

The Education of Mexican Immigrant Children

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A number of scholars feel that the educational progress of Latinos is a topic of serious concern (Portes 1996; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995a, 1995b; Valencia 1991). Yet recent studies of the academic success of Latino students in high school and their continued efforts to succeed in their adult lives invite reflection on the supportive role of the family and home environment (Diaz Salcedo 1996). The narratives of academic achievement, in the midst of the narratives of inequity for many Latino students, represent a unique success where failure was expected.

The struggle of Mexicans in what is U.S. territory today did not start with the tens of thousands who began to do unskilled labor there in the late 1800s. Certainly, many Mexicans were living in the Southwest prior to the annexation of Mexican territory by the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty of 1848, but many more have come since. In 1900 the U.S. census estimate of Mexican immigrants was 103,393. By 1910, there were 221,915; by 1920, 486,418, and by December 31, 1926, the official count was 890,746 (Gamio 1930, 2).¹ The exploitation of the so-called inferior people and the accepted practice of depriving them of certain rights was common in the last century and in the first decades of this century. The Civil Practice Act of 1850, which excluded Chinese and Indians from testifying against whites, was extended to Mexicans because they were part Indian. The residential segregation of Mexicans firmly established on the West Coast at the turn of the century became the foundation for the widespread segregation of the 1920s and 1930s; Mexicans were not allowed in public facilities such as schools, restaurants, swimming pools, and theaters (Menchaca and Valencia 1990, 230).

Enrique Trueba As a Jesuit missionary among the Mayas in the jungles of Chiapas, I learned of the power of malaria and the powerlessness of the poor even to prevent their children from dying from a poisoned water supply. Born in Mexico City to a family of immigrants from Spain, the tenth sibling in a family of twelve children, I became a Jesuit and spent 18 years of my life with the Jesuit order. But in Chiapas, I felt hopeless and frustrated about the possibility of improving people's lives through my work with the church. I met many anthropologists there and really got to know the local people through their eyes. In 1962, I went to the United States to finish my theological studies and stayed on, becoming an immigrant in this country.

I earned my doctorate in anthropology from the University of Pittsburgh, and became a U.S. citizen in 1972. I began to work in education when the University of Illinois asked me to start an interdisciplinary program there in the 1970s. My work has always been with the marginalized, especially with children. I have worked in the ghettos in Venice, California; I have followed among immigrants on their trail through south-central China; I've worked extensively in Latin America, in Alaska, and with many Latino communities throughout the United States. My interest is to attempt to understand what happens with long-term migrations and the reasons behind the resilience of these immigrants.

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We know that there is a close correlation between family poverty and children's educational levels, and between educational and economic development in a country. Furthermore, we have seen the rapid trends of aging in the white population and its decrease both in the labor force and in schools. In fact, the 1970s' predictions of demographic enrollment were too conservative. In the Southwest, the increased immigration of Latino and Asian populations has shifted in two decades both the total number of children in schools and their racial/ethnic balance *vis-à-vis* the magnitude of the white non-Hispanic population. California will face radical changes before any other state. In 1970 there were only 30 percent ethnic/racial minority students in K-12 public schools. After 140 years of predominantly white enrollment, in 1990, 50 percent of the California public school students belong to ethnic/racial subgroups. There is no numerical majority of whites. By the year 2030, white students will constitute about 30 percent of the total enrollment and Latino students will represent the largest group (44 percent of the total enrollment) (Valencia 1991, 17). Other school demographic projections suggest that the white school-age population will decrease for the country at large, while the Latino school-age population will continue to increase. Latino children (5 to 17 years of age) numbered 6 million in 1982 (9 percent of the national youth population); by 2020 they will number 19 million (25 percent of the country's youth population). That is, the Latino school-age population will more than triple in eight years (Valencia 1991, 18-19).

THE EDUCATION OF MEXICAN IMMIGRANT CHILDREN

The significance of Mexican immigration in contemporary North America is clear (see González Baker et al. and Orfield, this volume). The political, economic, and educational consequences of this phenomenon require a massive, serious, and long-term interdisciplinary approach. California and Texas are the focus of intensive Latino immigration, a population that is now more than ever segregated and neglected (Orfield et al. 1997). As a consequence, Mexican (and other Latino children) become rapidly marginalized and show persistently high dropout rates. What is the role of schools in the face of such a crisis? What are the structural (economic, political, and educational) barriers leading to school failure of Mexican children? Under what conditions is the academic achievement of Mexican children improving? What are the consequences of the increasing lack of cultural sensitivity and the cancellation of affirmative action efforts? These questions cannot be examined in detail here, but they provide the incentive to look into some of the characteristics of the education of Mexican children in North America. There are, however, two important statistical facts

that must be presented in advance: the rapid growth of Latino enrollments in the last 25 years and the increasing segregation of Latino students.

According to the Harvard Project on Desegregation (1997), Latino enrollments have increased significantly in California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, Arizona, New Mexico, and New Jersey between 1970 and 1994 (see Table 8.1 and Figure 8.1). Latino enrollments in California, for example, increased 176.3 percent during that period, from 706,900 pupils in 1970 to 1,953,343 in 1994; in Texas, enrollments increased 130.5 percent. The isolation of Latino students has become more acute. The overall trends of black and Latino student segregation in schools continue, but there is a significant increase in these trends for Latinos. Three measures of state rankings in segregation (percentage of Latino students in majority white schools, percentage in minority schools, and percentage of white students in Latino schools) between 1989 to 1990 and 1994 to 1995 show clear trends of marked isolation of Latinos in schools (see Tables 8.2 and 8.3 and Figure 8.2).

These basic facts must be explained in the context of a continued backlash against immigrants (Suárez-Orozco forthcoming).² Indeed, new immigrant children face many difficult problems in their adaptation. According to Carola and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco,

The obvious difficulties that most migrants face include language inadequacies, a general unfamiliarity with the customs and expectations of the new country, limited economic opportunities, poor housing conditions, discrimination, and what psychologists term the "stresses of acculturation" . . . Despite these obstacles, many migrants often consider their lot as having improved from what it was in their country of origin. Because of a perception of relative improvement, many migrants may fail to internalize the negative attitudes of the host country toward them, maintaining their country of origin as a point of reference (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995b, 325).

