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# MEXICAN AMERICANS

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## OVERVIEW

Mexico, or Estados Unidos Mexicanos, is bordered by the United States to the north, the Gulf of Mexico to the east, Guatemala, Belize, and the Caribbean Sea to the southeast, and the Pacific to the south and west. The northwest portion of Mexico, called Baja California, is separated from the rest of the nation by the Gulf of California. The Sierra Madre, an extension of the Rocky Mountain chain, divides into the Oriental range to the east and the Occidental range to the west. The central highlands, where the majority of Mexico's 75 million people live, lies in between these two mountain systems. Overall, Mexico occupies 759,530 square miles.

## HISTORY

The earliest inhabitants of Mexico are believed to have been hunters who migrated from Asia approximately 18,000 years ago. Over time, these early peoples built highly organized civilizations, such as the Olmec, Teotihuacan, Mayan, Toltec, Zapotec, Mixtec, and Aztec societies, the majority of which were accomplished in art, architecture, mathematics, astronomy, and agriculture. In 1517 Spanish explorer Francisco Fernández de Córdoba discovered the Yucatán, a peninsula located in the southeast of Mexico. By

1521 the Spanish conquistador Hernando Cortéz had managed to conquer the Aztec empire, the most powerful Indian nation in Mexico at the time. For the next 300 years, Mexico, or New Spain, would remain under colonial rule.

Spain's generally repressive colonial regime stifled the growth of commerce and industry, monitored or censored the dissemination of new and possibly revolutionary ideas, and limited access to meaningful political power to anyone but nativeborn Spaniards. An unequal distribution of land and wealth developed and, as the nation grew in numbers, the disproportion between the rich and poor continued to increase, as did a sense of social unrest among the most neglected of its populace. Their discontent resulted in a successful revolt against Spain in 1821.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, under the 30-year authoritarian rule of Porfirio Díaz, noticeable industrialization occurred in Mexico, financed in large part by foreigners. Mining was revitalized and foreign trade increased. Dynamic growth brought relative prosperity to many economic sectors of various regions of the country, complemented by increased levels of employment. As the century ended, however, a vast majority of the nation's inhabitants had realized little if any improvement in their standard of living. Those residing in rural areas struggled to produce enough to survive from their own small parcels of land, or, much more likely, worked under a debt-peonage system, farming lands owned by someone infinitely wealthier than they were. Most residents of urban areas, if they were lucky enough to have full employment, worked long hours under poor conditions for extremely low wages and lived in housing and neighborhoods that fostered diseases. The economic depression of 1907 soured the aspirations of the small but growing middle class and brought financial disaster to the newest members of the upper class (Ramón Ruiz, *Triumphs and Tragedy*, pp. 310-13).

Though he was able to manipulate his reelection in 1910, opposition to the Díaz regime was strong, and when small rebellions began to proliferate in the northern states of the nation, he resigned his post in 1911 and left the country. After Francisco Madero, the newly elected president, failed to define an agenda to satisfy the several disparate groups in Mexico, he likewise agreed to self-exile but was assassinated by supporters of General Victoriano de la Huerta, the man who next assumed national leadership. Violence escalated into a bloody and prolonged civil war known as the Revolution of 1910. The turmoil and bloodshed motivated some people from all levels of society to flee the country, most often northward to the United States.

By the early 1920s, though relative peace had been restored, the social and economic reforms that had become associated with the revolution were still unrealized, chief among them the redistribution of land to a greater percentage of the populace. From the perspective of the government-controlled political party, first designated as the PNR (Partido Nacional Revolucionario/National Revolutionary Party), and finally, in 1946, as the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional/Institutional Revolutionary Party), a nonviolent revolution was to continue until the goals related to social and economic justice were attained (Ruiz, p. 423). National presidents focused on promoting growth in

the industrial sector, but the opening of new jobs did not keep pace with the employment needs of a rapidly expanding population.

Since the 1950s, economic conditions in Mexico have improved at a gradual pace. Expanding industrialization has provided additional jobs for greater numbers of workers and increased oil production has brought in needed foreign currencies. The projected benefits from commercial accords such as the North American Free Trade Agreement have yet to materialize, but continued growth of international trade with other Latin American nations may invigorate areas of economic investment and production. Continued single-party rule by the PRI, high levels of unemployment, underemployment, low wages, and the many social problems related to a prolonged period of intense urbanization—coupled with the need for renewed efforts at land redistribution in certain areas of the country—remain as sources of concern for the government and causes of unrest for a significant segment of the population. In increasing proportions since the late 1970s, those people unable to find dependable sources of employment or subsistence wages have moved to the northern borderlands and crossed into the United States, where the economic prospects are more promising. To reverse this movement of manpower out of the country, future administrations in Mexico will have to continue to promote the expansion of economic growth to all regions in the country and the creation of new jobs in the public and private sectors.

## **THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR AND MEXICAN IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES**

The Mexican government initially promoted American settlement in parts of the territory now known as Texas in the 1820s to bolster the regional economy. As the proportion of North American settlers in these lands multiplied, however, they began to request greater local autonomy, feared the possibility that Mexico might outlaw slavery, and resented the imposition of taxes from the government in Mexico City (Oscar Martínez, *The Handbook of Hispanic Cultures in the United States History*, p. 263). Sporadic insurrections occurred after a new president, General Antonio López de Santa Anna, imposed restrictive controls on commerce between the Anglos living on Mexican land and the United States, and these uprisings precipitated an armed response by the Mexican army. Santa Anna seized the Alamo in San Antonio but was later defeated in the Battle of San Jacinto. Santa Anna later signed the Velasco Agreement in Washington D.C., which formally recognized the independence of present-day Texas. After returning to Mexico, however, he was quick to join other military leaders who rejected the accord.

Relations between the United States and Mexico remained strained, at best, during the late 1830s and early 1840s. The Lone Star Republic was admitted to the Union as the State of Texas in 1845; shortly thereafter the frequency of border skirmishes between the two countries increased. U.S. forces responded to these clashes by moving into New Mexico and California in 1846, as well as southward into Mexico. The capture of Mexico City was the final significant armed conflict.

War between Mexico and the United States ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 in which Mexico surrendered 890,000 square miles, close to one-half of its territory. Six years later, in order to finish construction of a transcontinental railway, the United States purchased an additional 30,000 square miles of Mexican land for \$10 million. This acquisition was made final through the Gadsden Treaty of 1854 (Carlos Cortés, *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, p. 701).

Approximately 80,000 Mexicans resided in the territory transferred to the United States at the conclusion of the Mexican-American War, the greatest numbers of whom were located in present-day New Mexico and California. Only a small proportion of the total, slightly over 2,000, decided to return to their country of origin after the signing of the treaty. Those who remained north of the border were guaranteed citizenship after two years, along with other privileges and responsibilities related to this status.

## **SIGNIFICANT IMMIGRATION WAVES**

When compared to various periods of the twentieth century, Mexican immigration to the United States between 1850 and 1900 was relatively low. The discovery of gold in the Sierra Nevada of California in 1849 was an initial stimulus for this migration, as was the expansion of copper mining in Arizona beginning in the 1860s. During this same period and on into the twentieth century, ranching and agriculture lured many inhabitants of the northern and central states of Mexico to Texas. By 1900 approximately 500,000 people of Mexican ancestry lived in the United States, principally in the areas originally populated by Spaniards and Mexicans prior to 1848. Roughly 100,000 of these residents were born in Mexico; the remainder were second-generation inhabitants of these regions and their offspring.

A combination of factors contributed to sequential pronounced rises in Mexican migration to the United States during the first three decades of the twentieth century. The Reclamation Act of 1902, which expanded acreage for farming through new irrigation projects, spurred the need for more agricultural laborers. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the aftermath of political instability and social violence caused many to flee northward across the border for their safety, and the growth of the U.S. economy in the 1920s attracted additional numbers of immigrants. Though the wages received by most Mexican migrants in these decades were quite low, they were considerably higher than the salaries paid for comparable work in Mexico. Most importantly, the number of jobs for foreign laborers seemed unlimited, especially during World War I and on into the early 1920s.

Only 31,000 Mexicans migrated to the United States in the first decade of the twentieth century, but the next two ten-year periods manifested markedly higher numbers, especially from 1920 to 1929, when almost 500,000 people of Mexican ancestry entered the country. However, since the frontier was virtually open to anyone wishing to cross it until the creation of the Border Patrol in 1924, immigration figures for years prior to this date are of dubious legitimacy. The actual number may be appreciably higher (Cortés, p. 699). Rural areas of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Texas attracted a

vast majority of these migrants, but during the years of World War I, mounting numbers of newcomers moved to the upper midwestern states, mainly to the region around Chicago. They were attracted by jobs in industry, railroads, steelmills, and meat-packing.

In these initial periods of heavy immigration, it was most common for Mexican males to cross the border for work and return to Mexico periodically with whatever profits they were able to accumulate over several months. Alternatively, they remained in the United States for a longer duration and sent money southward to family members; between 1917 and 1929, Mexican migrants to the United States sent over \$10 million to relatives in their home country (Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, [New York: Praeger, 1990], p. 171). During these same decades, men might also establish residency in the United States and return for their families, though still quite often with the ultimate objective of returning to Mexico permanently in a not-too-distant future. It is estimated that about one-half of those immigrants who entered the United States from 1900 to 1930 returned to Mexico (Matt Meier and Feliciano Rivera, *Mexican Americans/American Mexicans*, [New York: Hill and Wang, 1993], p. 129).

Mexican immigration to the United States decreased considerably in the 1930s due to the economic depression of this decade. Though approximately 30,000 Mexicans entered the United States during these years, over 500,000 left the country, most of them forced to do so because of the Repatriation Program, which sought to extradite those Mexicans without proper documentation. The Mexican government since the 1870s had attempted to encourage reverse migration to Mexico. In the 1930s jobs and/or land were promised to those who would return, but when this commitment was not fulfilled, many families or individuals moved back to the border towns of the north and often attempted again to return to the United States (Richard Griswold del Castillo, *La familia*, p. 59).

With the exception of the decade of World War II, legal immigration from Mexico to the United States since 1940 has remained at or above the high levels of 1910 to 1930. Despite federal legislation to limit the numbers of immigrants from most countries to the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, Mexican migrants crossing the border totaled 453,937 and 640,294 for the two decades. It is estimated that approximately one million entered the United States legally between 1981 and 1990. The number of undocumented workers has increased consistently since the 1960s; approximately one million people of this category were deported annually to Mexico in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a proportion of this figure representing individuals deported more than once (Meier and Rivera, pp. 192-95). The availability of jobs in the United States, coupled with high rates of unemployment and periodic slowdowns in the Mexican economy, served to encourage this continued migration northward.

## **SETTLEMENT PATTERNS**

Though in 1900 a vast majority of people of Mexican ancestry lived in rural areas, by 1920, 40 percent of the Mexican American population resided in cities or towns. In 1990 the estimated proportion had risen to 94 percent (Meier and Rivera, p. 250). Los Angeles

had among the highest number of Hispanics of major cities of the world and by far the greatest proportion of its population was Mexican in origin.

According to the 1990 U.S. Census Bureau report, approximately 12 million people of Mexican ancestry lived in the United States, a figure which represented 4.7 percent of the total national population and 61.2 percent of the total Hispanic population in the country. Over 66 percent of the people of Mexican ancestry were born in the United States, while 7.5 percent of the total were naturalized citizens. The Pacific states, led by California, held 47.8 percent of the 12 million; 30 percent lived in the West Central states, led by Texas. The states with the highest populations of Mexican Americans are, in descending sequence: California, Texas, Illinois, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Florida, and Washington.

## **RELATIONS WITH ANGLO AMERICANS**

Mexicans who held tracts of land of any appreciable size in Texas, California, and New Mexico prior to 1848 were angered and alienated when they began to lose their properties because of alterations made in the 1848 treaty after its signing or because of other unethical tactics used by Anglo Americans to obtain their land. Luis Falcón and Dan Gilbarg identify the procedures employed to acquire two-thirds of the lands once held by Spanish or Mexican families in New Mexico: "Traditional claims were rejected, and original owners were required to prove their ownership in court. The procedures of these courts were biased against the original owners: the burden of proof fell on them, the courts were conducted in English and in locations less accessible to Mexican landowners, and standards of legal proof were based on U.S. law rather than Mexican law under which the land had originally been acquired" (Luis Falcón and Dan Gilbarg, *The Handbook ... Sociology*, p. 58). Small landholders were particularly vulnerable. Land companies often successfully appropriated the holdings of isolated Mexican villagers who neglected to register their land claims in the appropriate governmental offices or failed to pay sometimes burdensome new taxes demanded on their properties. In some instances, these taxes were increased to excessive levels for Mexicans, then lowered after they were forced to sell their holdings to Anglo American families or land agents (Cortés, p. 707).

