

20. MEXICAN-AMERICANS IN A MIDWEST METROPOLIS

Julian Samora and Richard Lamanna

Mexican-Americans are not an easy group to name or to count correctly. Some people of essentially the same ancestral background as today's residents of, say, Mexico City have been American citizens since the Mexican War. Such people are sometimes called, and call themselves, Spanish-Americans, and live mainly in southern Colorado and New Mexico. In the latter state they may constitute as much as 20 percent of the population, and some belong to families that have been rich and eminent for generations.

Sometimes "Latin American" or merely "Latin" are used, but these terms are too general because Cubans and Puerto Ricans, not to mention people from South America who also live here, are also Latin Americans. "Spanish-speaking" does not work either, for the same reason as well as because many American-born citizens with parents or grandparents who emigrated here from Mexico speak Spanish poorly or not at all. Compounding the difficulty is the inadequacy of using physical appearance as a means of classification, particularly in the absence of cultural cues. The Census relies on an unsatisfactory compromise, estimating the numbers of Mexican-Americans in terms of "Spanish surnames," thus missing people like quarterback Jim Plunkett of the New England Patriots football team.

As long as these terminological difficulties are understood, I see no reason to hesitate in using "Mexican-American" as the most general and accurate term, employing it in the same

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sense as "Italo-American," "Polish American," or "Jewish American." I shall also follow the rather inaccurate but useful Western and Southwestern convention of using the term "Anglo" to refer to the white (that is, non-Mexican, nonblack, non-Oriental, non-Indian) majority. And at times, I shall use "Chicano," a contraction of the Spanish pronunciation of "Mexicano." The term was once derogatory when Anglos used it, but it has now taken on proud connotations. Young Mexican-Americans in particular use it to describe their own group and to differentiate it from people who are citizens of Mexico.

Half of all the Mexican-American people in the United States are American-born children of American-born parents, only about one out of seven having been born in Mexico. In 1960, 80 percent of the population lived in just five states: Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas. Their number then (according to the Spanish surname count) came to three and a half million people; it is now more than four million, and it has been shifting from Texas (the Mexican-American's Mississippi) to California (his Illinois).

Puerto Ricans and Mexican-Americans are the two large American minority groups based on recent emigration from outside the continental United States. Mainland Puerto Ricans are a smaller group, about a million people, concentrated (although not exclusively) around metropolitan New York. Puerto Rican immigration did not become appreciable until after World War II, while the peak early years for Mexican immigration were 1920-1929. Another difference is that Puerto Ricans became residents of huge cities like New York and Chicago almost immediately upon their arrival. More Mexican-Americans spent some time in rural areas or in the small urban centers serving the agricultural regions where they worked as farm laborers. A final difference concerns ancestry. Puerto Ricans are a composite population, with touches of black and Spanish white along with a trace of Caribbean Indian. Mexican-Americans are generally mestizos, that is, a mixture of Spanish white and Mezo-American Indian.

The most obvious similarities between the two groups are that both share the Spanish language—though many of today's youngsters do not speak it; the predominance of the Roman Catholic faith; and some features of Latin (actually Western Mediterranean) culture such as the paternalistic family and individualistic conceptions of dignity resting on personal honor and pride. Another parallel is that immigration of members of both groups continues. Continued immigration along with the proximity of Mexico and Puerto Rico mean that it is relatively

easy for the immigrant to stay up-to-date with developments in those places. The point is not irrelevant. Puerto Rican criticisms of American ethnocentrism and cultural dominance expressed in the Puerto Rican independence movement strike a harmonious note with Mexican-American pride in the Mexican nation's recent rapid economic growth and its conscious emphasis on ancestral indigenous heritage.

It is not farfetched to claim that there are also parallels between Mexican-Americans and blacks. Mexicans were never slaves, but most Mexican immigrants who came to this country were poor and unlettered *campesinos*, peasants who for subsistence worked land over which they had some hereditary-use rights but which they could not own because it belonged to extensive *latifundios* that were the holdings of wealthy *patrones*. The overwhelming majority of Mexican nationals were landless peasants until President Cárdenas' administration (1934–1940) extended agrarian reform and consolidated the Mexican Revolution. In this country the Mexican immigrants were used as cheap labor, and many returned or were driven back to Mexico during the depression of the thirties. They were strikebreakers and unskilled labor, migrant farm workers who found industrial jobs in World War II. In the last few years, potential immigrants have been simultaneously strikebreakers and migrant workers in California's grape and lettuce fields. Growers still hire Mexican citizens for wages Mexican-Americans are beginning to refuse to accept.

Through all of this, Anglos did not hesitate to show their distaste for what they considered an alien culture and inherent racial inferiority. The 1964 Civil Rights Act stopped Texas advertisements for a "neat dependable Anglo short-order cook," or "Waitresses, Colored or Latin."¹ It did not stop, however, Houston's 1970 plan for public school integration, a plan that calls for black and Mexican-American children to go to school together while white children continue having their own schools to themselves.² Nor did it stop—until a 1970 court order—the California practice of giving placement tests in English to kids whose home language was Spanish, and then placing them in classes for the retarded if they did not score well.