Immigrants may sustain their belief of improvement by visiting their villages of origin and displaying their wealth conspicuously (showing off new trucks, good clothes, and spending money; see Ainslie, this volume). The Suárez-Orozcos suggest that immigrants do not see their new life in terms of the ideals of the majority society but in terms of the "old culture," thus holding to a "dual frame of reference" (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995b, 325). The adaptive responses of immigrants vary according to their prearrival experience. For example, the key factors determining the educational success of

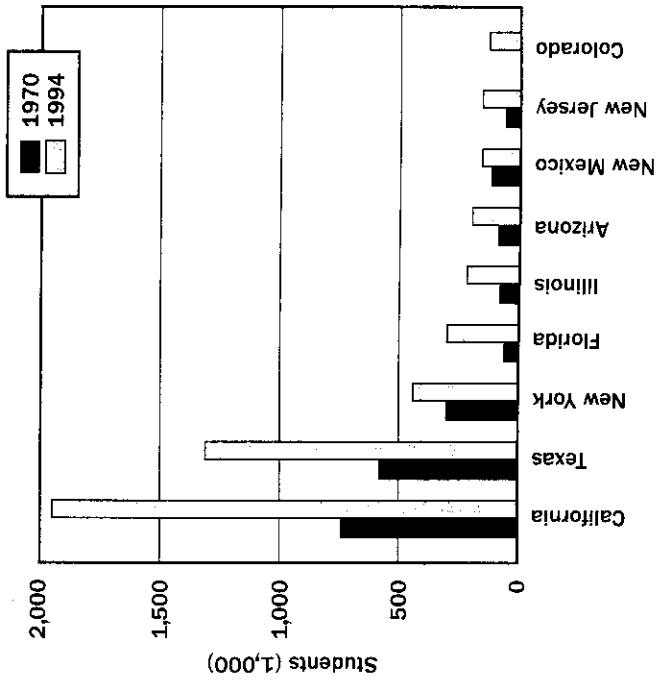
TABLE 8.1
Growth of Latino Enrollments, 1970-1994

	1970 Enrollment	1994 Enrollment	Change, 1970-1994 Number	Percentage
California	706,900	1,953,343	1,246,443	176.3
Texas	565,900	1,304,269	738,369	130.5
New York	316,600	440,043	123,443	39.0
Florida	65,700	301,206	235,506	358.5
Illinois	78,100	218,568	140,468	179.9
Arizona	85,500	203,097	117,597	137.5
New Mexico	109,300	148,772	39,472	36.1
New Jersey	59,100	148,345	89,245	151.0

Source: DBS Corporation, 1982; 1987; 1991-1992 NCES Common Core of Data Public Education Agency Universe; 1994-1995 NCES Common Core Data School Universe; Harvard Project on Desegregation.

FIGURE 8.1

Growth of Latino Enrollments, 1970-94 States with more than 100,000 Latino Students



Source: DBS Corp., 1982; 1987; 1991-92 NCES Common Core of Data Public Education Agency Universe; 1994-95 NCES Common Core Data School Universe; Harvard Project on Desegregation.

TABLE 8.2

State Rankings in Segregation of Latino Students by Three Measures, 1989-1990 School Year

	Percentage in Majority White Schools	Percentage in 90-100% Minority Schools	Percentage of Whites in Typically Latino Schools		
New York	16.6	New York	54.1	New York	21.5
Texas	21.2	New Jersey	41.4	Texas	26.5
California	22.2	Texas	41.0	California	28.8
New Mexico	23.2	Connecticut	36.8	New Jersey	28.9
New Jersey	24.9	Illinois	35.5	Illinois	31.7
Illinois	25.9	California	33.4	New Mexico	33.3
Florida	32.2	Florida	30.4	Florida	33.8
Connecticut	33.8	Pennsylvania	26.4	Connecticut	33.9
Pennsylvania	40.1	Indiana	21.2	Pennsylvania	41.6
Massachusetts	41.0	New Mexico	17.9	Arizona	42.4

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 1989-1990; Harvard Project on Desegregation.

Mexican families are related to the prearrival socioeconomic, cultural, and political experiences that determine their abilities to handle the traumas faced in the United States after their arrival.

A process called marginalization is often associated with conspicuous poverty and isolation in the new country (see Vigil 1988). The lack of com-

TABLE 8.3

State Rankings in Segregation of Latino Students by Three Measures, 1994-1995 School Year

	Percentage in Majority White Schools	Percentage in 90-100% Minority Schools	Percentage of Whites in Typically Latino Schools		
New York	13.8	New York	57.3	New York	19.2
California	17.3	New Jersey	43.4	California	24.8
Texas	19.6	Texas	43.0	Texas	25.0
New Mexico	21.6	California	38.7	New Jersey	29.3
Rhode Island	24.8	Illinois	34.9	Illinois	30.9
Illinois	26.5	Connecticut	32.4	New Mexico	31.0
New Jersey	27.3	Florida	27.6	Florida	34.5
Connecticut	31.9	Pennsylvania	25.8	Connecticut	35.0
Florida	33.2	New Mexico	20.0	Rhode Island	38.0
Arizona	34.0	Arizona	18.9	Arizona	38.2

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 1994-1995; Harvard Project on Desegregation.

munication with individuals who speak their variety of Spanish and the need to deal with issues dissimilar to those they handled in Mexico create a vacuum of support and a deep sense of anxiety over expectations and norms of appropriate behavior. Poverty is also associated with the nature of immigrants' work, which is often inherently unstable and not well paid; another source of poverty is the urgent needs of the family left behind in Mexico, who expect money to be sent regularly. Furthermore, immigrants often incur debts in order to pay the costs of going north to find employment.