The response of many Mexicans in the southwestern United States to the Anglo American presence was retaliatory violence. In New Mexico, Las Gorras Blancas, a vigilante group, destroyed rail lines and the properties of lumber and cattle interests in an attempt to convince these forces to move elsewhere (Griswold del Castillo, p. 13). In Texas, the decade-long Cortina War started in 1859. After shooting a deputy sheriff for arresting one of his former servants for no apparently just reason, Juan Nepomuceno Cortina and some followers conducted a prolonged series of raids on ranches and small towns around Brownsville, in part to avenge the deputy's act but also because he believed that since shortly after their arrival in the region Anglo Americans had scorned and insulted Mexican locals. In defense of Mexican property rights, Cortina declared: "Our personal enemies shall not possess our lands until they have fattened it with their gore" (McWilliams, pp. 104-05). Most Mexicans perceived Anglo Americans to be "arrogant,

over-bearing, aggressive, conniving, rude, unreliable and dishonest" because of the unscrupulous actions of some (McWilliams, p. 89).

Disfavor on the part of some Anglo Americans with Mexicans was evident before 1848, but it intensified thereafter. Besides a small minority of well-to-do Mexican families with extensive landholdings, the preponderant number of residents in the territories ceded to the United States in 1848 were of humble origin and negligible financial resources. As greater numbers came north in search of work, the wages of those Mexicans already working in the United States were held down due to the abundant supply of labor, and the standard of living of most of these individuals consequently remained at the same low level for decade upon decade. Though not all Anglo Americans living in the same areas inhabited by Mexicans were appreciably better off, a definite economic disparity existed and was one of the reasons for a division to develop between the two cultures.

Other differences made this division more pronounced, however. Whereas the immigrants from Mexico were predominantly Catholic, most of the people who settled in Texas, California, and the other territories were of Protestant sects. The religious wars on the European continent between these creeds were not too distant in the past to be forgotten. Perhaps most importantly for some, however, the new majority society was decidedly of North European origin and of light skin color. In contrast, most Mexicans living in or moving to these newly acquired lands of the United States were *mestizos* (people of mixed Spanish and Indian ancestry), and a significant percentage of those who immigrated from the northern states of Mexico were primarily of Indian ancestry. The sentiments of a sizable portion of western settlers in the United States in the mid-1800s about the indigenous civilizations whose lands they were slowly appropriating were quite negative. In the words of McWilliams, "Indians were a conquered race despised by Anglo Americans" and "Mexicans were constantly equated with Indians" by the most race-conscious of the early Anglo American westerners (McWilliams, p. 190).

The number of immigrants increased considerably in the first decades of the twentieth century. Though employers in mining, agriculture, and various industries were more than pleased to see ever larger numbers of migrant workers cross the border each year, Anglo American laborers in the same occupations as these immigrants blamed the newcomers for holding their wages down and viewed them as strike busters. Moreover, when urbanization became more pronounced in the 1920s and Mexicans in the Southwest began moving to the major cities, many people in these urban centers perceived these Hispanics as part of the cause of higher crime rates, increased vagrancy, and violence. City chambers of commerce, local welfare agencies, nativist organizations, and various labor unions all began to call for controls on Mexican migration. Bills to place a limit on their immigration were proposed in Congress in the 1920s but never ratified (Cortés, p. 703). Massive unemployment in the 1930s prompted the initiation of the Repatriation Program. Many of the Mexicans who left the country had lived in the United States for over ten years and had started American-born families. Their mandated eviction was a tragic experience that led to a bitter realization: it was clear to those involved that they were only welcome in the United States when the economy needed their labors. This

would not be the last time this fact would be dramatized to Mexicans and Mexican Americans in such humiliating fashion.

Approximately 350,000 children born in the United States of Mexican immigrants or Mexican American parents fought in World War II, and a proportionately high number won medals of honor, but relations between Mexican American and Anglo American citizens remained tense in the 1940s. In 1942 in Los Angeles, the purported beating of eleven sailors by a group of Mexican American youths sparked a prolonged retaliation by servicemen and civilians against Hispanics wearing "zoot suits," distinctive clothing interpreted by some Anglo Americans in the city to symbolize a rebellious attitude by the younger Mexican Americans. Many injuries occurred on both sides and the riots in Los Angeles spread to several other metropolitan centers nationwide (Meier and Rivera, p. 164).

After the war, despite the fact that thousands of Mexican Americans lost their lives in battle, many Hispanics remained segregated in neighborhoods out of sight to Anglo American society. They attended segregated schools, ate in segregated restaurants, sat in specially designated areas of theaters, and swam in pools on "colored" days only (Cortés, pp. 707-09). Though in the 1950s several southwestern states attempted to rebuild old sections of certain towns of Spanish heritage to romanticize the local Hispanic traditions, the apparent respect for the Hispanic past in this region of the country contrasted "harshly with the actual behavior of the community toward persons of Mexican descent" (McWilliams, p. 47). Increased tourism, rather than pride in the multicultural heritage of these areas, might have been the primary factor for most reconstruction programs.

Only in the 1960s, when the civil rights of most minorities in the United States were brought under scrutiny, did the negative attitudes of many citizens toward Mexican Americans begin to be called into question. In 1970 the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights proclaimed that Mexican Americans had been denied equal treatment by the legal and judicial systems in the United States (Cortés, p. 714). The press coverage given to the efforts of César Chávez to improve the wages and working conditions of agricultural workers and the vital ideas emerging from the Chicano movement of the 1970s raised the consciousness of non-Hispanic U.S. citizens to the social and economic issues of importance to the Mexican American population of the country. The *Teatro Campesino* of Luis Valdez dramatized visually for audiences the barriers of prejudice faced by most Mexican Americans in the land once possessed by their ancestors.

A significant majority of U.S. citizens in the 1990s recognized that Mexican Americans represent a segment of the population whose contributions to the nation's society have been and will be valuable and praiseworthy. Upward mobility has brought a better life to a minority of Mexican Americans and increased acceptance by some who might previously have repudiated them. Inequalities and discrimination have not disappeared, however, and remain as legitimate and vexing sources of discontent for a significant segment of this Hispanic community. As reasons for misunderstanding or discord diminish, both cultures will realize greater rewards.

## ACCULTURATION AND ASSIMILATION

Most immigrant groups in America to a lesser or greater extent have attempted to maintain their distinctive cultural ways. However, the general pattern has been that with each successive generation the use of the mother tongue and other cultural practices diminishes. Mexican Americans do not fit this pattern for a number of reasons. First of all one must consider their historical experience, particularly their "charter member" status within the United States. Some Mexican Americans can trace their ancestry back ten generations. The ancestors of many Mexican Americans living in rural Colorado and northern New Mexico pre-date the Anglo American presence in that region. Many have not acculturated; some speak English with difficulty and appear to be more traditionally oriented than the newly arrived Mexican immigrant (Joan Moore and Henry Pachón, *Hispanics in the United States*, p. 92). Second, Mexican immigration has been a constant pattern throughout the twentieth century. As a result, each successive wave of Mexican immigration has served to reinforce certain aspects of Mexican culture and maintain and encourage the use of the Spanish language within the United States. In addition, intermarriage between immigrant males and Mexican American women has encouraged the maintenance of Spanish. Immigrants have also encouraged the continuous growth of Spanish language enterprises such as the Spanish-language media, print as well as electronic, and small businesses that cater to the Spanish-speaking community. In fact, McLemore has stated that Mexican Americans "have been the primary contributors to the maintenance of the Spanish language over a comparatively long period of time" (*Ethnic Relations in America*, p. 261).

The size and the distribution of the ethnic group also plays a dominant role in the persistence of traditional cultural patterns. The 1990 census indicates that there are approximately 21,000,000 Hispanic Americans residing in the United States, so about one out of every ten Americans is of Hispanic origin. Mexican Americans form the largest group of Hispanic Americans, at over 12,000,000. Not all speak Spanish, but most have some familiarity with the language, and many who speak English in the larger society will often speak Spanish at home. While most are concentrated in the southwestern United States, there has been a greater integration of Mexican Americans into the larger society, and the vast majority are likely to live in communities with high concentrations of inhabitants of their same ethnic identity. Thus, the potential for interaction with other Mexican Americans is extremely high. Many, on a daily basis, will work, go to school, go to church, and attend various community events with other Mexican Americans. This continuous interaction over the years has served to perpetuate certain elements of Mexican and Mexican American culture.

The Mexican Americans' close proximity to their homeland is yet another factor resulting in their slower rate of assimilation. Since the United States shares a 2,000 mile border with Mexico, Mexican Americans are in a truly unique position. Over the years, the children and grandchildren of Mexican immigrants have been able to maintain close ties with the "old country." Many have the opportunity to visit Mexico on a relatively frequent basis. On extended trips, they may travel to the interior of Mexico, or, if their time is limited, they can visit the border region. These return visits to the old country are

not once-in-a-lifetime opportunities as has been the case for most European immigrants who settled in America. Many Mexican Americans are able to maintain strong cultural ties through their contacts with friends and extended family in Mexico (Richard Schaefer, *Racial and Ethnic Groups*, p. 277).

## **TERMS OF IDENTITY**

In the 1990s, two terms were widely used to identify Spanish-speaking people: Hispanic and Latino. The latter term appears to be growing in acceptance, especially by younger people who reject the Hispanic identification. The popular use of "Hispanic" grew out of the federal government's efforts, beginning with the 1980 census, to identify and count all people of Spanish-speaking backgrounds with origins from the western hemisphere. Since the term was employed in most federal government reports, the media soon appropriated it and popularized its use. Some members of the Hispanic community have employed the term to create political alliances among all ethnic groups with ties to the Spanish language. However, according to the Latino National Political Survey, the majority of respondents indicated that they defined their identities in terms of place of origin. Among those of Mexican origin who were born in the United States, 62 percent identified themselves as Mexican; 28 percent as Hispanic or Latino; and ten percent as American (P. Kivisto, *Americans All*, pp. 386-387).

Terms of identity vary greatly from region to region and from generation to generation. Traditionally, residents of northern New Mexico have referred to themselves as Spanish Americans or *Hispanos*, terms which are essentially a reflection of their early ancestors from "New Spain" who settled the region. Persons from Texas, in the recent past, have referred to themselves as Latin Americans, although there is growing use of the term "Tejano" by Texas residents of Mexican ancestry. The identification of Mexican is more commonly used in the Los Angeles area. More recently, the identification of Mexican American has gained in popularity.

In general, varying group identities are a reflection of the changing self-definitions of an ethnic group. The term "Chicano" is perhaps the best example of this social process. Chicano appeared in the mid-1960s as a political term of choice primarily among the young. The term identified an individual actively promoting social change within the context of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. To the older generation and the more affluent, to be identified as a "Chicano" was an insult. In the past the term specifically referred to the unsophisticated immigrant. However, to the generation of political activists, their term of ethnic identity came to signify a sense of pride in one's community and heritage. Thus, as Kivisto states, group identities are social constructs that "human beings are continually renegotiating and articulating" (Kivisto, p. 18).

## **RESISTANCE TO ASSIMILATION**

Following the Mexican-American War, increasing violence perpetrated by Anglo Americans made Mexicans and Mexican Americans intensely aware of their subordinate status within the American Southwest. They did not have equal protection under the law,

despite the guarantees of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the U.S. Constitution, and several laws were passed to specifically control their way of life. According to Griswold del Castillo: "A Sunday Law imposed fines ranging from ten to 500 dollars for engaging in 'barbarous or noisy amusements' which were listed as bullfights, horse races, cockfights, and other tradition Californio amusements. At the same time, a vagrancy law called 'the Greaser Law' was passed.... This law imposed fines and jail sentences on unemployed Mexican-Americans who, at the discretion of local authorities, could be called vagrants" (*The Los Angeles Barrio: A Social History*, p. 115). When Mexican Americans defied Anglo Americans and their newly established laws, lynchings, murders, and kangaroo trials were quite common as Anglo Americans asserted their dominance.