¹ Paul Bullock, "Employment Problems of the Mexican-American," in John H. Burma (ed.), *Mexican-Americans in the United States* (Cambridge: Schenkman, 1970), p. 154.

² I have read that a court ruling has quashed the same sort of plan in Corpus Christi, Texas, but do not know if that ruling will be applied across the state.

Today many Mexican-Americans believe that they may profit from adopting some of the same strategies that have earned new recognition and self-respect for and among black people. Nevertheless, there are also contrary currents of opinion in the group as a whole. For one thing, centuries of oppression in Mexico encouraged a fatalistic perspective in Mexican culture, along with a dependence upon the hope of favors paternalistically granted by those at the top. For another, the assertion of group independence means calling attention to group distinctiveness. Older Mexican-Americans resented the discrimination practiced against them; some tried to insist that they were, after all, Caucasians. Finally, Mexican-Americans share with blacks the tendency of almost all American minority groups to look down on others whom the majority does not accept. Thus, since neither group has a well-established or deep-seated trust and respect toward the other, the possibility of more than temporary black-Chicano alliances seems limited.

In the first of this section's three consecutive papers on Mexican-Americans, Samora and Lamanna describe an atypical community. It is old and well established, but outside the main area of Mexican-American settlement. Many features of the community and its history are similar to those that could have been found in ethnic minority communities around industrial centers as recently as a generation ago. There is concentrated residential settlement stemming from community members' desire for the familiar, from the prohibitive cost of more comfortable housing, and from the resistance of local populations to letting a minority spread. There is a perceived need for children to take education more seriously and to raise their aspirations, but this desire is countered by the possibility of their leaving school early for an initially attractive but ultimately dead-end job. There is the ethnic Catholic parish as the locale of rituals like christenings, weddings, and funerals that bring together family, faith, and group culture even though (and this is also common) adult men are not especially careful about attending mass regularly. There is the combination of parents knowing that their children will face a different world from the one they faced, and wanting to prepare them for it, without quite knowing the most effective ways of doing so.

Nevertheless, one should be wary of assuming that this community is wholly representative of ethnic communities in general. One reason is continuing immigration which helps to maintain traditional culture. Even more important is a continuing pattern of prejudice and discrimination that goes beyond mere ethnic antipathy. Poles were not given boat fare and

sent back to Poland, nor Greeks to Greece; and when Irish and Italian students went to the same parochial school, they did not attend segregated classes.

Samora and Lamanna conclude with the observation that the decreased intensity of discrimination should lead to greater assimilation. They are probably right, but there is also the possibility that even as acculturation continues, new Chicano solidarity will make assimilation seem less desirable.

Not far from the "Main Street of the Midwest"—the Indiana East-West Toll Road—in the industrial city of East Chicago, the unsuspecting traveler is likely to be surprised to find a large, well-established colony of Mexican-Americans. Many of us associate Mexican-Americans almost exclusively with the Southwestern states; others assume that all Mexican-Americans outside the Southwest are migrant farm laborers or at least that they got wherever they happen to be in this country by way of the migrant stream. Is it also frequently assumed that this movement of population is of fairly recent origin.

The Mexican-American colony of East Chicago, Indiana, located in that part of the city known as Indiana Harbor, sharply differs from this stereotype. For one thing, it is located in the midst of one of the world's greatest urban-industrial complexes,¹ and the great majority of its residents are employed in manufacturing and heavy industry. Secondly, the colony was founded by Mexicans who were recruited to work in these industries almost half a century ago. Thirdly, unlike any other colony outside the Southwestern states, the Mexican-American settlement of East

¹ Although the population of East Chicago itself is only 57,669 it is part of a larger complex of almost 7 million. The Gary-Hammond-East Chicago Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area had a population of 573,548 in 1960 and the Chicago SMSA a population of 6,220,913.

Chicago has constituted a substantial portion of the total population of the community.

The early Mexican immigrants to the Calumet region came principally from the area north and northwest of Mexico City and "leap-frogged" over the United States's border states to our northern interior. From a small colony of 20 to 30 persons in East Chicago before World War I, it gradually increased and expanded, becoming in time one of the largest concentrations of Mexicans outside the Southwest. This development grew out of the employment opportunities that opened up during World War I, and as industry grew and expanded in the area, so did the number of Mexicans who were recruited and attracted to it. By 1930 there were 5,343 Mexicans in East Chicago, and they constituted 10 percent of the city's population.

