundaries

How does nativism expressed in interpersonal interactions and public expressions influence Mexican Americans' ethnic identity? The boundaries that nativist expressions make salient are not merely imposed on Mexican Americans, but adopted by them. Stephan Cornell's (2000) conceptualization of ethnicity as a narrative provides a useful framework. Cornell argues that groups of individuals select, plot, and interpret events that are common to their experiences. The result of this process is the construction of a narrative that "captures the central understanding of what it means to be a member of [a] group" (2000: 42). Precisely because it is a very salient part of their historical *and* present-day experience, immigration and the struggles of immigrant adaptation are at the core of the Mexican American narrative. Nativist expressions toward Mexican immigrants make salient these core events in the Mexican American narrative, activating respondents' identity as a person of Mexican descent.

The comments of Mike Fernandez, a 19 year old community college student in Santa Maria, illustrate how the indirect effects of nativism activate respondents' own Mexican immigrant narrative. Mike lives in an upper-middle class neighborhood and attended a private high school. He describes his family as "a white family who is Mexican" because his Mexican background plays only a small role in his family life. Yet, the immigrant narrative comes to the fore when he encounters the nativist expressions that other respondents mention:

> [S]omebody will say something about Mexicans or something like that and it's not said towards me, it's not directed towards me. But at that point, I'll feel myself discriminated against. I'll put the discrimination on myself, feeling that even though they're not directing it towards me, I can't help but feel that it's degrading towards me in some way, when in fact I know it's not meant directly towards me; it's a general comment. But it just kind of makes me uncomfortable.

The reasoning that Mike provides for his discomfort reflects his attachment to a larger narrative centering on the immigrant experience:

> Just because they're speaking about a Mexican family or a Mexican person and I know that, though my family is not in that position, that I know somewhere along down before me, somebody in my family, I'm sure, has been in that position. And although I'm not in it, and probably never will be in that position, I just think that back when my ancestors were in that position and people were the same way towards them.

Although many respondents, like Mike, have only a vague idea about their family's immigrant history, Mexican immigrants are an *en vivo* representation of their family's historical struggles. When respondents witness anti-Mexican nativism, it evokes the immigrant experience as a central part of their ethnic identity. Hence, verbal attacks on Mexican immigrants become an affront to all people of Mexican descent, both foreign- and native-born. Indeed, it is not through the overt forms of discrimination, such as those middle class African Americans experience (Feagin 1994), that Mexican Americans experience their ethnic background negatively. Rather, Mexican immigrants are a prism through which nativism refracts into the lives of Mexican Americans.

IMMIGRANT REPLENISHMENT AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RACE

Mexican immigrant replenishment also makes ethnicity more of an ascribed identity for Mexican Americans. The large and continual influx of Mexican immigrants refreshes the salience of race in the lives of all people of Mexican-origin, including Mexican Americans. While past research firmly asserts that Mexican Americans' racial status adversely affects Mexican Americans (Acuña 1972; Almaguer 1975; Almaguer 1994; Murguía and Telles 1996; Telles and Murguía 1990), it fails to fully consider how immigration informs race. The meanings attached to racial markers must be understood in the context from which these meanings originate.[15] As Haney-López notes, "context includes both ideological and material components, such as entrenched cultural and customary prejudices, and also maldistributed resources, marketplace inequalities, and skewed social services. These inherited structures are altered and altered again by everything from individual actors and community movements to broad based changes in the economic, demographic, and political landscape" (1998: 11). The contentious historical relationship between Mexican and Anglos in the Midwest (see García 1996) and West (see Almaguer 1994; Camarillo 1996; Griswold del Castillo and de León 1997; Meier and Ribera 1993) lurks in the background, but it is the broad based demographic change, namely the continual influx of immigration, that most significantly structures how Mexican Americans experience race. Indeed, in a context of heavy Mexican immigration, race indicates a combination of ancestry, nativity, and even legal status.