In an attempt to cope with their second-class status, Mexican Americans created a variety of social and political organizations, many of which promoted ethnic solidarity. As sociologist Gordon Allport has noted, one of the results of ethnic persecution is the strengthening of ethnic ties. Within their group, ethnic minorities "can laugh and deride their persecutors, celebrate their own heroes and holidays" (*The Nature of Prejudice*, p. 149).

Before the turn of the twentieth century at least 16 Spanish-language newspapers were established in Los Angeles. The Mexican American press took the lead in condemning discrimination against their community. For example, in 1858 the editor of *El Clamor Público* denounced the theft of California lands by Anglo Americans and urged nonconformity to Anglo American culture and domination. The Mexican American press also developed a sense of ethnic solidarity by reporting on such cultural events as Mexican Independence Day and Cinco de Mayo, which celebrates the defeat of the French forces in Mexico in 1862.

The concept of "La Raza" was also promoted by the newspapers of the time. Its use by the Spanish-language press was evidence of a new kind of ethnic identity. The term connoted racial, spiritual, and blood ties to all Latin American people, ties particularly to Mexico. In addition, a number of social and political associations began to reinforce ethnic identity. Griswold del Castillo notes that between 1850 and 1900 at least 15 associations were established in Los Angeles. Their purposes were social and political. However, they overwhelmingly promoted Mexican nationalist sentiments (p. 135).

During the 1960s the Chicano movement specifically challenged assimilationist orientations within the larger society as well as within the Mexican American community itself. The ideology of the Chicano movement, particularly for Mexican American college students, called into question the idea of conformity to "Anglo American" cultural ideals. The beliefs promoted by the movement articulated a sense of personal worth and pride in common history and culture by emphasizing Chicano contributions to American society. The activists also reevaluated former symbols of shame associated with their heritage, culture, and physical appearance. Activists took great care in pronouncing Spanish names and words with the proper accent. Monolingual English-speaking Chicanos took courses to learn Spanish. Cultural relics and artifacts were

resurrected. Items such as *sarapes* (serapes, or shawls) and *huaraches* (sandals), as well as other clothing symbolic of Mexican American culture, were displayed and worn with pride. A new perception of self-worth and pride in one's heritage prevailed among the adherents of the Chicano movement. This perspective was not only indicative of a newfound image and self-concept; it was also an assertion of dignity within a society that regarded Chicanos and their cultural symbols as inferior (Marguerite Marín, *Social Protest in an Urban Barrio*, pp. 114-120).

The ethnic movements of the 1960s and 1970s brought to the fore the contemporary debate concerning cultural pluralism. The ethnic movements of this period argued that assimilating into American society entailed the loss of distinctive identities, cultures, and languages. Assimilation was defined as a virtual assault on the way of life of American ethnic minority groups. As a result, a concerted effort is under way to understand, albeit only within certain segments of American society, the internal and external dynamics of the many peoples that make up the American mosaic.

## **MISCONCEPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES**

The first major wave of Mexican immigration during the twentieth century triggered physical as well as verbal attacks by white Americans. Immigrant labor camps were raided by whites espousing white supremacist beliefs. By 1911 certain politicians lobbied against further Mexican immigration. The Dillingham Commission argued that Mexicans were undesirable as future citizens. Nativist scholars and politicians feared "mongrelization" as a by-product of contact with Mexicans, and in 1925 a Princeton economics professor even spoke of the future elimination of Anglo Americans by interbreeding with Mexicans (Feagin and Feagin, p. 265). These themes reemerged in 1928 when a congressional committee attempted to set limits on immigration from the western hemisphere. Congressman John Box called for restrictions on Mexican immigration because the Mexican was a product of mixing by the Spaniard and "low-grade" Indians. This mixture, according to Boxer, was an obstacle to participation in American democracy.

The image of the Mexican American male possessing innate criminal tendencies emerged during the World War II era. For example, in 1943, following the Zoot Suit Riots, the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department issued a report alleging that the Mexican American's desire to spill blood was an inborn characteristic. Further, the report concluded that Mexican Americans were violent because of their Indian blood (Feagin and Feagin, 265). And as late as 1969, a California judge ruling in an incest case reiterated similar racist beliefs. He stated in court: "Mexican people ... think it is perfectly all right to act like an animal. We ought to send you out of this country.... You are lower than animals ... maybe Hitler was right. The animals in our society probably ought to be destroyed" (Feagin and Feagin, p. 266).

One of the most persistent stereotypes is the image of simplemindedness. In 1982 the U.S. Department of Defense issued a report explaining that lower test scores for Hispanics and African Americans as compared to white Americans were due to genetic

differences as well as cultural differences. During the same year, the National Educational Testing Service, surprised by the excellent performance of 18 Mexican American students attending Garfield High School (a school situated in one of Los Angeles' poorest Mexican American communities), demanded that all retake the exam. Allegations of cheating by the students was the reasoning of the testing administrators. The students eventually did re-take the exam; once again they received excellent scores.

## HEALTH CARE BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

A majority of Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans relied most frequently on traditional medical beliefs and practices to resolve health problems up through the first decade of the twentieth century. In some situations, a physical ailment might easily be alleviated or eliminated by herbs or other natural medicines or remedies. These cures, prescribed most often by mothers or grandmothers,

**"I went to the doctor. He made me get undressed and put on a little robe. He examined my hands and knees. Then he told me I had rheumatism. I already knew that! He said he couldn't do anything for me, just give me a shot. He charged me \$15; now I go to him only when I feel real sick and need the drugs. Otherwise I go see [a healer]. I don't know why but I have more confidence and faith in him. He gives me herbs, and I feel fine."**

*Cited from Robert Trotter, Curanderismo, p. 51.*

represented the accumulated knowledge gained from personal experience or observation of others passed down from generation to generation. On those occasions in which relief from a specific affliction was not achieved through home remedies, however, individuals or families might solicit the assistance of a *curandero* (folk curer) or other type of folk healer.

In general, all folk healers possessed a certain *don*, or God-given gift or ability, that provided them the power to restore the health of others. They might accomplish this through the use of herbs (*yerberos*, or herbalists), massages or oils, and/or the aid of the spirit of another more powerful healer serving as a medium between this more potent spirit and the afflicted person (Leo R. Chávez and Victor M. Torres, *The Handbook ... Anthropology*, p. 227). Alternatively, some used cards to divine an illness or to prescribe a remedy (Chávez and Torres, pp. 229-30).

*Curanderos* also have been used to cure ailments more readily recognizable to the medical establishment in the United States. It was not uncommon for some Mexican Americans to seek assistance from both a *curandero* and a physician. Several factors prompted the first generations of Mexican Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to rely more readily on folk healers than on practitioners of the U.S. medical community. The geographic isolation of the rural areas in which they settled or the segregated neighborhoods in which they lived in the cities combined with limited financial resources to restrict the options available to most people or families for several

generations. Even those with ready access to medical assistance often were more confident in relying on a local curandero because of the faith their parents and grandparents had placed in these traditional curers or because of the more personal approach they employed. In many cases, the healers were likely to be acquainted with the family and involved relatives in the evaluation or treatment of an illness (Trotter, p. 44). The emotional bond established by the folk healer with the patient was a consistent and compelling element promoting greater trust in these traditional health providers.

As more Mexican Americans emigrated to large cities and greater numbers moved into more integrated settings, a higher percentage of them came to depend on practitioners and services of the U.S. medical community, occasioned either by easier access to these facilities, by the availability of medical insurance through their employers, or because of decreasing contact with families maintaining ties to traditional health practices. By the 1950s, research revealed that the primary source of health care for a dominant percentage of Mexican Americans had become doctors and clinics of the modern medical establishment. Surveys in the 1970s and 1980s in various urban areas of California suggested that as low as five percent of those polled had consulted a folk healer to resolve a health problem. Other studies showed that though close to 50 percent in some mixed urban and rural areas expressed faith in curanderos, over 90 percent of the same sample proclaimed confidence in medical doctors (*Family and Mental Health in the Mexican American Community*, edited by Susan E. Keefe and J. Manuel Casas, pp. 10-11).

Though their importance among Mexican Americans has diminished considerably over the last century, folk healers remain as a viable source for assistance with illness. J. Diego Vigil asserts that "some very acculturated Latinos accept the validity of diagnoses and traditional cures" of these healers (Chávez and Torres, p. 223). Second-generation families living in rural areas may have easier access to curanderos and therefore use them more frequently, and these curers still may consult with urban dwellers whose family medical doctors, despite the advances in contemporary medicine, are ineffective in treating a given ailment.

## **HEALTH ISSUES**

Though Mexican Americans manifest no congenital diseases that are group-specific, the rates at which they contract certain maladies are considerably above the national average. Some of these diseases are more evident among certain sectors of the Mexican American population, while others are common to the entire community.

The incidence of diabetes is greater among obese persons and studies have shown that one-third of all Mexican Americans fall in this category, the highest rate among Hispanics in the United States. Among those of the 45-74 age group, 23.9 percent had diabetes. Poor eating habits and/or inadequate diets contributed directly to its prevalence (Chávez and Torres, p. 235).

According to recent studies, 14 percent of all AIDS cases in the United States occurred among the Hispanic community and, as a group, they were 2.7 times more likely to

contract this disease than Anglo Americans. Evidence of higher rates of AIDS within the migrant farmworking community (a considerable proportion of which is still Mexican or Mexican American) became more pronounced in the 1990s. The mobile nature of existence of this specific populace facilitates its dissemination, as does a lower frequency of condom use (Chávez and Torres, p. 236). Farmworkers are also at higher risk of exposure to tuberculosis. In comparison to the overall population of the United States, they are six times as likely to fall victim to this disease.

Alcoholism afflicts Hispanics at two to three times the national average. Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans suffer the highest rates. Alcohol abuse is eight percent to 12 percent higher for all age groups among Mexican Americans as compared to "non-Hispanic whites" in these same categories (*The Statistical Record ...*, p. 434). The highest frequencies occur in those families of low economic stability, and many of those afflicted are unaware of, or ineligible for, treatment programs. Cirrhosis of the liver is the most common cause of death for these specific individuals. The frequency level for this disease is 40 percent higher among Mexican Americans than among Anglo Americans.

The underutilization of medical services represents one of the most pressing health issues among a significant proportion of the Mexican American population. For second-generation families whose contacts with Anglo American society have been limited and whose disposable income is low, such fundamental considerations as inadequate language skills, lack of transportation, or inability to pay for services reduce the possibilities for using or even seeking health care facilities. Public health facilities have decreased in number in some urban zones of heavy Hispanic population. In rural areas, medical assistance may be too distant, poorly staffed, or offer medical technologies of limited capacity to detect or cure more complex ailments. Preventative health measures are a privilege too expensive to consider for those whose income is at survival-level.

Research in the 1960s in Texas and California revealed that the proportionate number of Mexicans and Mexican Americans receiving psychiatric assistance in public facilities was significantly lower than their overall population in these areas. The findings in Texas prompted sociologist E. G. Jaco to suggest that Mexican Americans might in fact suffer less from mental illnesses than the Anglo American population, a premise that seemed to contradict generally held assumptions regarding immigrant groups and their families raised in foreign countries—specifically, that individuals of such groups were more likely than people of the dominant culture in a given society to exhibit a higher prevalence of mental disorders due to the psychological stress and tension generated by the immigration experience, discrimination, and the acculturation process in general. Jaco proposed that the existence of strong, supportive family ties among the Mexican and Mexican American population might explain the lower proportion of patients of this ethnic community at these facilities, but other theories have since been put forth. The most often-repeated assertions, some of which have been posited with little or insufficient supporting material to defend their contentions, have suggested that: Mexican and Mexican Americans are more tolerant of psychiatric disorders than Anglo Americans and seek assistance with lower frequency; they suffer from just as many disorders but manifest these conditions more often in criminal behavior, alcoholism and other

addictions; they are too proud or sensitive to expose such psychological problems, especially in facilities staffed mainly by Anglo Americans; they utilize priests and family physicians instead of public health specialists or they return to Mexico to seek a cure.

## **LANGUAGE**

Spanish has remained the principal, if not sole, language of almost all Mexicans in the southwestern United States for many decades after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Since the overwhelming majority of the first generations of Mexican immigrants moved to areas already populated predominantly by people of their heritage and worked side-by-side with these individuals in the same jobs, the need for them to learn more than rudimentary English was of minor importance. Proximity to Mexico and the continued entry of additional immigrants constantly revitalized the culture and native language of those who chose to become permanent residents of the United States.