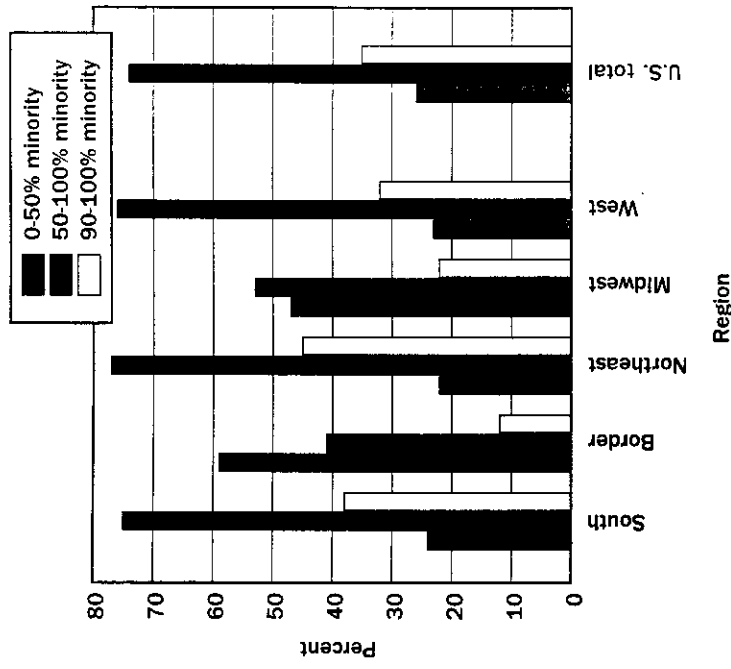
Another factor affecting the adaptive strategies of Mexican immigrants is their degree of literacy (in a broad Freirian sense), that is, their understanding of complex social systems and their ability to handle text related to those systems (contracts, government documents, banks, hospitals, the immigration office, etc.). The marginalization of many Mexican families starts long before they arrive in this country. Their naive notions about the politics of employment, the organization of schools, and the demands of society reflect more a change from rural to urban settings than the change from one country to another. Of course, the added dimension in this country is that in order to acquire the necessary sociopolitical knowledge of appropriate conduct in urban settings, immigrants must first acquire the communicative skills to do so in a second language. To compound the problem, immigrants often take jobs that are exhausting and leave them little time to acquire communicative skills in English. The consequence for the children of immigrants is that soon they are forced to play adult roles in making momentous decisions for their parents because the children know some English and understand the social system a bit better.

A serious problem facing young immigrant families upon their arrival is the neglect and malnutrition of their children. This does not occur only in the case of migrant workers, but also among urban dwellers who are isolated and cannot afford to pay for the cost of child care. Again, to compound these problems, families who have any members without full documentation feel the most vulnerable and therefore do not seek help from social agencies, even if they rightfully qualify to receive assistance. In many instances, workers do not have health insurance or welfare and do not have access to a physician prior to childbirth, or even in the weeks following childbirth (see Brown et al., this volume). Dysfunctional housing conditions increase the chances of health problems and neglect of children. In some cases, even the safety of children is jeopardized in dilapidated housing infested with drug addicts and vandals.

These conditions are also associated with the early recruitment of Mexican children into gangs and with the school dropout phenomenon. If, in the precarious conditions in which families live, the school lacks the resources or

FIGURE 8.2

Latino Segregation by Region, 1994-95 Percent of Latino Students in Region Schools



Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 1994-95; Harvard Project on Desegregation.

interest in providing special attention to immigrant children, then the chances of academic failure increase dramatically. Compounding these problems are the experiences of discrimination, of verbal and physical abuse on the part of mainstream children, and the predominant opinion among teachers that Latino children are low achievers. These experiences create a complex setting in which immigrant children must redefine themselves in the United States, one that can lead them to reject their own family, language, and culture. Such symbolic self-rejection and the formation of a new identity does not necessarily result in embracing school and North American society. A number of scholars have recently dealt with these problems of adaptation in the context of the school environment (Wilson 1991; Gutierrez 1994; Patten-Chavez 1993; Delgado-Gaitan 1994; Deyhle and Margonis 1995; Gutierrez, Larson, and Kreuter 1995; Bartolomé 1996; Bartolomé and Macedo 1997). Several scholars, using critical pedagogy, offer as a solution "transformative" strategies for

teachers and students (based on Freire 1973, 1995; scholars such as Giroux and McLaren 1994; and McLaren 1995, among others).

There is an intimate relationship between the successful adaptation of the entire Mexican family to North America and children's academic success (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995a, 1995b; Diaz Salcedo 1996; Trueba 1997). If children manage to retain a strong cultural self-identity and maintain a sense of belonging to their sociocultural community, they seem to achieve well in school. Carola and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco have also shown in their recent studies (1995a, 1995b) that immigrant children's learning ability and social skills deteriorate the longer they are exposed to the alienating environment of American society, which undermines their overall school achievement and adaptation to this society. The traumatic experience of being uprooted, confusion about family values, and a desire for personal survival, coupled with the need for peer support, are bound to lead many youth to become affiliated with gangs (Vigil 1983, 1988, 1989) and to disregard the codes of behavior prescribed by mainstream society.

Frequently, a family takes special precautions to salvage the moral character and overall well-being of a youth by taking him or her back to Mexico for a period of time, to complete his or her education, work under supervision, or marry a local person. There are cases in which the entire family returns to Mexico in order to reeducate teenagers in family values. This is often associated with a serious reassessment of their finances and the risks involved in continuing to work in the United States. The number of repatriated ex-farm workers in Colima, Michoacán, and Jalisco is increasing rapidly (Trueba and González 1997). However, in contrast to the alienation of Mexican immigrant children in major metropolises (such as Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Houston, etc.), children who live in settings where they can manage to retain their home language and culture, their familiar cultural institutions and networks, seem to survive the trauma of American schooling and to achieve well. This, of course, is the result of a carefully executed plan of education engineered primarily by the mothers, who monitor schooling and defend their language and culture by creating vast networks on both sides of the border, thus supporting their children's strong Mexican identity and their ability to live in a binational and bicultural world (preliminary fieldwork notes by Trueba and González in Comala, Colima, Mexico, 1997).

Some scholars (Martin and Taylor 1996) who intimately know the lives and needs of the seasonal farm worker population in California, as well as the demographic trends in the state, have recently outlined their observations and concerns. Agricultural towns in California are rapidly growing as a result of

both immigration and high rates of fertility among immigrants. Between 25 and 50 percent of residents in these towns have incomes below the federal poverty levels, and often live in overgrown labor camps. In these rural communities the correlation between the increase in the immigrant population and the ratios of children in schools is higher than between the population increase and its use of public assistance. Immigration of seasonal farm workers begins with U.S. recruitment during periods of economic downturn in rural Mexico and growth of job opportunities in California. Immigrant families and village networks are instrumental in managing the choice of jobs for persons from particular Mexican communities. Not only are labor market economies in rural communities increasingly layered in a way that passes the costs of farm work onto the most recently arrived immigrants, but this also displaces some migrant workers to areas of urban poverty. To compound the problem, many new immigrants have little education as they enter agricultural life. Rural poverty, thus, has an impact on urban poverty, especially among children. In fact, in California "the transfer of rural poverty to urban poverty highlights the importance of education and training to improve the prospects for California's rural-to-urban migrants in the urban economy" (Martin and Taylor 1996, 2).