Later, during the depression of the 1930's, a mass repatriation of Mexicans took place. A plan was devised for expediting and subsidizing the exodus, at the suggestion of the American Legion of East Chicago. The Legion pointed out that it would cost less to send the Mexicans back home than to keep them on the relief rolls, that the city would be spared the expense of educating their children, and that when conditions improved, the Mexicans would not be on the scene to compete for jobs with American citizens. The Mexicans were more

than willing to return to their homeland. The first train left East Chicago in May, 1932, and by the end of the year about 1,800 Mexicans had been sent back to their homeland from East Chicago and almost 1,500 from nearby Gary.²

Allowing ourselves a digression, we should like to point out that this massive repatriation was a dramatic example of one of the distinctive features of the Mexican immigration to the United States. Unlike other ethnic minorities in this country, the Mexicans have been able to and have gone back and forth across the border or to the Southwestern states. The Mexican immigrants have frequently not intended to become permanent residents of the United States, or they have been engaged in seasonal work, so that returning to their homeland has been relatively normal for them. Other immigrant groups have sometimes come with the intention of returning to their place of origin but they rarely had similar opportunities, and even more rarely did they avail themselves of the opportunities when they had them.

A change introduced by the Bureau of the Census of 1940, in the racial classification of Mexicans, has made it difficult to establish the number of Mexicans in East Chicago at the time, but 1,358 persons were listed as having been born in Mexico. This population increased steadily during the following two decades—in 1950, 1,867 gave Mexico as their country of birth, and the 1960 Census lists 6,532 persons of Mexican stock (first and second generation), 11.3 percent of the population of East Chicago. However, since Mexicans have resided in the Calumet region for some time, and since many have migrated there from other areas of the United States where they had resided for several

² Paul S. Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1932), p. 209.

generations, the "foreign stock" group very likely represents only a part of the total population of Mexican ancestry. A more realistic picture of the colony's size can be obtained by considering the ethnic composition of the public schools. In 1965, close to 22 percent of the school children were clearly of Mexican ancestry. Almost two-thirds of these came from homes where Spanish was the customary language. Another 9 percent of the school population was of Puerto Rican background. This means that in 1965, except for the Negro minority (38 percent), the Spanish stock minority constituted the largest (31 percent) single ethnic category in the East Chicago public schools.

Among the first families to settle in East Chicago, in 1838, were to be found the following national groupings: Irish, German, Dutch, Swiss, and native-born Americans. These settlers were followed almost immediately by Russians, Croats, Hungarians, and the English. By 1895, Greeks, Austrians, Italians, Rumanians, Slovaks, Serbs, Lithuanians, the French, and other national groupings had come to the city. By 1910 more than half (53 percent) of the population of East Chicago was foreign-born representing almost every nationality among the people who had come to the United States. The most heavily represented nations were: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Rumania, and Mexico. There were few Negroes (28 in 1910) in East Chicago until World War I restricted the flow of the European labor supply. By 1920 there were 1,424 Negroes; 5,088 by 1930; and 13,766 by 1960. The number of Asiatic residents has always been small in East Chicago. Although at various times some Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and Indians have lived there, they have never constituted a significant proportion of the population.

Ethnic heterogeneity is still a striking characteristic of the community. The

foreign-born population is dropping off rapidly; however, an examination of public school records indicating the birth place of students and their parents shows some 47 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and 36 foreign countries are represented. Included among the foreign countries are such unusual places as China, Turkey, Peru, Egypt, and Argentina. From the United States, Texas, Alabama, and Mississippi have been major points of origin, while Puerto Rico and Mexico have been the biggest sources outside the continental United States. Almost one out of every ten of the students enrolled in 1965 were foreign-born or born in Puerto Rico. The proportion of foreign-born parents is of course much higher. It is apparent that the community is still attracting a considerable number of interregional and international migrants seeking greater economic opportunity.

Residential segregation was in part due to preference for reasons of convenience (proximity to the steel mills) and choice (the tendency for immigrants to prefer areas inhabited by their countrymen), but it was also due to discrimination. Taylor has reported that in practically every major colony of Mexicans in the region there were efforts to drive them out or to isolate them by restricting the boundaries of their residence.³ The reasons given for opposition to the Mexican were diverse, but they included charges that they were given to fighting and annoying their neighbors, that they were dirty and poor housekeepers, that they were racially undesirable, that they depreciated property values, or simply that the intrusion of another nationality was unwanted. Competition for jobs and women also contributed to the hostility which at times expressed itself in physical assaults and even killings. Incidentally, many of the objections to Mexicans that Taylor has reported were repeated almost verbatim in the comments we heard (in

³ *Ibid.*

1965) from Mexican-Americans regarding the Puerto Rican newcomers.

It is apparent that the Spanish surname population—both Mexican-American and Puerto Rican—is highly concentrated in a small part of the total area of East Chicago. One census tract (31) has over 35 percent of all the Mexican-American population in East Chicago and 39 percent of all the Puerto Rican population, while another 44 percent of the Mexican-American population and 39 percent of the Puerto Rican live in three adjoining tracts (30, 32, 34). Almost 80 percent of East Chicago's Spanish surname population resides in these four tracts which constitute only a part of the Indiana Harbor section of East Chicago. The remaining tracts have relatively few Spanish surname persons, but they are likely to have a relatively greater number of more assimilated persons who have been socially mobile and are not recorded by the census as being of Spanish stock, because they are neither first nor second generation Mexican-Americans. It is noteworthy, however, that—just as Taylor noted in 1928—while there is a considerable amount of segregation, there are some Spanish stock persons residing in each of the tracts of the city and in no tract are they more than 51 percent of the total population.