In the twentieth century, as the proportion of second- and third-generation Mexican American families increased and some of their members moved into a wider range of professions in which more of their co-workers were non-Hispanic, proficiency in English became practical necessary for many. In addition, heightening exposure of the younger generations of Mexican Americans to Anglo American education meant that English became a fundamental part of their curriculum. Moreover, the use of Spanish in and outside the classroom was strongly discouraged and sometimes even prohibited in many school systems until mid-century and beyond. Of equally substantial and enduring impact, English was introduced to ever greater numbers of Hispanic households by means of television. Though few lower income Mexican American families could afford this form of entertainment in the 1950s, it had entered most living rooms by the end of the next decade and brought the language (as well as other aspects) of Anglo American culture nightly to the ears of a growing Mexican American audience.

The persistence of high immigration levels did not allow Spanish to disappear from this community, regardless of the encroachments made by English in their public and private lives, and the Chicano movement of the late 1960s and 1970s renewed the pride of many Mexican Americans in their heritage and in the Spanish language. In the 1980s there were still over 100 Spanish-language newspapers in circulation within the United States, approximately 500 radio stations, and 130 television stations whose programming was partially or completely in Spanish.

## **MEXICAN SPANISH**

Some families in more remote parts of northern New Mexico still speak a Spanish quite similar to the language spoken in Spain at the time of the arrival of the first conquistadors in the Americas. On the other hand, later immigrants, like their immediate ancestors, speak Mexican Spanish. This language differs from Castilian Spanish in the pronunciation of certain consonants and consonant and vowel combinations but is more strikingly distinct in aspects of vocabulary, where the influence of pre-Columbian indigenous languages have added to the language spoken in Mexico. Such words most

often apply to agriculture and the natural world. For example, the native word for "grass," *zacate*, replaced the Spanish word *hierba*- and *guajolote* and *tecolote*, of Indian derivation, replaced the Spanish words for "turkey" and "owl."

The Spanish spoken by Mexican Americans is "a spoken and informal dialect" (González-Berry, p. 304). It varies to some extent depending on the rural or urban identity of the speaker, his/her economic standing, length of time in the United States, and level of education. Though some scholars have maintained that Mexican American Spanish may be separated or differentiated by geographic zone in the United States, the intramigration among these areas has made a clear delineation between them difficult. In general terms, it is characterized by and distinguished from Mexican Spanish in differences between the enunciation of certain sounds. For example, whereas the standard Spanish words for "soldier" and the pronoun "you" are respectively *soldado* and *usted*, the corresponding words in Mexican American Spanish for many speakers have altered to *soldau* and *usté* through the elimination of the consonant of the last syllable.

Transformations of certain verb conjugations are evident also in Mexican American Spanish, such as the shift from *decía* ("I/she/he/you were saying") to *dijía* (González-Berry, p. 305). Markedly evident also is the incorporation of English words to Spanish, with the appropriate orthographic changes to make the specific terminology more similar in sound to Spanish, for example, *troca* for "truck," *parquear* for "park," or *lonche* for "lunch."

Still prevalent among various urban groups of young Mexican Americans is the use of *caló*, a variation of Mexican Spanish which employs slang from Mexican Spanish, African American English, and Anglo American English to create a new vocabulary. It was used much more extensively in urban settings in the Southwest during the 1940s and 1950s by members of the younger generation who wished to set themselves apart from their parents. As González-Berry illustrates, the combination of languages used in *caló* make it comprehensible only to those who use it, as may be seen by the phrase *gasofla pá la ranfla*—"gas for the car" (p. 306).

Those Mexican Americans who have been exposed extensively to English and Spanish and employ both languages actively in speaking or writing may move from one language to another within a given sentence, a linguistic phenomenon referred to as "code-switching." The alternation may be caused by a momentary memory lapse by the speaker, with use of proper nouns, or when a specific word has no exact equivalent in the other language. The result occasioned by one or more of these factors might be a sentence such as: "*Mucha gente no sabe* where Magnolia Street is" ("Many people don't know where Magnolia Street is") (Lipski, *The Hispanic American Almanac*, p. 224). This linguistic tendency was once perceived in a negative light, and in the case of some speakers is indicative of lexical deficiencies. An expanding percentage of Mexican Americans, however, are now "coordinate bilinguals," able to separate English from Spanish completely and use either language effectively and persuasively depending upon the situation or need (Olivia Arrieta, *The Handbook ... Anthropology*, p. 166). Code-switching when employed by these bilinguals by no means signifies confusion or

insufficient linguistic aptitude to distinguish between the two languages but an attempt to use the most appropriate phrase to convey a certain word or notion (Lipski, p. 224).

## LANGUAGE ISSUES

Despite high levels of Mexican immigration and strong pride in their Hispanic heritage, the primary language of Mexican Americans is English, and with each new generation born in the United States the use of Spanish becomes less frequent in many families. U.S. Census Bureau statistics for 1976 revealed that 68 percent of the Mexican American population possessed good language proficiency in English. According to Meier, polls taken in the 1990s indicate that though 90 percent of those Mexican Americans questioned asserted an ability to speak and comprehend Spanish, only 5.3 percent confirmed that they spoke the language at home (p. 245). Census figures for 1990 calculate that though 65 percent of Mexican Americans "speak a language other than English," 97.8 percent of those persons five years of age and over professed to an "ability to speak English" (*1990 Census of Population—Persons of Hispanic Origin in the United States*, p. 86).

In addition to the factor of progressive acculturation, these figures also in part reflect the effect of bilingual education programs nationwide, programs that began in significant numbers in the late 1960s with passage of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 but multiplied considerably in the 1970s due to a decision rendered by the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Lau v. Nichols* in 1974. This verdict affirmed that those schools not able or willing to provide language instruction to children of immigrants whose skills in English were deficient were acting in violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. By the close of the 1970s there were still four states in which bilingual instruction was forbidden. Spending for these classes had increased to \$107 million (Cortés, p. 715).

The movement to bilingual instruction in the public schools was not received positively by all sectors of society in the United States in this period, however. Towards the end of the 1970s and in the initial years of the 1980s, various individuals and organizations set out to reverse a perceived trend towards bilingualism and/or biculturalism/multiculturalism in the United States, which they saw as a threat to the dominant Anglo American culture. In 1978 Emmy Shafer established the organization English Only and in 1983 United States English was founded, a group whose annual budget is now \$5 million with a membership of 400,000. One of the priorities of this second group has been to secure passage of the English Language Amendment, thereby declaring to ratify English as the official language in the United States. Though they had not achieved this goal at the national level as of 1995, 21 states had passed legislation to this effect. Opponents of these proposals assert that the United States has never been monolingual or monocultural and that attempts to establish national or local restrictive language policies are anti-immigrationist and racist.

Though virtually all Mexican Americans endorse the need to learn English and have supported programs in bilingual instruction as a prerequisite to academic and professional

advance in the United States, many have found fault with the "language immersion" or "transitional" approaches employed in a large percentage of bilingual programs, which place little or no importance on the retention of the students' native language or culture as they learn English. A method far less commonly employed but defended more positively by many Mexican Americans is "maintenance bilingual instruction," a technique that utilizes the speaker's language of origin to teach English but never abandons the use of the native language nor denies the importance of the student's ethnicity. The goal of this popular alternative is to make the learner totally functional in the two languages in terms of reading, writing, and speaking (Arreta, p. 186). The English Plus proposal endorsed by the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC), which asserts the necessity of acquiring fluency in English for Hispanics yet also reaffirms the importance of maintaining identity with Hispanic values, has received the support of many Hispanic groups in the United States.

## **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DYNAMICS**

The average size of the Mexican American family in 1989 was 4.1 persons, as compared to 3.1 for non-Hispanic and 3.8 for all Hispanic families residing in the United States. Though the birth rate among Mexican American women remains high in comparison to the national average and 43 percent of the Mexican American population was 14 years of age or under, the size of the family has declined slowly over the past generations. In 1991, among Mexican-origin families in the United States, 73.5 percent were headed by married couples, and 19.1 percent were female-headed, a figure approximately three percent higher than for non-Hispanic groupings. Among female-headed families, 49 percent were below the poverty line in terms of income. According to the 1990 census, 7.8 percent of Mexican American men over 15 years of age were divorced, as opposed to 6.4 percent of the women in this same category. In 1989 13.5 percent of Mexican American households received public assistance. The mean for this specific income per household was \$4,359 (*1990 Census of Population...*).

Intermarriage between Mexicans/Mexican Americans and Anglo Americans was prevalent in the mid-nineteenth century and increased slowly in subsequent generations. After World War II, due in part to a slow movement towards residential integration and greater and more widespread social mobility, the incidence of intermarriage increased at more rapid rates, especially in urban settings. In the mid 1980s in the states of the Southwest of highest Hispanic population, intermarriage rates varied from nine to 27 percent in Texas, 27 to 29 percent in New Mexico, and 51 to 55 percent in California (Rosina Becerra, in Mindel, *Ethnic Families in America: Patterns and Variations*, p. 156). Male exogamy was slightly higher than female exogamy for the same period and occurred most frequently among third-generation Mexican Americans.

## **TRADITION AND CHANGE IN FAMILY STRUCTURE AND ROLES**

In the mid-nineteenth century *la familia*, or the extended family, included aunts and uncles, as well as grandparents and even great grandparents. Beyond these direct familial ties between generations, *compadres* (co-parents) were most often an integral part of

these groupings, as were adopted children and intimate friends, in many instances. As close, personal friends of the mother or father of a child, the *padrinos* (godfathers) or *madrinas* (godmothers) developed a special relationship with their *ahijados* (godchildren), a relationship that started in definitive terms at his/her baptism. From this point forward, in most instances, they provided emotional, financial, or any other form of assistance or advice their *ahijados* might require past that afforded by their actual parents, especially in times of family crisis. They were also essential participants in all events of social or religious importance to the godchild and maintained strong bonds with their *compadres* or *comadres*—lasting friendships based upon mutual admiration and support. As much as any immediate family member, godparents contributed to strong family unity (Griswold del Castillo, p. 42).

A patriarchal hierarchy prescribed a system of male dominance in the traditional family. As the authority figure, the husband was the principal, if not the sole, breadwinner. He made the important social and economic decisions and was the protector of the family's integrity. Wives had general control over household matters but were expected to be obedient and submissive to their husbands (Maxine Baca Zinn, *The Handbook ... Sociology*, p. 164). Though the wife might perform work outside the household, this was usually an acceptable alternative only in cases of extreme economic duress. In such cases, her efforts were limited to a restricted number of options, almost always of a part-time nature, and contributed nothing to improve her subservient status within the house. This division of authority established between man and wife was perpetuated by their offspring. Girls were taught distinct behavior patterns and were encouraged to adopt specifically defined aspirations quite different from their brothers, beginning at an early age. Motherhood was the ideal objective of all young girls and the primary virtue of all those who achieved it (p. 167).

This system of mutual dependence and respect for elders created a close-knit family unit. Family honor and unity were of paramount significance. If problems arose for individual members, the immediate or extended family could be relied upon to resolve the issue. Important decisions were always made with first consideration given to the needs of the group rather than the individual. Traditional social and religious practices passed from one generation to the next virtually unchanged because they were perceived as intrinsic values to the family's cultural heritage.

While extended family households are less common today, the importance of the family as a unit and the ties between these units and their extended members remains strong. Newly arrived immigrants generally continue to seek out relatives in the United States, as did the initial generations after 1848, and may rely upon these individuals and their families for temporary residence as well as assistance in arranging employment, especially in rural regions. Though in a majority of instances each successive generation born in the United States tends to exhibit reduced dependence on extended kin, birthdays, baptisms, marriages, and other family celebrations bring relatives together with a pronounced regularity (Robert R. Alvarez, Jr., *The Hispanic American Almanac*, p. 171).

Modifications also have occurred in the pattern of male dominance and division of work by gender within these families. In the United States in the generations immediately subsequent to 1848, economic necessities provided the initial impulse toward a more egalitarian relationship between husband and wife. The specific forms of employment assumed by the Mexican American husband in the southwestern region during these years frequently made his absence necessary from the household for long periods of time; while drovers, miners, farm-workers, and other laborers often strayed considerable distances from their families in pursuit of work or in performing their labors, the wife was left as the authority figure. Though the male almost always assumed total control upon his return, accommodations or compromise might alter the structure of power within the family somewhat, and it was not uncommon for women to continue to exert a more pronounced role in decision making in those families where this pattern of male absence was prolonged and repetitive (Griswold del Castillo, p. 34).