The sense that there is no end in sight to the waves of immigrants is pervasive, and demands reflection on the contradiction between immigration and integration policies. Is allowing unregulated immigration from Mexico and Latin America creating rural and urban poverty, and if so, what is likely to happen to the next generation of immigrant children? If the only option left for employers is to import cheap labor from Mexico, then new immigration will bring new poverty and more segregation. The development of new employers from Mexico (see Corneliuss, this volume) may indicate that a more profound transformation is occurring among Mexican immigrants and that there is hope for upward mobility. This is also confirmed by some of the work by Dussel Peters, Myers, and González Baker in this volume.

MEXICAN FAMILIES STRUGGLE FOR ECONOMIC SURVIVAL

Primarily for economic reasons, there is a steady stream of immigrants not only from Mexico, but also from Caribbean countries and South America, which now contribute the single largest continental segment (nearly 38 percent) of legal immigrants and over 80 percent of undocumented immigrants to the United States (González Baker et al., this volume).³ In addition to the role of Mexico in modern migratory movements into the United States, Mexico's economic and political importance was demonstrated by the role of the U.S. government in pursuing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and

its diligent response to Mexico's 1994 economic crisis. The flow of Latino immigrants will continue at a rapid pace, and their mainstreaming reflects a more intense globalization of our economies in the American hemisphere.

Foreign-born persons of Mexican origin in 1980 constituted 15 percent of the U.S. population, in 1990 20.7 percent, and in 1994 to 1995, 28.4 percent. The increase of the Mexican-origin population in the United States between 1960 and 1996 is as follows:

1960:	1.7 million (1% of the total U.S. population)
1970:	4.5 million (2.2%)
1980:	8.7 million (3.9%)
1990:	13.3 million (5.4%)
1995:	17 million (6.6%)
1996:	18 million (6.7%) (González Baker, this volume)

It is also significant that the 6.8 million Mexican people born in Mexico and living in the United States represent 38.2 percent of the total Mexican-origin population, and 25.8 percent of all the foreign-born persons in this country. Congruent with the previous indices of growth, the number of naturalized citizens of Mexican origin in 1980 was about half a million; between 1980 and 1996 this figure reached about 1.8 million. It seems that two additional factors have motivated Latinos to become naturalized in the last few months: the impending cuts in social benefits for all immigrants (see Hagan, this volume), and, in the case of Mexicans, the real or symbolic promise of dual nationality, or at least the recognition by the Mexican government, in principle, of their rights to Mexican citizenship.

The popular response to this "browning" of North America is that recent Latino immigrants, now at the bottom of the economic ladder, may remain unassimilated in enduring pockets of poverty. This notion is challenged by scholars who feel that Latino progress is disguised by large and ever-increasing numbers of newcomers. The sheer volume of Latino immigration seems to obscure the upward mobility of earlier arrivals (Myers, this volume). George Borjas (1985, 1995) has defended a model of ongoing deterioration in the human quality of recent immigrants, attributing a lower "human capital" and a "declining quality" to recent Latino arrivals:

The "declining quality" thesis has been criticized on several grounds. The economic concept of quality has an unfortunate implication when expressed in common English. Some have feared the racist implication

that the quality of immigrants is declining because the composition of the immigrant flow has shifted from European to Asian and Latin American origins. However, Borjas intended declining quality to signify the declining returns to human capital. Unfortunately, those declining returns are compounded by *relative* declines in the amounts of human capital as well. Recent immigrants actually have higher education and other human capital than their predecessors; their human capital is declining only in the relative sense that it is rising more slowly than that of native-born whites (Myers, this volume).

Two factors seem to determine the apparently slow pace of growth of human capital among Latino immigrants: the first is that the rate of the flow of newcomers is greater than the rate of increase in their incomes; the second is the educational point of departure, that is, many newcomers arrive with relatively little formal education. Without the appropriate educational level, upward intergenerational economic mobility is hindered.

Often the main motivation for Latinos who come to work for low wages is to provide their children with a better education. Yet immigrant parents cannot afford to pay for the education of their children. The reality of the exploitation of new immigrants has been clearly stated by Portes:

The puzzle is whether today's children of immigrants will follow their European predecessors and move steadily into the middle-class mainstream or whether, on the contrary, their ascent will be blocked and they will join children of earlier black and Puerto Rican migrants as part of an expanded multiethnic underclass. As the deteriorating conditions of life in American cities suggest, the question is of more than passing significance for the future of American society (Portes 1996, 3).⁴

According to Myers, there are three broad temporal dimensions that help measure the adaptation of immigrants: lifetime, intergenerational, and successive arrival cohort dimensions. The lifetime dimension follows a path suggested by age and length of residence in the United States. But because individuals move with passing time cohorts not only in length of residence but also in age (along with their birth cohorts) it is important to create double cohorts by putting together birth cohorts with arrival cohorts. Myers explains:

Given that the younger generation of native-born workers is falling behind the career progress of their more fortunate parents, failure to adjust for

birth cohort leads to upwardly biased age effects. . . . Compounding this problem, the Borjas method uses the upwardly biased native-born lifetime career as a reference for judging the relative adaptation of immigrants. The implication is that immigrants should advance at the same rate as the false standard linking younger and older men in the cross-section. By this method, both new immigrants and young native-born workers might be judged to have declining quality (Myers, this volume).

Intergenerational progress research assumes that immigrants pave the way for their children's adaptation and upward economic mobility. If there is a lack of upward economic mobility from one generation to the next, people assume that there is resistance to assimilation or an incapacity to assimilate. Portes (1995) focused on the so-called 1.5 generation, or young immigrant children, that highlights the age-at-arrival effects. Although there is no clear-cut age to identify the 1.5 generation, one could probably endorse Myers' suggested age of ten years as the cut-off point. Overall, however, change over time is better examined across successive cohorts of newcomers as a measure of collective adaptation of immigrant groups to a new society. According to Myers, the statement about declining quality of immigrants (made by Borjas and others) is based precisely on this type of analysis of change between arrival cohorts.