The influence of Mexican immigrant replenishment is most apparent when Mexican Americans are mistaken for immigrants. Respondents with dark-skin are especially vulnerable to being marked as foreign. Take the case of Ronnie Hinojosa, a 48 year old salesman in Garden City who has dark-skin and who speaks with a Midwestern twang typical of many Garden City natives. Ronnie lives in a middle class neighborhood with his wife, who is Anglo, and their two small children. Because of his dark skin, individuals whom he encounters often assume that he is an immigrant who speaks like a native-born American. Ronnie relayed the following experience to illustrate:

> I was at work and this lady called in. She wanted to know about a [stereo] or [CD player] or something and I told her all about it and I said, "Who am I speaking to?" And she told me her name was [Dana]. […] I said "My name is Ronnie. I work in [electronics]." [She said,] "OK, I'll come and see you Ronnie." She came in and the other sales people came and she said "Is Ronnie here? I didn't get his last name." I came up and said, "What can I do? My name is Ronnie. What's yours?" She said […] "So you're the one I

[15] Smith (2005) shows that Mexican immigrants and the second-generation in New York have an experience of race that is radically different than their counterparts in cities that have long been popular destinations for Mexican immigrants, such as Los Angeles because the racial and ethnic context in these locales differ.

> talked to. You're Spanish! I didn't know that. The way you spoke I didn't even realize you were Spanish." See what I mean? It's just my background and raising, and English – that if I didn't have any accent she just assumed I was just another salesman […] She was just shocked that I was a Mexican, and then the way I talked to her (on the phone), she thought I was just another educated, college white kid that worked in a nice department. That's who she wanted to speak [to], but she still bought something from me. But she thanked me for being knowledgeable of my products and [for speaking] English real well. I didn't question her but I didn't know what she meant by it. I kind of felt like maybe she felt like I just crossed the border and just got this job and I speak real good English.

Despite the fact that Ronnie is a third-generation Mexican American who speaks perfect English (and no Spanish for that matter), the customer surmised from his skin-color that Ronnie is an immigrant, like many individuals of Mexican descent in Garden City. Without a substantial Mexican immigrant population, the customer might have assumed that Ronnie was a Mexican American whose family, like so many others in Garden City, has been in the U.S. for several generations. But the presence of a substantial immigrant population imbues skin-color with meaning, and in a context of heavy Mexican immigration, skin-color becomes a convenient cue for nativity.

Race takes on added meaning in a context of heavy *undocumented* Mexican immigration. Skin-color in these two cities has come to indicate a combination of ancestry, nativity *and* legal status. Both cities have industries that employ large numbers of undocumented workers.[16] Non-Mexicans assume that people of Mexican origin are both foreign and undocumented. Pedro Ramirez, a 52 year old high school teacher, recalled the especially troubling experience of being pulled over by the U.S. Border Patrol while traveling in his pick-up truck after doing yard work at a rental property he owns:

> It's this guy with a Smokey the Bear hat and wrap around glasses. It's *la migra*. It's the INS, the border patrol! So I get out [of my car] and the guy says "*¡vete aquí!*" I go oh no, and I'm laughing. I come over and say "May I help you?" He says "Do you speak English?" I said "What the hell do you think I just said?" He says "Do you have some ID?" I go "What the hell do you want to know if I have ID for? I wasn't going past the speed limit. Besides you're not a cop. You're the Border Patrol. All right, I'll play your game." He said "Do you have some ID?" So I pull out my driver's license and show him my wallet. "Do you have anything else?" I said "Yeah." And I showed him my social security card. He wanted to reach for it and I go, "You ain't getting this. Forget that!" He goes, "You have anything else?" I go, "Sure I do." So I pull out my American Express card. And it's green. I said, "Don't leave home without it. This is harassment!" Guilt by association: Mexican needing a haircut and a shave on a Friday afternoon with bandanna around his neck, with an old pickup truck loaded with mowers and edgers and stuff like that.

The large numbers of Mexican immigrants in Santa Maria, most of whom are farm-workers, create the perception that to be of Mexican descent is to be an undocumented immigrant and a farm-worker. The Border Patrol officer who stopped Pedro probably did not consider that Pedro

[16] While it is incredibly difficult to estimate the size of the undocumented immigrant population in either city, a high ranking law-enforcement official estimates that around 15,000 undocumented immigrants live in Santa Maria (or roughly 61% of the total Mexican immigrant population). A labor contractor also told me that he believes about 80% of the workers he hires are undocumented. Nationally, Passel (2004) estimates that roughly 54% of the total Mexican immigrant population is undocumented.

could be a middle-class, third-generation Mexican American who was simply doing yard-work on the weekend. Rather, the officer relied on the dominant image of Mexicans as undocumented laborers to determine Pedro's identity.