Although Spanish is still the dominant language of the home even among those of native parentage (64 percent of the Mexican-American students report Spanish as the language at their homes), it appears that this, too, will change in time. For one thing, it is impressive that 8 percent of the students from English-speaking homes were born in Mexico (40 percent of their fathers and 28 percent of their mothers were born there). This indicates that at least some make a rather rapid transition at least as far as language is concerned. It is also apparent that the language of the home is more likely to be English if the students and their parents were born in the United States.

The obvious implication is that the current predominance of Spanish is likely to decline with the passing of the foreign-born generation. Its complete disappearance, however, is far from imminent.

The picture that emerges from an analysis of demographic characteristics is one of a community with an excess of single, unrelated adult males, but also with a substantial number of stable families with very high fertility. It appears from the data we have analyzed that Mexican-American family life in East Chicago has in some ways changed considerably since the 1920's, but that in other ways it has changed very little. The population is still demographically abnormal, and consequently prostitution, divorce, gambling, alcoholism, narcotics addiction, and other dysfunctions are still a problem. On the other hand, family and kinship are still very important. In our discussion with informants, they generally "place" persons in the community by noting to whom they are related, and family connections are still regarded important in the establishment and operation of local businesses. Parental control, moreover, continues to be extreme by American standards. Nevertheless, the family's solidarity reflected in its stability, self-sufficiency, and cultural distinctiveness after so many years in the industrial urban center of East Chicago is quite impressive. It seems clear, the Mexican-American family in East Chicago has held up quite well under the impact of urbanization, industrialization, and acculturation. It still constitutes the major reservoir of the traditional culture and the major link with the mother country. It also constitutes the major focus of conflicts between the old and the new, between the Mexican heritage and the American experience, between the traditional family structure and the demands of an urban-industrial social system. Thus, the family has done well in maintaining

the continuity with the past in the face of massive social changes.

A distinct pattern of providing parishes and religious services for nationality groups developed within the Catholic churches in East Chicago. Each group, whether Polish, Slovak, Croatian, Rumanian, Negro, Mexican, or Italian, felt a need to have its separate church, its own pastor who could give services in its native language, or its own idiom (Negro)—and eventually its own schools. Thus, a separatism was created which continues to the present time. While it might have been a good idea in the beginning to create such parishes and such schools to keep the faith intact and to transmit the cultural heritage, it is obvious that such a system has tended to retard the eventual assimilation into the larger community of the various national groups. However, in none of the parochial schools which remain today is the instruction conducted in the native language of the particular group and no significant attempt is made to teach its cultural heritage. To some extent the walls of nationalism are breaking down, though more so among Protestants than among Catholics, Eastern Orthodox people, or Jewish residents; and this is a trend that will continue in the foreseeable future.

[In fact] until very recent years, the Catholic Church in the United States had initiated few special programs or organizations to minister to the large Spanish-speaking population. Where there have been large concentrations of Catholics of Mexican descent, the Church has provided a national church or churches in particular neighborhoods (making them almost segregated churches), but in most instances the loyalty to the Church of the minority population has been taken for granted because of its long tradition of Catholicism. Protestants, on the other hand, have worked actively among this population in the city slums, the small towns, the agricultural migrant streams,

providing welfare programs in the form of food, clothing, health clinics, recreational facilities, adult education, and child care centers. The almost complete neglect on the part of Catholic organizations has contrasted dramatically with the active Protestant programs and this contrast has resulted in a number of conversions among Mexican-Americans to the Protestant faith. It would be difficult to estimate the number of converts for any particular region or city, but popular opinion suggests that, although the number is relatively small compared to those who remained Catholics, the number of converts to Protestantism among this population is growing at an increasing rate.

[Still,] many writers who have addressed themselves to the subject of Latin Americans and their relationship to the Catholic church have commented on the deeply religious character of the people and their devotion to the Faith. Most writers have also suggested that this population is at least nominally Catholic and makes efforts to receive and see that their children receive the basic sacraments. Burma states that most Mexican-Americans are nominally Catholic, being baptized, married, and buried in the church. It is chiefly women, old men, and young children, however, who attend church regularly. Adolescents, young adults, and males in general are likely to be indifferent but will not relinquish their bond to the Church.⁴ The members of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the local Mexican-American Parish, appear to fit this generalized description. A knowledgeable informant stated that less than 5 percent of the people attended Mass. This percentage is similar to that of participation of the parishioners in voluntary associations.

The present pastor has attempted a number of programs to aid the people in

becoming more integrated into the larger society, such as, the parochial school, adult education classes, and English language training, with varying degrees of success.