One of the most important findings of Myers' study is that young immigrant children (or the 1.5 generation) match or exceed the academic achievement of the native-born (they have a higher rate of high school completion). How then do we explain the general statistical data on the low educational achievement of Latinos? Simply by the low achievement of the older native-born population and older recent immigrants. In contrast, the "1.5 generation is a bright exception, and they would seem to be poised for economic success" (Myers, this volume). Another significant finding is that intergenerational educational progress does not necessarily or directly translate into occupational mobility and even less into higher earnings. Myers feels that the explanation for this economic ceiling is that economic restructuring has changed the economic returns to an increase in human capital for the most recent labor force (either immigrants or native-born workers).

SEARCHING FOR HOPE: THE RESILIENCE OF MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS

As Marcelo Suárez-Orozco has commented (in personal communication and speeches), what is remarkable is not that so many Latino children fail, but that so many succeed in spite of the difficulties they face. I am convinced that the

single most important characteristic of Latino immigrants, and particularly of Mexican immigrant families, is their enormous capacity to survive and adapt in the face of arduous life circumstances, poverty, and segregation. The role of Mexican women is at the heart of this resiliency. They are crucial to the maintenance of the home language and culture and a complex binational infrastructure of networks and relationships. Many factors contribute to the retention of the Spanish language: the critical mass of immigrants who speak the language, frequent visits to home towns and cities, and the interdependence between families living on both sides of the border. The organization of functional networks of families and their friends has been most instrumental to the survival of families during difficult economic times, but it has also served as a very strong emotional support system for retaining a strong Mexican identity in the face of the traumas alluded to above by the Suárez-Orozcos (1995a, 1995b, forthcoming). A substantial, although informal, financial cooperative system can also become a powerful political base from which to demand respect for their educational rights, as was the case in Guadalupe, California (Trueba 1997). Traditional organizations of a religious character, in the Mexican tradition, become a strong political enclave and support system in the adaptation of immigrant families to this country (Trueba et al. 1993). In fact, the only way for these families to engage in long-term economic ventures (buying land in Mexico, purchasing homes in the United States, etc.) is through the collective security of the family networks on both sides of the border, collective savings, and commitment to mutual support in times of crisis. The skills to survive emotionally and economically in the worst of situations continue to be a unique characteristic of many immigrant families, who invest every possible resource in the future generation through binational networks of strategically invested scarce resources. This "know-how," which Freire called "knowing the world" in contrast with literacy as "knowing the word," is often the key factor in facilitating the adaptation of the immigrant family (Freire 1973, 1995; Freire and Macedo 1996).

Because Mexican immigrant families have different prearrival experiences and varying degrees of literacy skills and socioeconomic status, their early experiences in the United States and their children's academic success also vary a great deal. The adaptive strategies adopted by new immigrants reflect their previous experiences and determine the pace of adaptation and its ultimate success. One of the least investigated strategies is the binational, bicultural approach to adaptation. Naturally, education is very important to Mexican families. In fact, some children are sent back to Mexico for their elementary education if their experience in American schools becomes unproductive or

unbearable. Often, however, children from migrant families in the entire Southwest are well known in school for their absences, which parallel their parents' cycles of unemployment. There are important recent changes associated with the unemployment of immigrants; for example, the replacement of traditional farm workers (those who started to come in the 1960s from central Mexico) by Mixtec or Mayan Indians aggressively recruited by *contratistas* (contractors) in northern Mexico (seeking the cheapest manual labor for agricultural jobs in California). The least sophisticated new workers often tolerate the low pay and abuse because they need work and are unaware of their rights. Although the rural Mexican population in the United States represents only about 20 percent of all Mexicans in the United States (while urban Mexican immigrants are the majority), many of the urban immigrants in the United States come from rural backgrounds and resort to networks and cultural traditions in the United States. The reality of their binational experience is instrumental in their survival, judging from the testimonies of repatriated immigrants in Mexico (see Trueba and González 1997).

From preliminary reports of repatriation studies, it seems that communication between family members on both sides of the border never stops. The economic interdependency of members of the same family residing on either side of the border permits them to engage in a resource exchange and the investment of modest capital to run small businesses. The use of both languages and cultures, as well as the use of capital and labor to support family ventures, continues to provide these families with new economic resources and higher social status. The conspicuous consumption that is discussed by Durand, Parrado, and Massey (1996) has important symbolic functions in marking success and building confidence among those who left Mexico. It is indeed an indirect repayment that compensates the many degrading experiences suffered in the United States. In fact, families and their networks on both sides of the border create an efficient informal social insurance that provides small amounts of cash and emotional support to any person in trouble, with the implied commitment that eventually all will have to reciprocate in kind as crisis or need arises. The penalty for not complying with this reciprocal obligation is abandonment by the family and network on both sides of the border. As they grow up and become fully bilingual, children become an integral part of the network, and are often called to play a role as interpreters and assistants. During important life events all these relationships are played out and ritually sanctioned with religious ceremonies during baptisms, weddings, funerals, and so forth. Also, during certain celebrations (patron saint festivities, Day of the Dead, etc.) relatives get together on either side of the border to renew their

commitment to help. An intergenerational agreement is always renewed. More recently, women have come to play a major role in these events because in many instances they have become the financial experts for the family.

CONCLUSION

The following questions continue to intrigue researchers who study Mexican immigration and its consequences for the education of Mexican children:

1. What is the nature of the process of ethnic, racial, and cultural identification of children, and the integration of their inner self, as they face a loss of social status in the United States and increased isolation from both Latino communities and the white communities in this country?
2. What is the cost (emotional, cultural, and psychological) of the apparent socioeconomic advantages of immigration, especially if we consider the heavy financial obligations of immigrants to their families of origin in Mexico?
3. What are the fundamental changes in values and lifestyle, and what are the consequences of such changes for both the survival and prosperity of immigrants in the United States and their temporary presence in Mexico?
4. How do children adjust back in Mexico, and how do they achieve in Mexican schools?
5. For those who return to Mexico for extended periods of time, what is the impact of the socioeconomic, political, and cultural changes they have experienced as they engage in daily life in Mexico?