Even if respondents do not have dark-skin, they are not entirely shielded from assumptions about their nativity. Non-Mexicans often tag as foreigners respondents who have a Spanish name. Surnames often serve as markers of ethnicity and race for all groups. They may signal when someone has, for example, Italian, Polish, or Irish ancestry. But when immigration is replenished, surnames mark not only ancestry, but also nativity, as shown in the experiences of Refujio Fernandez Jr., a 21 year old college student in Santa Maria. Refujio recalled,

> Actually freshman year in college, living in the dorms…I guess with a name like mine, I'd go over and say, "Hi! I'm [Refujio Fernandez]." And [they would say,] "Oh really? Are you a foreign exchange student?" And I'd just kind of chuckle like, "No, actually I grew up about half an hour from here." [They would say,] like, "Oh really? Where did you guys get... when did you come to the country?"

Like skin-color, Refujio's name resonates with non-Mexicans as a characteristic of a foreign-born individual, and many non-Mexicans interpret having a Spanish surname as a sure indictor of not only his ethnic background, but his national origin.

Research in other setting supports these findings. Gilda Ochoa's (2004) study of Mexican Americans in La Puente, California, shows that non-Mexicans confuse Mexican Americans for foreign-born Mexicans based on skin-color and surname. Similarly, Japanese and Chinese Americans are lumped with foreign-born Asians based phenotype. Mia Tuan's (1998) latter-generation Japanese and Chinese respondents experience instances in which Anglos rely on perceptions of Asians as foreigners and expect them to exhibit characteristics associated them with foreign-born Asians. As Ochoa and Tuan show, and as I show here immigration is a significant factor in the ascription of foreign identity to latter-generation American-born individuals.

ETHNIC EXPECTATIONS AND BOUNDARIES

Ethnic identities are not just assigned to groups and individuals, they are also asserted by group members themselves. The heavy influx of immigrants to Garden City and Santa Maria informs ideas about authentic expressions of Mexican ethnicity.[17] Mexican immigrants, the immigrant second-generation, and non-Mexicans all assert strong notions of Mexican authenticity in their interactions with Mexican Americans, creating stringent ethnic expectations that limit Mexican Americans' ability to freely assert an ethnic identity. Immigrants and second-generation individuals regard Mexican Americans who fail to live up to these expectations as "inauthentic" and non-Mexicans are surprised when Mexican Americans do not conform to these notions.

Ethnic Expectations and the Boundaries Within

The options individuals have to assert an ethnic identity is dictated by the way that co-ethnics regard such assertions. As Barth notes, "The identification of another person as a fellow member of an ethnic group implies a sharing of criteria for evaluation and judgment. It thus

[17] Certainly these boundaries are not new, as fissures have always existed between American-born Mexicans and foreign-born Mexicans. See Gutiérrez (1995) for a history of relations between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants.

entails the assumption that the two are fundamentally 'playing the same game'" (1969: 15). When the criteria for authentic expression of ethnicity are rigid – when the "rules of game" are well-defined – assertions of ethnic identity must past strict muster for co-ethnics to view these assertions as authentic. While determinations of authenticity entail judgment about the ethnic "stuff" that boundaries enclose, they often sharpen the boundaries themselves.

Mexican immigrant replenishment informs notions about ethnic authenticity and immigrants and the second generation often see Mexican Americans as inauthentic for latter's inability to live up to these notions. The expectations that Mexican Americans face are particularly apparent around issues of Spanish language use. Although many people of Mexican descent in the U.S., including those in my sample, do not speak Spanish (Alba et al. 2002), immigrants from Mexico and even second-generation individuals maintain and replenish Spanish language use as a central component of an authentic identity. Interviews abound with reports of experiences in which immigrants or second-generation individuals call into question respondents' authenticity because of their inability to speak Spanish. The school setting can be a particularly contentious place for young respondents, as their Spanish-speaking peers use the ability to speak Spanish as the litmus test for authenticity. Faith Obregón, a 16 year old high school student in Garden City, relayed the following experience illustrating the point:

> They ask me, they say "Are you white?" And I'm like "No." Because I don't speak Spanish and this school is like if you speak Spanish, then you're a Mexican and if you don't then you're white [...] Because, I don't know, they're just like "What are you?" [They ask,] "Like, are you half white?" Like, if I told them, "Yeah, I'm half white," they'd believe me. It's like "No." And when I do tell them that I'm full Mexican, they're like, "Na uh!" They're like, "You're lying!" And then they ask, "Do you know Spanish?" It's like "No." And then they think it's like so wrong that I don't know Spanish.