The dilemma faced by this parish is a familiar one and has confronted most national churches: on the one hand, it was important and necessary in the development of the parish to minister to the people in their native language, showing cognizance of their culture and building the bridge between the parishioners and the dominant society; on the other hand, the persistent use of the native language and the reinforcement of the culture presented a formidable barrier to the eventual assimilation of the people. There is no easy solution to this dilemma. Other national churches in East Chicago and elsewhere have resolved it rather effectively by diminishing the use of the native language, by insisting upon educational achievement, and by establishing programs aimed more at the youth than at the older generation.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, however, has problems that are not easily solved; they will continue in the foreseeable future. Unlike other national parishes, whose immigrant stream dried up years ago, this parish continues to attract immigrants daily, either directly from Mexico or from the southern part of Texas. The open international border has its effect in East Chicago, thousands of miles away. The other contributing factor aggravating this situation is social and geographical mobility. By and large, the more successful and the better educated move from this parish, leaving behind the older, the less successful, and the newly arrived. The pastor and his assistants have had to begin all over again, almost every year, the slow and arduous task of attempting to integrate foreign-culture immigrants into the larger society—a task which normally confronts other national parishes only once. Thus, the failures and successes of this Mexi-

can-American parish must be viewed in the light of the special circumstances in which it was born and had its being.

The adjustment of the Mexican-American to East Chicago can be described in terms of four major processes on stages:

1. Accommodation

The initial adjustment of Mexican-American migrants was facilitated by the circumstances of their migration. Since they came during periods of labor shortage and, in many cases, were recruited by the employers, there was no question of their acceptance in the community. Moreover, the practices of using them in more or less segregated work crews and providing group quarters for them limited their contact with other groups and enabled them to get by with a minimum of difficulty. The Mexican-Americans, for the most part, stayed out of trouble, and the other residents, although not exactly friendly, refrained from overt hostility except during periods of economic stress (e.g., when Mexican-Americans were used to break the steel strike of 1919 and during the depression of the 1930's). The preponderance of young unmarried males, however, did present some problems in the early years. But, all in all, the group accommodated smoothly to the new situation.

Individuals and families who have since migrated to East Chicago have also managed the transition smoothly—due in no small part to the pattern of chain-migration that in effect puts each arriving immigrant in touch with a circle of friends and relations who can provide him with material, social, and psychological support until he gets settled. New immigrants, on the other hand, can count on little assistance from the dominant community in getting settled. The data on the poor performance of recent migrants on the selective service examinations and the virtual absence of special

English-language courses or adult education programs suggest that the new immigrant can count on little more than a handout from the township-trustees office.

2. Economic Integration

The Mexican-American immigrants have been quickly and smoothly integrated into the economy of East Chicago. The availability of good-paying, steady, unskilled and unionized employment opportunities in the steel mills have provided them with the economic security so necessary for further advance. The general consensus has been that the Mexican-Americans have made excellent workers and that in some cases they have been much preferred as workers to members of other ethnic groups. With the notable exception of the mass repatriation to Mexico in the 1930's and during the occasional recessions in the steel industry in recent years, the Mexican-Americans of East Chicago have had little difficulty adjusting to the economy of the region. However, because of the character of that economy and the limited educational achievement of the group, its economic integration has remained more or less frozen at this basic level. Mexican-Americans employed in East Chicago have been concentrated in a few industries, and at the lower pay and status levels. This has, in part, been due to the limited range of occupational opportunities available in a place like East Chicago and the fact that individuals who qualify for other types of positions simply leave the community. But, compared to the income and occupational distribution of other groups in the community, it is apparent that Mexican-Americans have not been very successful in obtaining higher level positions in industry and business. This has undoubtedly been due in part to a past and present discrimination, but perhaps more importantly to the social and cul-

⁴ John H. Burma, *Spanish-Speaking Groups in the United States* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1954), p. 31.

tural characteristics of the group involved—that is, language, education, and motivational problems.

3. Cultural Integration

The cultural integration of the Mexican-American follows a rather mixed pattern and is strongly related to recency of migration and age. One still finds in the community many cultural elements reminiscent of situations in the society which the immigrants left and which may be a hindrance to certain aspects of cultural integration. The services of the ethnic churches (both Catholic and Protestant) are a case in point. The Spanish-language newspapers, movies, and radio programs, the dances, music, Mexican Independence celebrations, the restaurants and stores featuring Mexican food, and the work of the consular officials, still make the group and its culture very "visible," although many of these services, activities and cultural elements become pervaded with the "American" influence. Facility in the English language is still a problem for a considerable number, and even many Mexican-American natives of East Chicago have pronounced accents and distinctive gestures. Social roles, although they have undergone some changes, have remained remarkably traditional—especially the parental roles and the role of women. They have not as yet acquired, to any great extent, the achievement motivation so prominent in the larger society. The problems in educational performance (age-grade retardation, high drop-out rate, non-academic curriculum, and limited higher education) reflect both the community's failure to meet the needs of this group and the group's failure to adapt its values and aspirations to the host society. But there are signs of change—the strain noted in family relations and the increasing value being placed on education, as evidenced by the publicity and fuss made over youngsters who graduate or go to

college—these suggest a growing amount of acculturation on the part of the Mexican-Americans. However, there remain sharp and clearly visible cultural differences between them, as a group, and the rest of the community. Individuals who learn to think and act like Anglos are more likely than not to drift off to a larger city in the United States, to seek greater opportunity, thus depriving the remaining residents of the small community of role models and assimilating leadership.