Binational, bicultural survival is a new fact of life for many Mexican immigrants who do not obtain steady employment in this country and must find creative ways of providing for their family. From preliminary fieldwork in Mexico (see Trueba and González 1997), this is a phenomenon continually increasing both in central Mexico and the U.S. Southwest. It is one of the adaptive strategies for surviving the economic and psychological hardships alluded to by Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995a, 1995b) as well as by Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) and by Trueba et al. (1993) that are associated with the experience of working and living in the United States, often in poverty and under oppression.

In the late 1960s, there were more than three times as many blacks as Latinos in the school population, and there was one Latino for every seventeen white students; twenty years later, Latino enrollment is two-thirds of the black student population, and there is one Latino student for every seven whites. The white student population decreased 17 percent, while the Latino student population increased 103 percent in that period (Orfield, cited by Valencia 1991, 18–20). This trend has been accentuated for complex historical reasons in the 1990s (Orfield and Eaton 1996). Paradoxically, the economic and technological future of this country will depend precisely on the educational success of Latinos, blacks, and Asians because by the mid-twenty-first century they will constitute half of the total U.S. population. Latino children are already the majority in many of our schools.

High achievement is only possible for immigrants if we pay attention to what Sonia Diaz Salcedo (1996) considers the most crucial factors of adaptation to schools. Discussing the students in her study, she states:

They spoke at length about the issues they faced with their parents or guardians, and the impact that their relationships at home have had on their success in school. The themes that surfaced were: resilience and survival, relating to family, the importance of connecting with the culture and ethnicity, developing a sense of responsibility and independence, communication, and spirituality or religious affiliation (Diaz Salcedo 1996, 129).

Diaz Salcedo describes how students spoke lovingly of their parents, who gave them a “loving and caring home life” that provided what they perceived as a supportive environment. In her interviews, Diaz Salcedo suggests that students were grateful to their parents and felt fortunate that their parents provided constant encouragement. In some specific cases, students spoke of the sacrifices made by their mothers in the way they provided a caring, nurturing home for them. This is consistent with the perception of hardships articulated by mothers during the years in which they had to work and take care of their children. Caring for children and providing them with support in their education is at times very difficult and costly for parents, given the exhausting jobs they hold. For example, a young mother, speaking of those years, related to me:

To me all this has been very hard, especially when my children were younger. I had to prepare lunches and clothing for my oldest son and my daughter the night before and wake them up early to go to school. Then

I had to take my two youngest sons (who were two and four years of age) to my sister's house so she would take care of them while I worked in the fields. I came back home exhausted. I had to see them with *lastima* (pity): “*Mami, Mami*,” they said crying. I would reply, “let me make supper” or “let me take a shower.” [With tears, she continued] *Bien duro* (real hard). . . . (Trueba 1997).

In the Diaz Salcedo study, however, not all of the families of successful students were ideal and exemplary. Those students whose families were less than ideal found other sources of support. Their resourcefulness led them to find the support of surrogate parents, and to find within themselves and their school environment additional support through a strong spiritual life, a strong belief in God, and trust in various church groups. In all cases,

The students also formed their ideas about resilience and survival in the context of their home lives. In turn, they had made the connection to parental support or lack of support in discussing their success at school. For all of them it appeared to be important for someone to say that “they matter.” In many cases this “someone” was the mother; in other cases it was someone at school or in their lives outside of school or home (Diaz Salcedo 1996, 131).

In the end, students were aware that they had not chosen their family, but they had many choices open to them; they felt in control of their future. All felt in close emotional connection with their Latino culture, which was “implicit in certain dynamics, and tended to be more explicit in their home contexts” (Diaz Salcedo 1996, 132). These findings are congruent with the work of Carola and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco (1995a, 1995b) and the work I did in central California regarding the unique role that a strong ethnic affiliation plays in the maintenance of the motivation to achieve in school.

In conclusion, there is a conspicuous need for systematic, substantive, and long-term research on the achievement of Mexican children to explore the conditions and circumstances that can make possible a serious change in dropout rates and a marked progress in academic achievement. The research agenda must take into consideration the importance of the family in its binational, bicultural situation. The role of schools in encouraging the use of ethnic cultures to improve achievement continues to be central. School initiatives to prevent the isolation of Mexican families and facilitate their socialization into academic careers are indispensable.

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NOTES

1. The U.S. population as of May 1, 1996 was 265,022,000. Of the population 65 years of age and over, whites represent 85 percent, blacks 8 percent, Hispanics 4 percent, and Asian and Pacific Islanders 2 percent. Blacks, Hispanics, Asians and Pacific Islanders, and American Indians account for 34 percent of the U.S. population under 18 years of age. From the over 16 million poor children, one-third (5.6 million) live in working-poor families (that is, having at least one parent working 50 or more weeks a year and making less than \$11,821, the poverty standard for 1994). Working-poor families increased 30 percent from 1989 to 1994; most children in these working-poor families are born to women over the age of 25, and half of these children live in two-parent households with one parent working all year. These children (27 percent of whom have no health insurance) are often not immunized, do not do well in school, and are more likely to be poor as adults. From 1985 to 1993, low-birth-weight babies increased 6 percent; violent deaths (suicide, homicide, accidents) among youth aged 15 to 19 increased 10 percent; violent crime arrests of youths aged 10 to 17 rose 66 percent; and single-parent families with children increased 18 percent (*Population Today* 1996, 4-6).
2. As Suárez-Orozco has pointed out insightfully, the United States is currently going through difficult times, when fear of losing one's job, the increase in crime, and the erosion of family values signal social chaos. Anxieties have focused on immigrants and refugees, who are blamed for our problems and our deep and "terrifying sense of homelessness" (Suárez-Orozco 1998, 9-24). Some of this anxiety is related to vast changes in immigration patterns. To understand long-term population trends and the impact of Latinos, we must examine what we know about Latino immigrants from the last three decades. According to Rumbaut (1995, 16-69), in 1990 there were 19.7 million immigrants (defined as people born outside the U.S. territory) in the United States (or 6.8 percent of the U.S. population), of which 8,416,924 were Latinos (including Caribbean), from Cuba, Colombia, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico; of that number 4,298,014 were from Mexico. Of all Latino immigrants, 78 percent arrived between 1970 and 1989 (6.5 million, one-third of all immigrants), and 50

percent came in the 1980s; only 27 percent of the Latinos have become U.S. citizens, which is understandable given the recency of their arrival, type of work, rural background, and limited access to assistance. Overall, 60 percent of Mexican immigrants live in California. A person's educational level seems to predict economic level and employment. The highest rates of poverty are found among the populations with the least education: Mexicans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Dominicans, and Haitians.