For Faith and other respondents, asserting one's self as a person of Mexican descent requires living up to expectations about the use of Spanish that immigration informs. The parents and grandparents of young respondents did not transmit Spanish language across generations. An ideology of Americanization that forced earlier generations of Mexican Americans to speak only English, combined with the long amount of time that their families have been in the U.S. means that young respondents are ill-equipped to use language to validate their ethnic roots to those who bear a more salient form of Mexican ethnicity.

Adult respondents also run into boundaries when Mexican immigrants question how they can be of Mexican descent and not speak Spanish. Consider the case of Kyle Gil, a 35 year old auto-body shop owner. Some Mexican immigrants who come into Kyle's shop have a strong reaction when they realize that he does not speak Spanish. Kyle believes this treatment is a reversal of the type of prejudice that Mexican immigrants experience:

> I think sometimes you get that anti-racism, it's a reverse role. Because they'll come in and they'll look at me [and say], "You speak Spanish?" [I answer,] "No, not really." [They say,]"You dumb or what? How come you don't speak Spanish?" And it's like I'm not good enough for them because I can't. So you get that reverse. It's tough.

The use of language as a gatekeeper of ethnic identity is not unique to Garden City and Santa Maria. Indeed, Mexican Americans it other cities with large Mexican immigrant populations report similar experience. Ochoa's (2000; 2004) research on Mexican Americans in La Puente, California, shows that conflict arises between Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans because immigrants make Mexican Americans feel uncomfortable about their inferior Spanish language skills. Like Mexican Americans in Garden City and Santa Maria, Ochoa's respondents

are made to feel inadequate in their ability live up to expectations about Spanish language use as a marker of group authenticity.

In addition to language, immigrants and the second generation often challenge Mexican Americans about their style of dress, tastes, and their choice of friends. Some respondents said their popular, preppy style of their dress left them open to criticism because these styles are closer to Anglo-American styles. Rolondo Ramos, an 18 year old high school senior in Santa Maria is a case-in-point. Rolando is very patriotic and aspires to a career in the military because he believes it will allow him to be a role model to other Mexican-descent students. However, some of his acquaintances equate his career aspirations, style of dress, and inability to speak Spanish with Anglo orientations, charging that he is not fully Mexican as a result:

> There's people at school [who] say that I'm white, I mean stereotyped by it. The brand I wear, which is Quicksilver, and Anchor Blue in shoes… And I'm just trying to do something positive. Like I said, I want to be in the military, be a police officer. I want to be a positive role model for Mexican Americans. And that there's a place for us in law enforcement and the military.
>
> Q: Why do people think that you're white?
>
> A: Because of just the way I dress and type of music I like sometimes, and because I don't know Spanish.

In the eyes of those who enforce the criteria for authenticity, Mexican ethnicity and "mainstream" American culture are at odds. Having tastes and styles perceived to be devoid of Mexican overtones fail to meet the expectations about Mexican ethnicity that many immigrants and second-generation individuals impose.

Although students never accused Lori Rojas, 40 year old financial coordinator in Santa Maria, of acting white, she recalls being teased in junior high school because her involvement in school activities meant that she spent time with many non-Mexican students. Some of the Mexican immigrant and second-generation students perceived Lori's high level of participation and closeness to non-Mexicans to be a slight to her ethnic background:

> In junior high I did have a lot of trouble because some girls didn't believe me that I was Mexican when I would say I was Mexican. Or they would say that I didn't act like I was Mexican. So I had problems in junior high […] They wanted me to maybe dress like they did and act like they did and I didn't. I wasn't trying not to be, or act like it. I didn't feel I had to act a certain way because of my background. But I was a cheerleader, sports, outgoing, so I guess they felt I shouldn't have done that […] In junior high one time I walked into the bathroom and they were all standing by the door and they wouldn't let me go in because they said that I thought I was too good.