Although residents take pride in the cosmopolitan character of the Mexican-American community, there is actually not much evidence of other groups adopting elements of the Mexican culture. Assimilation for the most part means conforming to Anglo-American models.

4. Social Integration

The structure of social relationships in the Mexican-American community of East Chicago is still for the most part separate and distinct from that of other groups. Except in the area of employment and the unions, Mexican-Americans tend to restrict their informal interactions to other Mexican-Americans and to belong almost exclusively to ethnic organizations and groups. Many of them lack citizenship, and there is a great deal of sentimental nationalism still expressed. Voting participation is low even among the native born, and they have not as yet succeeded in developing any significant power or influence in the political arena. In the estimation of most observers there has been a significant decline in prejudice and discrimination against the Mexican-Americans but this has not resulted as yet in any major change in the patterns of social interaction. There is an increasing amount of residential dispersion but the group is still highly concentrated and consequently tends to be institutionally segregated (e.g., churches, schools). Volun-

tary associations and friendship groups still generally follow ethnic lines, and the amount of intermarriage remains insignificant. In short, ethnicity remains an important, if not the most important, status-defining characteristic for Mexican-American as well as most other groups in East Chicago. The assimilation process in East Chicago has resembled a mixing bowl rather than a melting pot. There has been a surprising amount of success in preserving the social and cultural identity of the different immigrant groups that have settled there. The signs of change, however, are also apparent. The breakage of ethnic neighborhoods, the decline of the national parishes and their parochial schools, the declining number and proportion of foreign-born persons—all suggest that the population will undergo more assimilation, but it remains problematic how much and what kind.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PACE OF ASSIMILATION

Some writers have in fact been somewhat naive in discussing the problem. McWilliams, for example, writing in 1948, claimed that: "It is a foregone conclusion that the northern Mexican settlement will have largely vanished in another generation,"⁵ and Burma, writing in 1954, stated that: "the adult Mexican immigrant keeps his old ways because he does not know any other," but that he rapidly takes on the Anglo culture when given the opportunity.⁶ Both of these statements are questionable, as we have shown.

It would be useful to examine the experience of Mexican-Americans in East Chicago in the light of factors generally assumed to influence the assimilation process. As Heller notes: "Although the

limited assimilation and acculturation of Mexican-Americans have often been commented on by social scientists, there are very few scholarly studies of the factors accounting for this situation."⁷ We have attempted in this study to make a contribution to the isolation of the factors of which Heller speaks. The summary of our findings follows.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS

1. Goals and Intentions

An immigrant who does not intend to settle permanently will usually make little effort to integrate. It is clear that most of the early settlers in East Chicago intended to return to Mexico; moreover, the group as a whole, both then and now, has not been clearly committed to an assimilationist goal. It has generally made the minimal changes necessary to cope with the East Chicago situation, but it has never really questioned the value or desirability of preserving its separate existence. In this respect, as others have noted, the Mexican-American is somewhat differently oriented in terms of ideology than most American minority groups.⁸ Its expectations have been more or less limited to economic ends.

2. Predisposition to Change

Coming from a folk society, Mexican-American immigrants were little prepared to accept rapid social change, in general, and assimilation, in particular. Even more recent migrants have come from more stable and traditional communities that do not predispose them to accept the changes that assimilation implies.

⁷ Celia S. Heller, *Mexican American Youth: Forgotten Youth at the Crossroads* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 19.

⁸ McWilliams, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

⁵ Carey McWilliams, *North From Mexico* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1948), p. 223.

⁶ Burma, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

3. Size of the Group

The group, almost from the beginning, because of the organized nature of the migration, was large enough to provide mutual reinforcement and to eventually support the full range of separate community institutions. Moreover, because of its size, it encountered more organized resistance to its dispersion in the community. A smaller migration or settlement would likely have undergone more assimilation.

4. Physical "Visibility"

The physical "visibility" of most Mexican-Americans was probably also an obstacle to assimilation, especially at the individual level, although their success in "redefining" themselves as Caucasians eliminated this barrier at least formally.

5. Socioeconomic Status

Immigrants are generally of a lower status than the host population, but in the case of the Mexican-Americans there is no doubt that their extremely low educational, income, and occupational levels presented especially severe obstacles to their assimilation.

6. Marital and Family Status

Although Humphrey contends that single persons acculturated faster than married immigrants, it appears to us that the excess of unmarried males tended to retard the assimilation of the group.⁹ The children of married migrants, exposed as they are to the dominant culture, act as bridges between the two cultures. Single adults, on the other hand, are likely to be more isolated from the dominant group and to retain their original culture longer.

⁹ Norman D. Humphrey, "The Changing Structure of the Detroit Mexican Family: An Index of Acculturation," *American Sociological Review*, 9 (1944), 622-627.

7. Kinship Ties

Strong ties of sentiment to the extended family, the *Compadrazgo* system, and place of origin account for both the continued contact with Mexico, the Southwest, and things Mexican, and the pattern of chain migration that replenishes the immigrant colony. The familial ties also partially account for the persistence of the residentially segregated colony. Moreover, a well-integrated, self-sufficient group is less susceptible to change than a less integrated one.