As a growing proportion of Mexican American women moved into the full-time labor force in the early decades of the twentieth century and thereafter, alterations in role patterns and the division of responsibilities were manifested in greater frequencies. Though in some cases, especially in the early years of the century, the family was less male dominant, equal hours of work outside the house for the wife generally helped to initiate a progressively more egalitarian arrangement with the family structure.

The contemporary Mexican American family exhibits a wide range of decision making patterns, including that of male authoritarianism. Most, but not all, studies in the 1980s and early 1990s have concluded that both parents generally share in the day-to-day management of the family and in determining responses to matters of critical importance to this unit. Among others, Ybarra contends that "egalitarianism is the predominant conjugal role arrangement in Chicano families" (*Journal of Marriage and Family* 1982, p. 177). The mother, as before, is generally seen as the individual most responsible for meeting the domestic needs of husband and children, but in those families in which she has become the disciplinarian, she has frequently found this role is in conflict with her traditional identity as nurturer (Chavira-Prado, p. 258). Alvarez contends that, as in many contemporary cultures, though women most often have taken on new and varied roles, men have altered little with respect to their low participatory level related to household chores (*The Handbook ...*, p. 165). Despite the fact that actual family dynamics reveal general egalitarianism, deference to the father as the ultimate authority remains the ideal behavior pattern (Alvarez, *The Hispanic American Almanac*, p. 172).

## **CHILDREARING AND COURTSHIP**

Fairly rigid sex roles were maintained for Mexican American children well into the twentieth century. Beginning in colonial times in Mexico, young girls were taught the tasks and skills of their mother from an early age. The eldest daughter was initially always given the chore of caring for her younger siblings, but, after reaching puberty, the eldest brother replaced her in this responsibility (Becerra, pp. 149-50).

Whereas girls, up through adolescence, were restricted in their activities and spent much time together with their sisters at home, boys of the same age group were given more liberties and were allowed to venture outside the household with peers. There were rules of proper etiquette that prevailed in large cities and small towns for dating. Chaperoning was most common, if not required. Young unwed women were to be perceived by the community as the ideal figures in terms of social behavior. Adolescent boys, on the other hand, were not monitored as closely. The male was seen as "a fledgling (sic) macho who must be allowed to venture out of the home so he may test his wings and establish a masculine identity" (Alfredo Mirandé and Evangelina Enríquez, *La Chicana: The Mexican-American Woman*, 1979, p. 114).

Teen marriages were most prevalent in Mexican American families into the first decades of the twentieth century. The premarital procedures involved in joining a couple in matrimony varied depending on the social background of the families. Up until the 1920s and perhaps later in rural areas, a *portador* (go-between) would deliver a written proposal of marriage to the father of the would-be bride. Fathers decided on the acceptability of the suitor based on the apparent moral respectability of the young man and his family, and though the opinions of his spouse and daughter were important in the final decision as to marriage, the father might often overrule the wishes of either or both of these individuals (Williams, pp. 27-30).

Except among the most traditional Mexican American families, childrearing and dating practices have changed substantially over the past few generations. Among other studies finding similar conclusions, Jesse T. Zapata and Pat T. Jaramillo have found that parents rarely ascribe pronounced roles determined by sex to their children (*Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 3, No. 3, p. 286). Family commitments or responsibilities may still curtail the social activities of young girls more than boys, but equal privileges within the family arrangement are the norm rather than the exception. Girls may be monitored more closely in their dating patterns, but few of the restrictions that once prevailed now determine their behavior. Premarital chastity is still expected of young Chicanas, but as Mirandé and Enríquez affirmed, though "premarital virginity prevails ... its enforcement may prove more difficult today than in the past" (p. 114). Parents have farreduced and sometimes incidental influence with regard to the selection of marriage partners for their offspring, except in the most traditional families, but their sentiments on the issue are most always considered of significance.

## **EDUCATION**

The desire of low-income migrant families from Mexico to provide their children with opportunities for education in the late 1800s and early 1900s was counterbalanced by more fundamental needs: the wages paid these immigrants for their labors in the fields, mines, factories, or railways were most often so low that families needed the additional income provided by their children to meet the basic necessities required for survival. Attendance at the primary level of instruction was relatively high, provided that schools were available in the predominantly rural areas where the first generations of Mexican immigrants resided. But progress past this level and on into secondary schools was less

common because of economic factors. The mobile nature of farm and railworker families made it difficult for children to maintain a continuity in their schooling. Finally, the schools and teachers in these rural areas were of inferior quality. It was hard for parents to maintain a positive attitude about the long-range significance of attending classes since it quickly became apparent to most that, as with other families before them, it would only be a matter of time before economic factors would force them to pull their children out of classes or at least reduce the number of hours or days that they could attend school.

Low-income immigrant families, as well as those with greater financial stability whose children consequently had a better chance of staying in school, were dissuaded from adopting a more positive attitude toward the U.S. educational system because of the tendency of teachers and administrators to deny the existence or importance of Catholic or Hispanic traditions in favor of those held by the majority population. The assimilationist philosophy endorsed by the public school system was designed "to shape desirable behaviors for functioning in America" and encourage uniformity of perspective regardless of differences in the ethnic heritage among the student population (Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., *The Handbook ... Anthropology*, p. 293). Texts as well as curricula in the public schools well into the twentieth century disregarded or acknowledged only minimally the role and/or contributions of minority peoples to the socioeconomic historic development of the United States.

Religious orders staffed most Catholic schools in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, many of which were located in areas of high Mexican and Mexican American population. Though not founded specifically to educate Hispanics, these schools attracted significant numbers of Mexican Americans because of their religious orientation. As public education facilities began to proliferate at the end of the century, however, an ever-smaller percentage of Chicanos attended parochial schools, either because of easier access to public institutions or because of the cost factor involved with Catholic education (San Miguel, p. 293). By the 1960s, though the Mexican American population of the United States was close to 90 percent Catholic, only 15 percent of Spanish-surname students in Los Angeles attended grades one through six in Catholic institutions, whereas in San Antonio 21 percent attended grades one through eight (Grebler, p. 475). The proportion of Mexican Americans in parochial schools in the 1990s remains at similar or lower levels.

Beginning in the first decades of the twentieth century and continuing thereafter, as greater numbers of Mexican Americans moved to an urban setting, the opportunities for public school education increased measurably. Alternative sources of employment were more plentiful in the cities, and, though a majority of Mexican Americans continued to experience wage discrimination during these decades, the possible advantages of higher levels of education related to salary and employment options made academic preparation more attractive. Segregated educational facilities were the rule, however, until mid-century and beyond. The suits brought by *Menendez v. Westminster School District* in Southern California and *Delgado v. Bastrop Independent School District* represented important steps in the 1940s toward the outlawing of segregation, but some school systems practiced "integration" by joining Mexican American and Afro American

students rather than combining these minorities with predominantly Anglo American students (Cortés, p. 718). The separate educational facilities provided to minority students were most often poorly maintained, staffed by undertrained instructors, and provided with inadequate supplies.

As segregated facilities have slowly diminished over time, Mexican Americans who have entered integrated schools have often been classified as "learning disabled" because of linguistic deficiencies or inadequate academic preparation afforded by their previous learning institutions. This factor has caused many of these students to be channeled into "developmentally appropriate" classes or curricular tracks (San Miguel, p. 303). It was only in the late 1960s that the judicial system took steps to mandate the establishment of bilingual programs in education, but continued strong funding for these programs has been challenged by many groups at national and local levels. The pedagogical approach adopted by the vast majority of bilingual programs has stressed rapid conversion to the use of English without regard for the maintenance of skills in the native languages of first- and second-generation immigrants.

Leaders of the Chicano movement focused much of their energies on educational issues. They emphasized the need to lower the high school dropout rate, expand the number of bilingual/bicultural programs, increase the availability of fellowships for Mexican Americans at the college level, support the recruitment of higher percentages of Hispanic instructors and administrators at all levels of the educational system, and diversify class offerings by establishing new courses and programs in Chicano studies (Cortés, p. 718). Several student organizations have evolved to provide forums for the discussion and wider propagation of issues fundamental to improving educational opportunities for Mexican American students. In 1969 a conference at the University of California, Santa Barbara, attempted to unite many of these organizations under MECHA (*Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán*—Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán). A *Plan de Santa Barbara* (Santa Barbara Plan) was formulated related to the procedures necessary for the development of degree programs in Chicano studies (Meier, in McWilliams, p. 287). Strategies emerging from this reunion and other meetings of an academic focus among Mexican Americans have resulted in the creation of a growing number of Chicano studies programs nationwide. These programs feature courses and curricula of more definitive relevance to students at advanced education levels. In 1972 the National Association of Chicano Studies (NACS) was founded, an organization for college students and professors that sponsors annual conferences oriented to social, economic, literary, and other themes pertinent to Mexican Americans. A special session of the annual meeting in 1982 brought under discussion the need to champion recognition and participation by Mexican American women in this organization, a goal that has been accomplished in large part since that time (Teresa Córdova, *The Handbook ... Sociology*, p. 185).

According to U.S. Census Bureau estimates for 1991, 50.5 percent of the "Mexican-origin" population 35 years of age and over had completed four years of high school or more, and 7.4 percent of this same age category had attended four years of college or more. As of 1985, 27.8 percent of women in the United States designated under the identical classification had studied four years or more in high school, whereas 4.6 percent

had continued on to four or more years of college. Significant differences existed between first- and second-generation families and their levels of educational attainment in 1988: 34 percent of the first generation received a high school degree while 65 percent of the next generation reached this level (Steven F. Arvizu, *The Handbook ... Anthropology*, p. 288). Though the number of Hispanics with advanced degrees remains low, this number has risen in a consistent, albeit slow, pattern since the 1970s.

## **THE ROLE OF WOMEN**

Beginning in the late 1960s and in increasing proportions thereafter, Mexican American women began to write about themes directly oriented to the socioeconomic and political challenges that had confronted them over many generations: gender/race-based discriminatory practices in almost all areas of the labor market; inequities in educational opportunities and lack of sufficient local or federal support to alter this situation; the specific needs of Chicana women in poor Mexican American neighborhoods (health care, physical abuse, and unemployment, among others); Chicana prisoner abuse and rights; welfare rights and child care issues; lack of equitable political enfranchisement;



**This elaborate altar is decorated for the celebration of the Mexican Festival El Dia de los Muertos, or the Day of the Dead.**

and the virtual nonexistence of gender-specific political representation at local, state, or national levels (Córdova, pp. 177-80).

In the 1970s and early 1980s a significant number of Mexican American women were intrigued, but most often not attracted, by the ideas emerging from the women's movement in the United States. Though, as Maria Gonzalez affirms, it "provided the

example and the language with which Hispanic women could challenge traditional attitudes towards women's roles," several basic perspectives identified with the movement were seen in a negative light by most Mexican American women. While they were aware of the need to react to oppression from within and without the Mexican American community, they judged the declarations of Anglo American feminists as somewhat excessive in their demands for independence and self-autonomy and contended that such stances, if adopted by Chicanas, might function to disrupt the unity of the Mexican American family. They also were disenchanted by a perceived racism that was made evident to them from occurrences at various national women's association conferences. As synthesized by María González: "What has emerged from Hispanic women's experience with feminism is an acknowledgment by Hispanic feminists of pride in their traditional heritage but with a realistic attitude toward its limitations, as well as an acknowledgment of the limitations of feminism" (*The Hispanic-American Almanac*, p. 356).

Since the 1960s, many notable advances for women and women's issues have been made within the Mexican American community. Melba J. T. Vásquez cites two studies (Gándara and Avery) of the 1980s on "high-achieving" Chicanas that suggest a dilemma of a different dimension for these women when set in the context of Mexican American social history in the United States. In both studies, it was revealed that, as opposed to Anglo American professional women, Mexican American women in industry, academia, and politics married at significantly lower rates and, of those who married, only 56 percent of them had children. Avery concluded that for these specific females, "the conflicts involved in maintaining roles within and outside the home may be perceived as too overwhelming and the availability of male partners of comparable educational backgrounds may be limited" (quoted in Vásquez in *Chicano Psychology*, second edition, edited by Joe L. Martínez and Richard H. Mendoza, p. 42).