3. While immigration is caused by many complex factors, economists feel that one of the greatest incentives to go north is economic opportunity vis-à-vis the poverty experienced by an ever-increasing unemployed group of able persons. Enrique Dussel Peters (this volume) feels that a major motivation for Mexican immigration to the United States is economic. The chronic lack of stable and well-remunerated jobs in Mexico has created a systematic and permanent flow of immigrants seeking employment in the United States. Part of the problem in Mexico seems to be related to restrictive monetary and credit policies, the import liberalization trends that culminated with the 1994 peso devaluation, and the ever-increasing foreign debt, which together created a surplus of labor in spite of successful economic improvement in the automotive, petrochemical, and electronic industries. In the end, Mexico has not been able to shake off its dependency on imports, and, particularly among the private manufacturing industries, the crises peaked in 1994. The rate of increase among the economically active population far exceeded the pace of economic growth and the demand for domestic labor. One of the most promising, growing industries in Mexico is the maquiladora, with an increase from 5 to 40 percent of total manufacturing employment between 1980 and 1996 (or from 125,000 to 800,000 workers in those years, respectively). But even that represents a very small part of the total economy and will not continue to grow at a fast pace because the market is becoming saturated (Dussel Peters, this volume).
4. Portes goes on to spell out the long-term role of immigration in the structure of the American economy through the sagas of immigrants. Immigrants struggle to find political freedom and economic security. Portes adds:

The saga reflects accurately many individual experiences, but it is only part of the story. While individual motivations are undoubtedly important, a political economy analysis shows that what drives the process is not the dreams and needs of immigrants but the interests and plans of their prospective employers. Although geopolitical and other considerations have played roles in granting to certain foreign groups access to American territory, the fundamental reason for sustained immigration, at least since the post-Civil War period, has been the labor needs of the economy. . .

Employer associations played a decisive role in recruiting European and Asian labor during the nineteenth century. They organized dependable labor flows from Asia, southeastern Europe, and Mexico at the turn of the century and then succeeded in keeping the immigration door open against nativistic opposition until World War I (Portes 1996, 3-4).

5. Martin and Taylor (1996, 6) suggest that in some rural towns agricultural labor is divided into a three-tiered labor force: The smallest portion of workers, 14 percent, work year round; 20 percent are long-season local workers, and 66 percent are peak season migrants. However, there is a great deal of networking across rural-urban continua within the families of immigrants. In Guadalupe, California, for example, most of the second-generation children who reached high school work in urban areas, in spite of the fact that they were born into Mexican migrant families. I suspect that there is an overall career ladder starting from the lowest-paid jobs in the rural United States to better-paying skilled labor, to professional and business occupations. The mobility from rural to urban within the United States occurs within one generation in most cases (Trueba 1997; and personal interviews in central California). The creative entrepreneurs who repatriate permanently in Mexico, or continue their binational existence, are intimately connected to the flow of "migradollars" sent to Mexico. It is universally recognized that the inflow of migradollars, estimated at some \$2 billion a year, directly stimulates higher levels of economic activity, investment, employment, and income growth (Durand, Parrado, and Massey 1996, 423). But there are also many indirect effects, such as the celebration of traditional fiestas:

In the fiesta, those who have money are expected to spend for the benefit of those who do not. Returning United States migrants with substantial savings feel obligated to spend a share of their funds for the general welfare, covering the lion's share of the costs of the music, fireworks, dances, parades, and religious celebrations—all of which are presented publicly and enjoyed by all, rich or poor (Durand, Parrado, and Massey 1996, 428).

Furthermore, the additional income for Mexicans is estimated at \$5.8 billion a year (3 percent of the gross domestic product in 1989), which benefits primarily skilled urban workers and investors, with annual gains of \$1.9 million each. Beyond this impact, those 2 billion migradollars could well generate \$6.5 billion in manufacturing and services. Thus, unlike other investments, migradollars benefit the people who need money the most, and very little is diverted to those with higher incomes who occupy positions of authority (Durand, Parrado, and Massey 1996, 426-441).

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Commentary

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If demography is destiny, the United States is entering a perilous era and seems perversely engaged in implementing policies that will greatly heighten the threat to the American future. Between the mid-twentieth century and the mid-twenty-first century we are being transformed from a nine-tenths white European, English-speaking society with one large minority group, concentrated in the South and a few large northern cities, to a multiracial society with a declining white population and a non-European majority. In that new society, the largest minority group will be Latino, three times as large as the present black population, and many millions will speak Spanish. Political and cultural power will rapidly shift from the East and the Midwest to the West and the South.

Our largest immigrant stream, which is accounting for much of our population growth, includes millions of people with very little education and few skills to prepare them for a bitterly competitive global economy in which the growing rewards are very tightly linked to skills. They tend to enter secondary labor markets with low wages, little mobility, and few exits.

The issues of racial, ethnic, and linguistic differences are likely to become more and more salient as our two largest states become predominantly Latino and many communities try to sort out the cross-pressures of three or four different racial and ethnic groups competing for power and economic opportunity and seeking opportunity through schools. Recent research shows that the major "minority" groups tend to have more intense stereotypes toward each other than whites have of any of them, and there are already bitter political divisions among minorities in some cities.

It should be clear in the post-Cold War era that racial and ethnic cleavages are potentially profoundly destructive if institutions and leaders favoring mutual respect, integration, and pluralism are replaced by demagogues activating stereotypes, fears, and hatred. The Soviet Union collapsed from such forces, not from external conquest. The tragedy of Bosnia follows a long chain

of similar events stretching from the Indian subcontinent to Belfast, from Beirut to Indonesia. Our northern neighbor Canada has very recently been through an election in which a major part of the nation came within fractions of a percent of voting to split the nation along lines of language. We could reasonably expect that farsighted leaders would be seeking ways and means to weave together the disparate elements of our changing population with the greatest urgency.

Nowhere should this effort be more intense than in our schools. Unlike most other industrial societies, the United States has a weak system of social welfare provision, one that is becoming more feeble after recent massive cutbacks in welfare, housing, and other programs. Only the schools exist as a major instrument for bringing the society together and giving substance to the central dream—equal opportunity for all. This is particularly true for Latino immigrants, since the Latino population is the youngest major group in the society.