8. Proximity and Access to Homeland

It is generally felt that the greater the proximity and access to the homeland, the slower the rate of assimilation. There is little question but that this has made a difference. In comparison to the Southwest, the Mexican-American in East Chicago has been relatively isolated from Mexico; but in comparison to European immigrant groups, the homeland is physically and psychologically much closer.

9. The Pattern of Migration

The rapid initial influx and continued chain migration is a pattern that is likely to maximize the "holding" power of the old culture. The open border makes this cultural influx possible.

10. Length of Residence

Assimilation, as we noted, is a slow, gradual process. The longer an immigrant group is in a country, the more assimilated it is likely to be. Even though the first Mexicans arrived some time ago, the bulk of the population is of fairly recent origin, as evidenced by the birthplaces of school children and their parents. The host society has literally not yet had an opportunity to make a great impact on the bulk of this population.

11. Fertility

The relatively high fertility of the more unassimilated Mexican-Americans also has a retarding effect on the assimilation of the group. A relatively young population consisting of large households is not socially mobile nor economically independent enough to make certain decisions toward assimilation.

12. Reaction to Prejudice and Discrimination

The fierce pride and sensitivity of the Mexican-American leads him to react to slights and hostile sentiments by withdrawing and cultivating pride of "La Raza," which further deters his assimilation. Many, for example, think Negroes are foolish "to want to go where they are not wanted—we're too proud for that." Even when there is no desire to be excluded, one cannot detect any great desire by this minority to be included.

13. Value Orientation

The very nature of some of the value orientations of the Mexican-Americans presents a barrier to their rapid assimilation. There is a note of fatalism and resignation in the attitudes and behavior of the residents and an orientation to the present (not unlike that described by Kluckhohn in connection with the Southwest) that would have to change somewhat before they could be expected to achieve significant changes in their social situation.

14. Individualism and Leadership

Individual leaders can frequently make a great deal of difference either in opposing or encouraging assimilation, but in a fragmented community, like the East Chicago Mexican-American one, one is tempted to conclude that it remains un-

assimilated by default—no one does or can lead effectively. This lack of organization and cohesion has other consequences as well. Assimilation becomes an individual matter—individuals pursue their goals and, if they succeed, they move up and out of the community. There is no concerted effort to change the position of the group comparable to the civil rights activities of Negro organizations.

The voluntary organizations, although oriented to greater participation of their membership in the dominant community, have yet to put together significant programs which are meaningful to the members and would help them realize their goals in the broader community.

15. Religion

Although the national church is quite concerned that its members become integrated in the community, the Catholicism of the immigrant does not predispose him to active participation in the Church programs. The continual new immigration also forces the Church to offer services and programs which are not conducive to full assimilation (e.g., services in Spanish and ethnic sodalities).

The Protestant church appeals more to the lower socioeconomic classes, and its services and programs are even less assimilative.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EAST CHICAGO COMMUNITY

1. The Recency and Rapidity of Development

East Chicago grew very rapidly, and the Mexicans arrived at a fairly early point in the development of the community and were aided by the steel industry in their adjustment to the new situation. The subsequent stabilization of the population and the economy, however, has

ended this early opportunity, and group assimilation is likely to be very slow and difficult in the future, especially if automation leads to the displacement of large numbers of unskilled steel workers.

2. General Socio-Cultural Features

It is generally agreed that modern urban industrial communities, which ask the immigrants to fulfill more universal roles, afford a better climate for immigrant assimilation than rural folk societies. East Chicago has provided a situation in which an incredible variety of people have integrated into a productive community.

3. Cultural Heterogeneity

The fact that East Chicago has included such a conglomeration of ethnic groups has made it that much easier for newcomers to have their differences respected, or at least tolerated. But it has also complicated the matter of assimilation—when virtually everything and everyone is in some sense “foreign,” there is no point in giving up one’s native culture only to take up someone else’s “foreign” attributes.

4. Ecological Structure

The peculiar ecological structure of East Chicago has also retarded the assimilation of Mexican-Americans. Normal dispersion out of the area of first settlement has been impeded by the physical barriers that fragment the community. Such “natural” barriers tended to box in the various subcommunities, increase the residents’ consciousness of differences, and make access to other parts of town more difficult.

5. Industrial Specialization

The limited types of employment opportunities in the area have given the

community a very special character. There have been relatively few middle-class white-collar type positions and relatively few opportunities for women. Consequently, the better-educated are encouraged to leave the community, and women are forced to restrict themselves to the domestic role, both of which tend to retard the assimilation of the group.

6. Absence of Formal Assistance

The assimilation of Mexican-Americans could have been facilitated by the provision of formal programs to aid them in making the transition. Little was or is being done in the way of adult education, family guidance, compensatory education for Spanish-speaking children, vocational education. Some of the agencies dealing with this population do not even have staff members who are fluent in Spanish.