For the pronounced majority of Chicanas, however, the move to a position of equality in North American society has yet to begin or is only commencing. Insufficient opportunity for an adequate education to allow them to compete in an increasingly challenging job market condemns too many of them to unemployment, underemployment, or work in professions with little promise for upward mobility and jobs with decent salaries. Many Chicanas remain in oppressed situations within their own community, held back by gender-based traditions that deny them a chance to alter their role and define a new identity. The positive advances of the minority of Mexican American women must be viewed by the majority, however, as a promise for a better future.

## **CUISINE**

The basic diet of the inhabitants of Mexico has changed little from the beginning years of recorded human history in the area to the present period. Corn, beans, squash, and tomatoes were staples until the arrival of the Spaniards in the early 1500s. The culinary preferences of these Europeans, plus the addition of some items from trade centered in Manila brought pork, beef, rice, and various spices, among other foods, to the diet of this region.

Pork and beef, in steaks or stews, along with chicken, were the meats eaten in those areas from which migration to the United States was highest in 1848 and subsequent decades. This same cuisine forms the day-to-day food of most contemporary Mexican Americans: prepared with tomato-based sauces flavored by a variety of chiles and/or spices or herbs such as cumin and cilantro, one of these meats is generally served with rice, beans, and corn tortillas.

On festive occasions such as religious holidays or family reunions, one or more of the following traditional meals consumed in Mexico are prepared by most Mexican American families: *tamales* (shredded and spiced pork or beef caked within cornmeal and wrapped in a corn husk before steaming); *enchiladas* (corn tortillas lightly fried in oil then wrapped around sliced chicken, shredded beef, cheese, or ground beef and various spices and coated with a tomato and chile sauce before baking); *mole* (most often chicken, but sometimes pork, combined with a sauce of chiles, chocolate, ground sesame or pumpkin seeds, garlic, and various other spices, slow-cooked under a low flame on the stove); *chilaquiles* (dried tortilla chips complemented by cheeses, chile, and perhaps *chorizo*—spiced sausage—and/or chicken and a tomato-based sauce of green or red chile stirred into a hash-like dish on the stove); *chiles rellenos* (green chiles stuffed with a white cheese and fried in an egg batter that adheres to the chiles); and *posole* (a soup-like stew which contains hominy as its essential ingredient, as well as stew meat and various spices).

Though some ingredients of the meals described above are at times somewhat difficult to find in major supermarkets in the United States, the proximity of Mexico makes it possible for small markets that specialize in Mexican food to obtain and sell these items at a reasonable price.

## **TRADITIONAL CLOTHING**

The clothing identified as most traditional by Mexicans and Mexican Americans and, according to Olga Nájera-Ramírez, recognized as "official national symbols of Mexico," is now worn most frequently at festivals of historic importance to these people. Men dress as *charros*, or Mexican cowboys, and wear wide-brimmed *sombreros* along with tailored jackets and pants lined with silver or shining metal buttons. Women dress in *China Poblana* outfits, which include a white peasant blouse and a flaring red skirt adorned with sequins of different colors. This apparel is linked most closely in socio-historical terms to people of more humble origin in Mexico.

## **HOLIDAYS**

Two secular holidays of national importance in Mexico are celebrated by a significant number of Mexican Americans. Mexican Independence Day is celebrated on the 16th of September. Commemorating the date that the priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla initiated the war for liberation from Spain with the *grito*, or call to battle, "*Viva Mexico y mueran los gachupines*" ("Long live Mexico and death to all *gachupines*"—a derogatory term for Spaniards used during the colonial period and afterwards), part of the festivities may

include the pronouncement of the grito and/or a mass with *mariachis*, (Mexican street bands) followed possibly by a speech or parade. In that the central idea related to this date is ethnic solidarity, many of the participants wear the *charro* and *China Poblana* outfits. Along with traditional plates such as *mole*, other condiments and food served on this date traditionally stress the colors of the Mexican flag: white, red, and green. These items may include rice, limes, avocados, chopped tomatoes, peppers, and onions (Eunice Romero Gwynn and Douglas Gwynn, *The Handbook ... Anthropology*, p. 366).

Perhaps the most widely recognized Mexican holiday celebrated by Mexicans and Mexican Americans residing in the United States, as well as by other Hispanics nationwide, commemorates the victory of Mexican troops in the Battle of Puebla over the invading French army on May 5, 1862. The Cinco de Mayo celebration may include parades or other festivities and, as with Independence Day, reinforces for many Mexican Americans a sense of ethnic brotherhood. Many Anglo Americans join in commemorating this date, though its historic importance is known by only a negligible number of revellers.

## RELIGION

Approximately 75 percent of the Mexican American population are of the Catholic faith, and in the southwestern United States over two-thirds of the Catholics are Mexican or Mexican American (Julián Samora, *A History of the Mexican-American People*, p. 232). Despite their numerical importance within this church, however, the first Mexican American bishop was not ordained until 1970 and, as of 1992, only 19 of 360 bishops in the country were of Hispanic origin. In recent decades, attempts have been made by church hierarchy to establish a stronger bond between Mexican Americans and the Catholic church in the United States, but various factors and events over time since 1848 created a rift that remains clearly defined between this specific laity and the institutional church with which they are nominally affiliated (Silvia Novo Pena, *The Hispanic-American Almanac*, p. 367).

## CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

The presence of the Catholic church on Mexico's northern frontier was weak throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, due in part to the attempts of liberals to reduce its economic and political power nationwide, but also because of the death, departure, or expulsion of Spanish clerics from the region and the failure of the church to replace them (Cortés, p. 710). By 1846 there were only 16 Catholic priests in the lands that were to become the states of California, Arizona, and New Mexico (Alberto L. Pulido, in *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies IV*, p. 106).

Beginning in the colonial period, and increasingly so in the nineteenth century, Mexicans living in the rural areas of this region evolved a "self-reliant," popular religiosity. Though based upon fundamental Catholic tenets, this form of religion manifested practices that deviated in notable ways from those endorsed by the institutional church, especially so after 1848 (Moisés Sandoval, *On the Move: A History of the Hispanic Church in the*

*United States*, p. 21). Home altars and devotional tables became the center of prayer for this isolated laity, and parents or grandparents often instructed the younger members of the family in religious matters. Feasts, festivities, and processions to honor saints or events of historical religious significance became the principal means for local believers to share religion on a community level. Pilgrimages to shrines took on added importance for those hoping for divine intervention in times of despair (Anthony Stevens-Arroyo and Ana María Díaz-Stevens, *The Handbook ... Sociology*, p. 270). A more pronounced devotion to certain saints or the Virgin Mary in one of her various identities frequently dominated a believer's prayers. Religious brotherhoods, such as *Los Hermanos Penitentes* (the Confraternity of Our Father, Jesus of Nazarene) in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado—operating in the absence of priests—directed holy ceremonies for those in the surrounding communities, taught doctrine to the young, and conducted penitential rituals (Sandoval, p. 22).

By the mid-1850s the lands taken over by the United States were included in newly created dioceses placed under the control of bishops and vicars whose origin or heritage, much like the newly ordained clergy of the period, most frequently was European. These leaders were prompt to voice protests over the religious practices of the Mexican laity and priests in their regions and soon proposed several basic reforms. Though they had been prohibited since 1833, the collection of tithes was called for in most dioceses and set fees were established for church marriages, burials, and baptisms. Processions and other public demonstrations of faith not under the direct control of the church were discouraged. Festive religious celebrations often were condemned as immoral and those who selected not to worship or to do so in services not tied officially to the institutional church were chastised. In New Mexico the French apostolic vicar of the Santa Fe diocese, Jean Baptiste Lamy, actively sought to curtail the activities and power of the *Penitentes* and replaced or excommunicated several priests who failed to follow his dictates, among them Father Antonio José Martínez of Taos, who, despite being excommunicated, continued to perform services in a small chapel in his parish (Mirandé, p. 136).

Thus, although they had been guaranteed the right to maintain their religious preferences and practices in 1848, as the nineteenth century ended it was progressively more evident to most Mexican and Mexican American Catholics that they had no institutional voice at any level in the American Catholic church and that the religious traditions they had come to deem important and essential to their convictions were considered inappropriate, if not unacceptable, in the estimation of the Euroamerican Catholic laity and clergy in the United States.

It was not until the mid-1940s that the institutional Catholic church in the United States began to devise strategies and programs to meet the pastoral and social needs of Mexican Americans and other Hispanics. In 1944 meetings and seminars were organized for delegates of western and southwestern dioceses at the request of Robert E. Lucey and Urban J. Vehr, the archbishops of San Antonio and Denver, respectively, to analyze the scope and effectiveness of the church's efforts in these areas (Sandoval, p. 47). In 1945 the Bishop's Committee for the Spanish-speaking was formed, the objectives of which

were to construct clinics, improve housing and educational and employment opportunities, and eliminate discrimination.

Hispanic priests increased in numbers slowly during the 1950s and 1960s, and beginning in 1969, some of these pastors organized the PADRES (Priests Associated for Religious, Educational, and Social Rights) to help strengthen the voice of their ethnic community within the national Catholic church (Novo Pena, p. 367). Fifty nuns in 1971 united to form *Las Hermanas* and proclaimed a similar agenda. In response to pressure from these and other associations, a Secretariat of Hispanic Affairs was created within the church to coordinate activities of Hispanic clergy across the country. Three national meetings (*Encuentros*) between Spanish-speaking leaders and higher clerics in the church were held in 1972, 1977, and 1985. Though not all participants involved in these meetings viewed them in positive terms, Sandoval concludes that they provided a means for Hispanics to "come face to face with the top levels of authority in the church to express their frustrations and demands for equality and opportunity in the community of believers. The *encuentros* have legitimized protest and demonstrated the Church's willingness to listen to the oppressed" (*Fronteras: A History of the Latin American Church in the United States*, p. 431).

One of the most dynamic forces to bring about change between Mexican Americans and the Catholic church and its clergy in the United States was the Chicano movement of the 1960s and early 1970s. In seeking to define their unique identity within North American society by affirming a strong sense of pride in their Spanish and indigenous American heritage, leaders of this movement also condemned U.S. institutions that they believed had fostered or condoned the oppression of Mexican Americans in the past and present. In the early 1970s, the activist group *Católicos por la Raza* dramatized their discontent over lingering evidence of segregation in the church and its failure to bring about reforms to correct inequities in society by organizing a Christmas Eve demonstration. Many of the participants were arrested, but their sentiments were publicized (Meier, p. 227).

By the 1990s, an expanding proportion of Mexican Americans were mainstream Catholics and no longer sensed the same isolation or separation that their parents or grandparents likely experienced. According to Sandoval, however, the basic reality is the same as before: "Hispanics ... remain a people apart. They continue to cling to their culture and maintain at least some of their religious traditions. There is 'social distance' between them and the institutional Church. For some it is a vague discomfort of not feeling at home. For others, it is the perception that the clergy are not interested in them. Moreover, Hispanics in the main have no role in ministry: episcopal, clerical, religious or lay. They are the objects of ministry rather than its agents" (p. 131).

## **RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS AND RITUALS**

Various rituals and festivals of Spanish or Mexican Catholic origin continue to represent an important spiritual element in the lives of many contemporary Mexican Americans. In some instances, these public manifestations of faith have remained virtually unchanged since 1848 or before, but the number of those believers who practice them is decreasing

with each new generation. The degree to which any single family participates in these activities depends on the nature of their religious convictions and the level of contact they maintain with more tradition-oriented members of churches of the Mexican American Catholic community.

One of the most symbolic celebrations for many Mexican Americans is the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12th. The festivity commemorates the apparitions of the Virgin Mary to a converted Christian Indian, Juan Diego, in Mexico on the hill of Tepeyac (located within the boundaries of present-day Mexico City) on this same date in 1521. Though she had identified herself as the Virgin Mary to Diego, in appearing before him she spoke his language, Nahuatl, related herself to indigenous deities, and, most importantly, was of a skin color similar to his. In the years immediately after her apparition countless thousands of Indians who had previously sought to maintain their native religions converted to the Catholic faith, seeing the coming of the Virgin in a new identity as a symbolic act of supreme consequence.