Criteria for ethnic authentication vary for different groups for which ethnicity and race remains salient, and the grounds on which authenticity are contested are equally variable. Among African Americans, school success is grounds to contest authenticity. High-achieving African American students are sometimes seen by their lower-achieving peers as betraying their African American roots in favor of an ideology representative of the dominant society. By embracing values and an ideology of achievement these high-achieving students are said to "act white" (Fordham 1996; Fordham and Ogbu 1986).[18]

[18] Carter (2005) and Neckerman et al. (1999) offer a formidable challenge to Fordham and Ogbu's arguments.

With Mexican immigrant replenishment, Mexican Americans come in constant contact with Mexican immigrants and second generation individuals who are closer to the Mexican ethnic "ground zero," and who assert and enforce the criteria for authenticity. Mexican Americans' inability to live up these criteria sharpens the boundaries that form within ethnic groups. These boundaries are drawn down generational lines, with latter-generation Mexican Americans falling on one side, and those closer to the immigrant generation on the other. As a result Mexican American cannot symbolically or optionally assert their ethnic identity without challenge.

Notions about Authenticity from Non-Mexicans

Mexican immigrants are not the only ones who impose notions of ethnic authenticity. In many instances, non-Mexicans assert strong ideas about ethnic authenticity informed by the perception of Mexicans as foreign-group. As with expectations that come from Mexican immigrants and the second generation, the use of Spanish language is a central source of these expectations. Non-Mexicans often assume that Mexican Americans speak Spanish, an ability much more likely to be found among immigrants and the second generation (Alba et al. 2002). Mexican Americans' experiences in the work setting highlight how non-Mexicans assert these expectations. Non-Mexicans often ask Mexicans American respondents to serve as interpreters at work and are surprised when they discover that Mexican Americans are unable to do so. Consider the case of with Lucia Pacheco, a 19 year old college student in Santa Maria who works at a local pizza restaurant:

> I work with people and they always come in and there is this one girl who I work with, she stereotyped me as a Mexican because of my name, just my name. Before she even knew me, she assumed that I spoke Spanish. And she would always send [Spanish-speaking] people to me to talk to me. And I'd have to send them away because I didn't know what to say to them or help them […] It was my name. […] in one instance, she's like, "This is Lucia Pacheco. She doesn't speak Spanish and doesn't like hot food!" And I thought that was kind of inappropriate of her to say. But she was my manager and I couldn't really say anything.

The expectations about authenticity that Lucia and other Mexican Americans encounter from non-Mexicans are in many ways similar to those they face from Mexican immigrants and the second generation. Because Mexican immigrant replenishment makes the criteria for ethnic authenticity clear, Mexican Americans lack the option to assert an ethnic identity that departs from the notion that Mexicans are a foreign-group. Such assertions rarely go without challenge from non-Mexicans, Mexican immigrants, or the second generation who impose more stringent notions of Mexican ethnicity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper illustrates the role of immigrant replenishment in the formation of ethnic identity, and particularly its effects on the ethnic boundaries that distinguish groups. Using the case of the Mexican-origin population, I find that the ability of individuals to experience ethnicity as a symbolic, optional, and consequence-free aspect of identity is in part a function of immigrant replenishment. Continuous waves of immigration maintain the salience of ethnicity and race as boundaries, even for latter-generation members of an ethnic group. The case of Mexican Americans in Garden City and Santa Maria identifies three significant mechanisms by which

immigrant replenishment limits the a symbolic, optional, and consequence-free experience of ethnic identity.

Ethnicity for Mexican Americans carries negative consequences that come from the indirect effects of nativism directed at Mexican immigrants. Non-Mexicans' expressions of nativism sharpen the boundaries that circumscribe groups. Non-Mexicans express nativism in interpersonal settings and in public forums, couching their sentiments in a language that attributes nativist fears to all people of Mexican descent. Mexican Americans internalize this nativism because it leads them to invoke their own immigrant history, drawing parallels between their ancestors' experiences and those of today's Mexican immigrants. In so doing, Mexican Americans come to identify with the immigrants' plight, as the experience of immigration and integration becomes ever more central to the Mexican American narrative.