7. Unfavorable Attitudes

The hostility of many elements of the community—not as pronounced now as in the past—is still a factor in the cultural and social isolation of the group. It is difficult to assess the extent to which discrimination has actually held back the group, but it seems certain to have slowed the process of assimilation—as, for example, the segregation of classes in the parochial school at the insistence of the Polish group when the two schools were merged.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MEXICANS AND THE COMMUNITY

1. Cultural Differences

It is generally felt that the more nearly alike the host and immigrant cultures, the easier and more thorough the assimilation. We found support for Kluckhohn’s contention that the slow rate of

Mexican-American assimilation is, at least in part, the result of sharp differences between the “deeply rooted” value orientations of the original Mexican culture and the value orientations of the newer dominant American society.¹⁰ The differences in language and even religion have also proven formidable. The Catholicism of the Spanish is both socially and ideologically differentiated from that of the European immigrants of East Chicago.

2. The Ratio of the Two Groups

The larger ratio of the minority group to the resident population, the slower the rate of assimilation. This seems to be true for two reasons: a large ratio is likely to prove threatening to the resident population and elicit hostility from them, and, on the other hand, a larger proportion is likely to give the minority the internal resources and confidence to maintain its identity and distinctiveness. In East Chicago, assimilation does not seem to be as extensive as in many Northern centers, where the migrants constitute a very small part of the total population, but it seems to be more extensive than in the border counties, where Anglos are in a minority.

3. Contact and Isolation

Generally speaking, the greater the contact between immigrant and host community members, the greater the degree of assimilation. The contacts between Mexican-Americans and other residents of East Chicago have been severely limited by a number of factors: First, language problems have caused employers to assign workers to homogeneous work crews, sometimes even supervised by a member of their own group. Second, traditional values and limited work op-

¹⁰ Florence R. Kluckhohn and Fred Strodtbeck, *Variations in Value Orientation* (New York: Row, Peterson, 1961), pp. 175-257.

portunities have kept women in the home and close to their traditional domestic role. Third, the strong preference for Mexican brides has kept intermarriage at a much lower level than one would have expected considering the sex ratio of the group. Fourth, the pattern of settlement, making for a high degree of concentration in separate neighborhoods even in the age of the automobile, has encouraged exclusiveness and has limited social contacts with others. Finally, institutional segregation in the schools and churches has had the same consequence. Although the schools are not as rigidly segregated as in some parts of the Southwest, the enrollments are ethnically imbalanced in both the public and parochial schools. The crucial importance of this factor is pointed up by Heller’s Los Angeles study showing that school integration was the most salient factor associated with ambition among Mexican-American youth.¹¹ The organization of the churches in East Chicago has also contributed to this isolation. Unlike the Southwest, however, the non-Spanish Catholic population is large in East Chicago, and there is some evidence that, under pressure from the Bishop, in time both schools and parishes will cease to be organized along national lines. The discontinuation of the Our Lady of Guadalupe School and the increasing tendency on the part of Mexican-Americans who live outside the colony to affiliate with the nearest parish are encouraging signs.

4. Crisis Situations

Two crises situations also played a role in retarding the assimilation of Mexican-Americans. Both were related to situations in which the newcomers suddenly posed a threat to the economic security of the older resident population. The first came with the steel strike of 1919 and the use of Mexicans as strikebreak-

¹¹ Heller, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-87.

ers—this soured relations for some time. The second, and more serious, was the mass repatriation in the early 1930s, when several thousand unemployed Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were loaded on trains and returned to Mexico. Although many returned later, this action seriously disrupted the community and wiped out much of the progress which had been made up to that time.

The East Chicago Mexican-American community is in many important respects unique, and, although we hope that our study will be of some help in understanding the situation of Mexican-Americans in general, we remind the reader that this is by no means a typical community. It differs from most Northern colonies in that its population is less transient, that it is *not* composed of agricultural workers who dropped off the migrant stream, and, finally, that the settlement is older, larger, and constitutes a larger proportion of the total population than in most other places in the North.

Compared to the Southwest, the settlement is more intensely urban, smaller in terms of aggregate numbers, further from the border, more heavily industrialized and economically secure. The Mexicans are immigrants rather than indigenous, the dominant groups are of European immigrant stock and not "old" Americans, many of the "others" are

also Catholic, in contrast to the predominantly Protestant Anglos of the Southwest, and the intergroup situation is more complex compared to the Southwest.

It appears that group assimilation has been limited and slow. Individual assimilation appears to have been more extensive, but, because of its nature and the nature of the community, its extent is difficult to gauge. . . . It appears that East Chicago functions as a way station on the road to *individual* assimilation—a place where families can find employment and economic security that satisfies most and provides the resources and motivation for a few to attain more. The community currently lacks the "holding power" to train its more assimilated elements, and, given the nature of East Chicago, this is unlikely to change. Moreover, as long as the colony continues to be fed by a stream of new migrants and as long as its fertility remains high, Mexican-Americans as a group cannot expect to assimilate much more than they have. A crisis brought on by the latent conflict between the high drop-out rate and shrinking employment opportunities for the unskilled, could, on the other hand, radically change the picture by encouraging a new emphasis on education and, perhaps, by generating the motivation for a social movement that would seek improvement in the group's position.