With the best of good will and major resources, the task would still be huge. Schools have much weaker effects than families on children's lives, and population growth is concentrated in overburdened urban school districts that are struggling with many kinds of social and economic problems. A great many low-income families, for example, move every few months because of the lack of affordable housing, giving their children a chaotic educational experience.

Latino immigrants, like earlier black immigrants to big cities, are hard working, ambitious, and deeply concerned about education; they desperately want a better life for their children. Most of their children still have the great benefit of intact families. But the growing populations are often locating in dysfunctional inner cities and decaying suburbs where economic and cultural crises pose a clear and present danger of ghettoization and failure for their children. Too often there is a drastic shift from traditional rural poverty in coherent Mexican villages to chaos and tragedy on vicious streets dominated by heavily armed urban gangs that ridicule the values of parents and the old society.

What our leaders have too often discovered are not the lessons of the dangers of division and inequality but the political benefits of activating stereotypes and playing on fears and social cleavages. As this huge new population arrives asking for incorporation and respect in the society and a fair chance to make it in the mainstream, we are in the process of abandoning many of the limited tools we have to make this work and raising new barriers that block incorporation and mobility.

Since demographic change is already deeply structured into the existing population and we have no policies likely to substantially reduce additional immigration, this means that we are betting that a huge and very rapidly grow-

ing community will accept increasing subordination and that the segregated communities and institutions where they are confined will produce acceptance of subordination rather than a countermobilization of beliefs and political leadership built around defiance rather than pluralism.

Latinos are facing intensely isolated and unequal schooling, isolation already more severe even than that of African Americans. They also face a marginalized economic situation. Their family income is now about the same as that of African Americans and has been declining significantly in recent years. The only major policy initiative on their behalf has been bilingual education.

There are now major attacks on bilingual education programs that blame them for the educational problems and lack of incorporation that grow out of poverty, isolation, and discrimination. Latinos are also vulnerable to the conservative attack on the whole array of other civil rights protections that may help them. These attacks target affirmative action college admissions, aid programs, and policies, greatly increasing the cost of college and the courses and test scores required for admission. Programs for minority small businesses, affirmative action hiring, and voting rights enforcement to enhance political representation have also been attacked.

Latino students constituted 13 percent of the enrollment in American public schools by 1994, a proportion higher than the proportion of black students at the height of the civil rights struggle. The West, the region most isolated from the black struggle because of its small black population, is undergoing a vast transformation and now has the smallest share of white students of any region. Predominantly minority areas in terms of school enrollment already include the nation's two most populous states, California and Texas, which are both moving rapidly toward a Latino majority in their school systems. Latino students show the most significant change as a proportion of students in intensely segregated schools, which rose to 34.8 percent of all schools in 1994.

From the 1960s to the mid-1990s, Mexican American areas in the West changed from very substantial desegregation to a level of isolation exceeding that of blacks. Since Latino students are experiencing far higher dropout rates than African Americans, and three-fifths of Latino students live in two states in which education officials have adopted policies ending affirmative action for college admissions, the increasing concentration of students in low-achieving, high-poverty schools where few children prepare competitively for college raises extremely important issues. If the growing community of Latino students is increasingly isolated in inferior schools and standards are raised without the schools having the means to meet them, a vicious cycle of declining opportunity could result.

The relationship between segregation by race and segregation by poverty in public schools across the nation is exceptionally strong. The correlation between the percentage of black and Latino enrollments and the percentage of students receiving free lunches is an extremely high .72. This means that when we talk about racially segregated schools, they are very likely to be segregated by poverty as well.

There is strong and consistent evidence across the United States as well as from other nations that high-poverty schools usually have much lower levels of educational performance by virtually all measures. This is not entirely caused by the school; family background is a more powerful influence. Schools with concentrations of isolated, low-income children have less well-prepared children. Even better-prepared children can be harmed academically if they are placed in a school with few other prepared students and, in some cases, in a social setting where academic achievement is not fostered.

School-level educational achievement scores in many states and in the nation show a very strong relationship between the concentration of poverty and low achievement. This is because high-poverty schools are unequal in many ways that affect educational outcomes. These students' parents are far less educated—a very powerful influence—and these children are much more likely to be living in single-parent homes that are struggling with multiple problems. Children are much more likely to have serious developmental problems and health problems that go untreated. Children move much more often, often moving involuntarily in the course of a school year, meaning that schools often do not have students for sufficient time to make an impact. High-poverty schools have to devote far more time and resources to family and health crises, security, children who come to school not speaking standard English, seriously disturbed children, children with no educational materials in their homes, and many children with very weak educational preparation. These schools tend to draw less-qualified teachers and to hold them for shorter periods of time. They tend to have to invest much more heavily in remediation and much less adequately in advanced and gifted classes and demanding materials. The level of competition and peer group support for educational achievement are much lower in high-poverty schools. Such schools are viewed much more negatively in the community and by institutions of higher education as well as by potential employers. In those states that have implemented high stakes testing that denies graduation or fails students, the high-poverty schools tend to have by far the highest rates of sanctions.

Trueba correctly points out that the educational crisis facing Latinos is compounded in many dimensions. There are massive cultural changes that

take place in the process of immigration and entering into new school systems. Newcomer families often have a clearer vision and more hope than those who have been struggling for a generation in a deteriorating urban setting with shrinking economic opportunities and those who have been exposed to the loss of culture between generations. These problems are compounded by prejudice and language differences. Schools can, of course, play important roles in this process and sometimes help replace family influences for those without strong support at home. Sonia Diaz Salcedo and others have described some of the powerful impacts of positive supportive schooling. Typically, however, the schools serving minority concentrated-poverty communities are deteriorating, poorly equipped, staffed with inexperienced teachers who plan to leave as soon as possible, and have few educated or powerful parents.

Latino communities in urban America are deeply threatened by current trends and policies. Most are situated in settings where it is impossible to maintain the old culture through the generations and where the economic threats to both parents and students are often extreme. These communities face the dual pressures of a continuing inflow of economically marginal or illegal workers and the exit of those who have had success in U.S. mainstream institutions. If the economy is raising the stakes on education, and bilingual programs are only a very partial answer and are being cut back, new thinking about educational and residential choices is badly needed. The success or failure of devising and implementing policies directed at these problems will do much to shape large portions of twenty-first-century America.

PART V

Psychocultural Themes