Immigrant replenishment also bolsters the salience of race in the lives of Mexican Americans. The meaning assigned to race is rooted in the context in which race operates. In a context of heavy Mexican immigration, non-Mexicans use racial markers, especially skin-color and surname, as proxies for a combination of ancestry, nativity, and even legal status. Non-Mexicans often mistake Mexican Americans for immigrants, and in some cases undocumented Mexican immigrants. It is these situations that ethnicity becomes anything but a consequence-free identity option.

Finally, Mexican immigrant replenishment determines the extent to which Mexican Americans experience ethnicity as an optional aspect of identity by increasing expectations about ethnic authenticity. Mexican immigrants have come to define "Mexicanness" and this entails, at the very least, speaking Spanish and having non-Anglo American tastes. Mexican immigrants and the second generation call into question respondents' authenticity for not being able to openly display the cultural characteristics that might "prove" their authenticity. Likewise, non-Mexicans impose their own expectations about what it means to be a person of Mexican descent, and the large immigrant population in Garden City and Santa Maria informs these expectations.

By understanding how immigrant replenishment shapes Mexican Americans' ethnic identity, this paper also illustrates the relative importance of immigration to the identity formation of white ethnics. The mechanisms that limit Mexican Americans' ability to experience ethnicity symbolically, free of consequence, and optionally are the very mechanisms that allow for just such an experience of ethnic identity for white ethnics. Because immigration has attenuated, so too have the accompanying forms of nativism familiar to European immigrants in the past (Higham 1963 [1955]) and Mexican immigrants today. The foreign character of European groups that so many Americans despised faded as immigration from European nations declined (see Figure 1). Because there is no immigration replenishment, latter-generation descendents of these European immigrants negotiate an American society that sees them as belonging to American ethnic groups that have overcome the hardships of assimilation, rather than poor, laboring foreign-groups that muddy the economic and social fabric of American society. Without a replenishment of immigrants and its accompanying nativism, ethnicity is more of a consequence-free identity option for white ethnics.

This paper also suggests that the cessation of European immigration contributed to the declining salience of race for white ethnic groups. Race played a central role in the assimilation processes of these groups, animating the boundaries between European immigrants and the native-born "white" population (Higham 1963 [1955]; Roediger 2005). But the salience of race attenuated along with the decline of European immigration, and many of these groups "became white" (see Ignatiev 1995; Jacobson 1998; Roediger 1991). With the cessation of immigration,

the racial markers that once served as cues about ancestry and nativity grew weaker in their association with the particular groups from which they originated. This weak association between race, ancestry and nativity means that latter-generation descendents of European immigrants experience American society as "white," free from the racialized foreign status with which their immigrant and second generation ancestors were all too familiar.

The experiences of latter-generation Mexican Americans also points to the lack of European immigrant replenishment as a source of the symbolic, optional, and consequence-free ethnic identity that white ethnics display. Ethnicity has attenuated in salience to such an extent that group members require nothing more from co-ethnics than to claim that their ancestors come from a particular homeland. Seldom would anyone expect an Italian-American, Russian-American or Polish American to speak the tongue of their immigrant ancestors or to have tastes that somehow display their ethnic origin.[19] Without any replenishment of immigrants, there are low standards for ethnic group authenticity, and white ethnics are free to assert their ethnic identity optionally, and without challenge. As the case of the Mexican-origin population suggest, had European immigration continued at levels equal to those around the turn of the last century, white ethnics would likely face stringent criteria for group authenticity, and claims about group membership would require much more than a symbolic nod.

Given that the political, economic and social forces that initiate and perpetuate immigration (see Massey 1999) are well entrenched, immigrant replenishment from many countries is to be a feature of American immigration into the foreseeable future. Immigrant groups will likely display the forms of internal diversity resulting from immigrant replenishment found in the Mexican origin population. Thus, understanding dynamic interplay of race, ethnicity, and immigration means that social scientists can no longer rely only on the "usual suspect" independent variables to explain assimilation. Indeed, as this research shows, immigrant replenishment is a central factor shaping ethnic identity formation and one that that researchers must take seriously to more fully understand ethnic and racial change.

[19] Some groups have experienced immigrant replenishment to some areas of the U.S. For example, Erdmans (1998) explores the divisions between Polish Americans and new Polish immigrants in Chicago. However, the scale and persistence of Polish immigration do not match those of Mexican immigration.

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