To commemorate the day of the Virgin's final apparition to Juan Diego on December 12th, some Mexican Americans may rise early and unite at some high point in the area (symbolic of the hill at Tepeyac) and sing "Las Mañanitas," a traditional song which, according to Elizondo, in this festivity represents the Mexican Americans' "proclamation of new life" (*Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, p. 44). A special mass is said and roses are an important part of the celebration; most families take these flowers to the service and place them at the altar of the Virgin. Some Mexican Americans, on a given year, may make a pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. The importance of the Virgin Mary to Mexican Americans and Hispanics in general cannot be overstated, as affirmed by Silvia Novo Pena: "For the males she is the understanding mother who forgives and intercedes for her errant sons; for the women she sympathizes with the early travails of a mother, sister, or daughter" (p. 381).

Ceremonies and rituals in recognition of events related to the birth and death of Jesus Christ are an essential part of the religious calendar of many Mexican Americans. During the nine days prior to Christmas Day, masses are said at dawn and the festivities of "Las Posadas" honor the arrival of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem and their search for lodging at an inn (*posada*). Dressing in clothing similar to that likely worn by these personages, a couple visits designated houses of friends or other family members on consecutive nights. It is common for the participants to read dialogues that recreate the probable conversation between the Holy Family and the innkeepers. Though the contemporary Mary and Joseph, like those whom they represent, are denied entry each night, after the dialogues and other ritual acts are completed they may return to the house and unite with friends and family for fellowship. On the ninth night, which is Christmas Eve, Mary and Joseph visit a house that accepts their request for a night's lodging. All those who participated in the events of prior evenings generally attend the *Misa de Gallo* (Midnight Mass), which usually starts with a procession down the main aisle during which two godparents carry a statue of the Christ Child to a manger near the front altar (Samora, p. 227). Festivities include the sharing of food and drink to celebrate the arrival of Mary and Joseph at the inn where the Christ child will be born. During the evening, in most instances, those

children present break a *piñata* (a paper maché figure often in the shape of a farm animal filled with candy and hung from a high spot in the house). In all, these joyous events serve to prepare the human spirit for the arrival of the Christ Savior. Christmas Day is spent at home with members of the extended family, and traditional Mexican dishes are principal elements of the menu (Nájera-Ramírez, p. 337).

The final significant event of the Christmas season is *El Día de los Reyes Magos* (Three Kings' Day) on January 6th, when children receive gifts to mark the arrival of the Magi and their offerings for the Christ Child. The night before this special date children leave a note in one of their shoes explaining their behavior during the past year, followed by a list of requests for specific gifts. The shoes often are filled with straw and left under the bed or on a windowsill, along with water, symbolically to provide sustenance to the camels of the kings. In doing so, "they are taught to be mindful of animals and to experience the joy of gratitude" (Samora, p. 227). On the evening of January 6th, families and close friends of this group unite to cut and share a special bread of circular shape with the figure of the infant Jesus in the center.

Activities throughout the Hispanic world also occur to recall the last days of Christ's life on earth. *El Miércoles de Ceniza* (Ash Wednesday), according to Samora, is of particular importance to Mexican Americans "as they reflect on their ties to the earth as a mestizo people" (p. 227). By receiving the imprint of a cross on their foreheads during mass on this day, like Catholics of all countries, they acknowledge the pain and suffering of Christ on the cross and "profess publicly the Christian faith with an awareness of their human sinfulness and limitations." On Good Friday in many parishes, *La Procesión de las Tres Caídas* (The Procession of the Three Falls) in conjunction with religious services brings to the memory of those in attendance the agony associated with Christ's journey to Calvary. Families may visit a statue or altar of Our Lady of Sorrows, a Virgin Mary with tears of anguish for her Son in His last moments on earth. The Mexican American mother, in visiting the statue, demonstrates her pity for the Virgin on this anniversary day. On Easter Sunday, another procession commemorates the reunion of the resurrected Christ and His mother. The burning of an effigy of Judas may also form part of the religious activities (Samora, p. 228).



**These Mexican American World Cup fans display their excitement on their faces and their clothes.**

## **FUNERALS**

Rituals practiced in Spain and colonial Mexico associated with the death of family members are still preserved by some Mexican American families. After passing, the body of the deceased may be dressed in special clothing (*la mortaja*) and remain in the family home overnight, making it possible for relatives and friends to pay respects to the departing soul. Food is generally served at this *velorio* (wake). For years to follow on this same date, those people who attended the *velorio* may reunite to affirm once again their bonds to the deceased person. On the day of burial, the family accompanies the body to the grave, frequently singing songs of a religious theme. Flowers are thrown into the grave and the entire family generally stays at the site until the casket is completely covered. Mexican American families whose deceased members were born in Mexico may sometimes arrange for the body to be transported back to his/her town of origin. It was once customary for the spouse and certain family members to wear black clothing for varying periods and make *promesas* (vows) to honor the dead. This is still the practice with a reduced number of families, but the length of time of mourning differs considerably from group to group. Most significant is the perspective on death held by many Mexican and Mexican American Catholics that, rather than an end, death is seen as "a new beginning" (Stevens-Arroyo and Díaz Stevens, p. 379).

## **PROTESTANTISM AND OTHER FAITHS**

The Anglo American settlers who immigrated in the early nineteenth century to the area of presentday Texas were predominantly of Protestant faith, as were those who in later decades travelled to California and most other regions north of the Rio Grande. Over time, they converted a small number of Mexican Americans to Protestantism. By the 1960s three percent of the Mexican American population were members of Protestant denominations (Cortés, p. 711). Increased efforts in social outreach projects, pronounced support of farmworker protest campaigns, and expanded evangelism, coupled with the

continued dissatisfaction of many Mexican Americans with the relative lack of recognition accorded them locally or institutionally, have contributed to a considerable expansion in the proportion of Mexican Americans who have converted to Protestant sects. Pentecostal groups have also attracted growing numbers of Mexican Americans.

## **EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC TRADITIONS**

Mining, agriculture, transportation, and ranching attracted the highest numbers of Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans in search of work in the United States from shortly after the mid-nineteenth century through the first decades of the twentieth century. As these sectors of the economy grew in importance, their demand for low-wage laborers multiplied, and the completion of local and transcontinental rail lines expanded the markets for ranchers and farmers in this region, prompting further increases in demands for additional workers (Mirandé, p. 29). Laws limiting or excluding Chinese and Japanese immigration made jobs even more abundant for others in certain regions of the western United States. For the Mexican immigrant, repeated downturns in the Mexican economy and the socio-political turbulence related to the Revolution of 1910 made "the North" an attractive location for at least temporary residence.

A reduced percentage of Mexican landowners and merchants crossed into the United States in this early period during the years of the Mexican Revolution. Many were successful in establishing businesses in Mexican American neighborhoods in the Southwest. With more years of formal education in their background than the majority of immigrants in this same period, this minority frequently provided jobs and political leadership within their newly adopted communities (Meier, p. 109).

Though mining, ranching, and transportation employed many new immigrants, the highest percentage of foreign workers were drawn to agriculture, mostly in Texas and California, but also in parts of New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado. By 1930, 41 percent of the agricultural laborers in the Southwest were Mexicans or Mexican Americans (Cortés, p. 708). Eight-, ten-, or twelve-hour workdays, with few if any days of rest, combined with generally high temperatures to make this work in the fields or orchards extremely demanding and wearing in physical terms. Housing made available to laborers by their employers was of inferior quality. Unsanitary and confining living quarters facilitated the spread of disease. Clean drinking water was not easily accessible and indoor plumbing was uncommon. In areas of colder climate, inadequate heating was the norm. The transitory nature of this work was most difficult on immigrant families, whose children very seldom had the opportunity to attend anything but makeshift schools on a temporary basis and were most often forced, for economic reasons, to begin work in the fields at a young age.

The decade of the 1930s brought severe cutbacks in hiring in agriculture and other industries due to worldwide economic depression. High levels of unemployment nationwide made immigrant labor expendable. Those workers not of U.S. origin were deported in large numbers; over 500,000 were forced to return to Mexico during this ten-year period. Frequently, families were separated: parents of foreign citizenship were

returned to their home countries, whereas their children, if born in the United States, and thus, American citizens, sometimes remained in their country of birth with relatives or family friends, hoping for the prompt return of their parents.

Less than ten years after the first of these deportations, however, labor shortages caused by World War II—principally in agriculture—stimulated a renewed need for immigrant labor. To resolve this matter, the governments of the United States and Mexico signed an agreement in 1942 that initiated the *bracero* (someone who works with their arms—*brazos*) program, which allocated temporary work visas to Mexican immigrants seeking farm work in the Southwest. From 1942 to 1948, over 200,000 laborers entered the United States to work in California agribusiness and, in reduced numbers, in the rail industry and other sectors. Though cancelled in 1948, the program was renewed shortly thereafter and continued in force until 1964 when, in part because of socio-political pressures related to the civil rights movement, the U.S. Congress decided against any further extensions of the agreement. Accusations of farmworkers against their employers related to substandard housing and work conditions had been confirmed by studies conducted by the Labor Department in the 1950s; agencies such as the National Council of Churches of Christ in America, the National Catholic Welfare Council, and the National Consumers League had spoken out against these infringements and made many U.S. citizens more fully aware of the abuses repeatedly suffered by these workers.

A major portion of the *braceros* working in the United States from 1942 to 1964 returned to Mexico, but it is estimated that eight percent of these workers, roughly 750,000, remained in the Southwest to raise families and establish permanent residency or citizenship (Meier, p. 184). To those who participated in this program and to other immigrant Mexican laborers who had come northward for work in this period, it became evident once again, as in the 1930s, that when low-wage workers were needed, they were welcome in the United States. When the demand for laborers diminished, however, their presence was not wanted by significant numbers of the majority community.

Wages for Mexican and Mexican American farmworkers continued at inequitable, low levels and living and work conditions failed to improve to any marked degree in the decades subsequent to the 1960s. Strikes and boycotts organized by César Chávez further publicized the injustices perpetrated by many employers in this rural industry. The formation of the United Farm Workers union gave somewhat greater strength to migrant labor demands, but unfair practices by employers still remain a source of grievance in the fields (Meier, p. 210).

## **DIVERSIFICATION OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

Noticeable beginning in the 1920s and increasing measurably in the years after World War II was a shift in the Hispanic labor force in the United States, especially by second- and third-generation Mexican Americans, away from their initial sources of employment into a wider range of occupations. Many of these workers were attracted to other regions of the country. The midwestern states, particularly Illinois, offered jobs in meat-packing and manufacturing to mounting numbers of Mexican Americans seeking alternatives to

the transient life of field work. By 1990 only 2.9 percent of the Mexican American working population were employed in agriculture and forestry, with less than one percent in the mining industry. Professional and health and education services employed 20.3 percent of this specific labor force, while 16.4 percent had service occupations and 15.9 percent were in manufacturing. Over 16 percent held managerial and professional specialty positions (*The Statistical Record of Hispanic Americans*, p. 534).

The small Mexican American entrepreneurial sector—evident beginning in the second decade of the 1900s—expanded considerably after World War II. By 1990 over one-half million Hispanic-owned businesses existed in the United States, the majority of them in California and controlled by Mexican Americans. Earnings for these commercial concerns approached \$100 billion annually and contributed to the growth of the Mexican American middle class (Meier, p. 253).

Mexican American women entered the labor market as farmworkers, laundresses, and domestics in representative numbers starting in the first decades of the twentieth century. By 1930, 15 percent had employment, and 45 percent of this total worked in domestic and personal service, with smaller percentages in textile and food processing industries, agriculture, or sales (Cortés, pp. 708, 713). The proportion of Mexican American women in the labor force increased substantially in the decades that followed, reaching 21 percent by 1950 and over 50 percent by 1990 (Falcón and Gilbarg, p. 64). In 1991 the sectors of the national economy with highest levels of employment for Mexican American women were technical, sales, and administrative support, including clerical positions at 39 percent, followed by jobs in service occupations at 27 percent. Fourteen percent were in managerial and professional specialty classifications (*The Statistical Record ...*, p. 508). Though Mexican American women are employed at approximately the same percentage as non-Hispanic women, their earnings are 82 percent of the income of this other group (Meier, p. 262). In general, as asserted by many contemporary sociologists, Mexican American women have had to overcome the triple oppression of class, race, and gender in seeking employment.

Despite the diversification in employment into other sectors of the national economy detailed above, wages have remained low for most members of the Mexican American community. Though well over 50 percent of the families had two wage earners and 15 percent had three workers, as of 1990, the median family income was \$23,240, considerably lower than the national average. The median incomes for Mexican American males and females were below those of most other Hispanic groups: while Puerto Rican males and females earned \$18,193 and \$11,702 respectively, the corresponding wages for Mexican American men and women were \$12,894 and \$9,286. Unemployment rates for the two genders were 11.7 percent and 9.2 percent (Falcón and Gilbarg, p. 64).

In the early 1990s jobs in manufacturing in the national economy declined, whereas service and information technology hirings increased. Service sector jobs respond more immediately to cyclical trends, and because a large percentage of Mexican Americans are in this line of employment, they are among the first exposed to periodic declines in the

contemporary job market. High dropout rates at the high school level and low numbers of Mexican American youth that graduate from two- or four- year colleges allow but a small percentage of Mexican Americans to qualify for positions in the information technology sector. Low educational attainment in general continues to place them consistently at entry-level positions and makes progress to higher rank or pay more difficult. The plant closings of many manufacturing industries in the southwest, and specifically in Southern California in the early 1990s, have forced many thousands of Mexican Americans to look for jobs in other lines of work, but again, low levels of education or technical training limit the alternatives open to these individuals.

## **POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT**

Political participation by Mexican Americans historically has been limited by discrimination. In the early Southwest before 1910, small numbers of Mexican Americans held offices in territorial and state legislatures in California, Colorado, and New Mexico. However, they were usually handpicked by the dominant Anglo Americans of these regions. In other cases, Anglo American businessmen who controlled the railroads, mines, and large ranches dominated the state and local politics of the Southwest. The existing political structure was manipulated to benefit these interests. During the first decades of the twentieth century—to insure Anglo American political control—participation in the voting process for Mexican Americans was maintained at a minimum with the use of various discriminatory devices. Restrictive policies included the poll tax, literacy tests, all-white primaries, and coercion. In this atmosphere it is not surprising that few Mexican Americans voted (Feagin and Feagin, p. 274).

While political participation was limited, Miguel Tirado points out that during the early part of the twentieth century Mexican Americans formed protective organizations—*mutualistas* (mutual aid societies)—which were quite similar to those that developed among European immigrant groups. Members of these organizations found that by pooling their resources they could provide each other with funeral and insurance benefits as well as other forms of assistance. For example, the Lázaro Cardenas Society was formed in Los Angeles soon after World War I to improve municipal facilities available to Mexican Americans (*Aztlán*, 1970, p. 55). By the 1920s it became evident to Mexican Americans that if their interests were to be protected political power was essential.

However, even as Mexican Americans began to adapt to the political and social traditions of the United States they were still viewed as "foreigners" by the larger society. Thus, they set out to demonstrate that they were true Americans. This orientation was reflected in the goals of the emerging organizations of the early twentieth century. The *Orden Hijos de América* (Order of the Sons of America), established in 1921 in San Antonio, Texas, by members of a small emerging middle class, restricted its goals to that of "training members for citizenship." Membership was consequently limited to "citizens of the United States of Mexican or Spanish extraction" (Moore and Cuellar, 1970, p. 41). According to Moore and Cuellar, this orientation strongly suggested that Mexican Americans "were more trustworthy to Anglos than Mexican nationals, and also more deserving of the benefits of American life." Thus, as an organization consisting of

upwardly mobile individuals, OSA attempted to demonstrate to the larger community that they were people to be respected. To understand the group's motives, the OSA must be placed within the social climate of the era. Their orientation was a reflection of the social and economic vulnerability of Mexican Americans during the 1920s.

The OSA functioned for approximately ten years. Disagreements about the goals and direction of the group soon led to schisms. However, the splintering of OSA led to the development of a new organization—the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC). The theme of unity and the need to provide a united front to the Anglo American community guided the group's decision to call itself LULAC. It also limited its membership to U.S. citizens. LULAC gained power among the Mexican American middle class and it ultimately became their strongest advocate (Moore and Cuellar, p. 41).

## **THE POLITICIZATION OF MEXICAN AMERICANS**

The events of World War II would prove to be a turning point in the Mexican American's bid for expanded political participation. This confrontation profoundly affected Mexican Americans, first by exposing those who served in the armed services to social climates where they were regarded as equals. Secondly, the needs of the industrial wartime economy drew many Mexican Americans into the nation's urban centers seeking employment, thus fostering a greater participation in larger society. In essence, their participation in the war effort at home and abroad served as a solidifying force, setting the stage for political activism (Moore and Pachón, p. 178).

Many political groups organized by returning Mexican American veterans emerged to challenge segregation and other forms of discriminatory practices in American life. The Community Service Organization (CSO) is one example. It was founded in 1947 to promote social change within the Mexican American communities of Los Angeles. The founding members set out to improve social conditions by promoting participation in the political process. CSO was determined to elect individuals responsive to the needs of the Mexican American community. It met with some success. Through the efforts of CSO, the East Los Angeles community elected the first Mexican American to the city council since 1881 (Tirado, pp. 62-66).

The political activism of this period is also exemplified by the actions of the G.I. Forum, the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA), and the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations (PASSO). Established in 1948, the G.I. Forum emerged to protest the refusal of cemeteries and mortuaries in Three Rivers, Texas, to bury the body of a Mexican American World War II veteran. This incident focused national attention on the discriminatory conditions of Mexican Americans in Texas. The Forum later turned its attention to mainstream politics by organizing voter registration drives and get-out-the-vote campaigns (C. F. García and R. O. de la Garza, *The Chicano Political Experience: Three Perspectives*, p. 29).

Created in 1960, MAPA marks yet another stage of political activism. It was one of the first organizations to clearly articulate ethnic political goals. According to the MAPA Fourth Annual Convention Program, "An organization was needed that would be proudly Mexican American, openly political, and necessarily bipartisan" (Moore and Pachón, p. 179). MAPA met with success. It helped elect several Mexican Americans to office (Garcia and de la Garza, p. 31). PASSO, created a few years earlier in Texas, and MAPA were political groups organized essentially to lobby at the party level for Mexican American interests. Both organizations carried out voter education and registration drives; however, they were primarily oriented toward winning concessions for Mexican Americans at the party level (Moore and Cuellar, p. 45).

In the 1970s, unhappy with both the Democratic and Republican parties, some Mexican Americans opted for an entirely different political strategy. They set out to create an alternative political party—La Raza Unida (LRU). Established in Texas in 1970, the LRU had remarkable successes. Most notable were the party's achievements in Crystal City, Texas, a community of approximately 10,000 where many LRU candidates won control of the city council and the school board. These newly elected officials in turn hired more Mexican American teachers, staff, and administrators. They also instituted bilingual programs and added Mexican American history to the school curriculum. The newly elected officials also made changes throughout the city government, including the police department, to rectify years of neglect by city officials (John Shockley, *Chicano Revolt in a Texas Town*).

The LRU then sent organizers throughout the Southwest in efforts to duplicate their success in South Texas. LRU candidates were placed on many local and statewide ballots, but they were unable to generate the type of support that led to their success in Crystal City. After the mid-1970s, the LRU rapidly declined. Its decline was the result of several factors. Internal ideological splintering and personality conflicts played a part, but harassment and repression of the party was the most significant force (Carlos Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement*, 1989).

The LRU is but one of many groups that contributed to the growth of the Chicano Movement during the 1960s and 1970s. Mexican Americans became much more vocal and militant in their demands for social change. Many groups emerged to address such issues as the rights of farmworkers, inferior education, employment opportunities, health care, women's rights, reform within the welfare system and the Catholic church, police brutality, and community self-determination.

National attention during this period focused on the actions of La Alianza Federal de Mercedes (Federal Alliance of Land Grants) and the United Farmworkers of America (UFW). Reies López Tijerina and the members of La Alianza demanded the return of stolen lands to the indigenous peoples of northern New Mexico. In 1966 La Alianza occupied a part of the Kit Carson National Forest in New Mexico. Arrested for trespassing, Tijerina spent the next few years awaiting trial. In 1975 the land dispute was partially resolved when about 1,000 acres of the forest were transferred to 75 Mexican American families (Shaefer, p. 283).

The notable organizing efforts of César Chávez, Dolores Huerta, and the UFW brought the plight of the farmworker to national attention and served as a mobilizing force for many Americans of all walks of life. The UFW's first success was the grape boycott beginning in 1965, which carried the struggle of the farmworkers into the households of many Americans. With the overwhelming refusal to buy table grapes by many American households, the UFW was able to negotiate its first union contract with California growers (the first union contract in the history of California farm labor). During the late 1980s, the UFW altered its labor unionizing strategies by addressing the issue of pesticide use in agricultural production.

From the Mexican American communities of Denver, Colorado, emerged the Crusade for Justice led by Corky Gonzales. This organization was primarily concerned with civil rights issues of urban Mexican Americans; however, it was also one of the first groups to advocate and promote issues of cultural diversity. During 1969 and 1970, the Crusade for Justice was instrumental in organizing a series of Chicano youth liberation conferences, bringing together hundreds of young Chicanos from throughout the nation and generating a series of discussions concerning the question of ethnic identity (Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America*, pp. 241-43).

By the late 1960s high school and college students were calling for social change within the educational system. The high school "blowouts" of East Los Angeles in 1968 galvanized student discontent. Chicano high school students walked out of their classes in mass, demanding quality education and local community control of their schools. In several other communities students staged similar events. High school students abandoned their classes in Riverside, California; Denver, Colorado; Crystal City and San Antonio, Texas; and several other cities with high concentrations of Mexican Americans. College students also mobilized. In the Los Angeles area, college students came together to support the high school walkouts and the students' demands for a quality education. Throughout the Southwest, college students were instrumental in establishing the first Chicano studies programs and educational opportunities programs on many college campuses (Acuña, p. 243).

In 1968 the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) was established by several Mexican American lawyers to protect the constitutional rights of Mexican Americans. Although it does not endorse political candidates, it has made itself felt in the political sphere much like the NAACP has for African Americans. In addition to providing legal advocacy, MALDEF has been involved in litigation involving illegal employment practices, immigrant's rights, biased testing in school settings, educational segregation, inequalities in school financing, and voting rights issues. As of the 1990s, MALDEF has emerged as the primary civil rights group advocating on behalf of Mexican Americans.

## **VOTING PATTERNS AND ELECTED OFFICIALS**

Mexican American voting behavior has traditionally been Democratic, especially at the presidential level. According to the Latino National Political Survey (1992), 59.6 percent

of all Mexican Americans identify themselves as Democrats, 16 percent as Republican, and 24.4 as belonging to independent parties. As members of the Democratic Party, they have played a significant role in several elections. In 1960 John F. Kennedy won an estimated 85 percent of the Mexican American vote, which allowed him to win the states of New Mexico and Texas. To insure Kennedy's victory, "Viva Kennedy" clubs were formed throughout the Southwest, promoting voter education and registration drives. In 1964 Lyndon B. Johnson won an estimated 90 percent, and in 1968 Herbert Humphrey won 87 percent of the Mexican American vote (Feagin and Feagin, p. 275).

While Mexican Americans played a significant role in the above elections, there are several factors that have worked against the growth of Mexican American participation in the political process. First, they are a young population, which means that many are below the voting age. Second, a relatively large segment of the population is ineligible to vote because they are not citizens. Even among those who are eligible to vote, the turnout of 46 percent (for all Hispanics) in the November 1988 elections was 15 percent lower than for non-Hispanics. Third, lower socioeconomic status serves as an obstacle for many Mexican Americans. The educational attainment of Mexican Americans is still far below the general population and the poverty rates are much higher for Mexican Americans than the general population. Thus, many Mexican Americans have not had the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to participate in the voting process. Consequently, Mexican Americans are presented with formidable obstacles that prevent the development of political strength and greatly hinder the election of Mexican American officials (Maurilio Vigil, *The Handbook ... Sociology*, pp. 81-82).

While the percentage of Mexican American elected officials is not representative of their total U.S. population, significant changes have taken place since the mid-1960s. The number of state legislators in 1950 with Spanish surnames totaled 20. By the late 1980s the number had increased to 90. In 1991 the National Roster of Hispanic Elected Officials reported 3,754 elected officials in the five southwestern states, mostly of Mexican American ancestry, and 4,202 Latino elected officials nationwide. The increase in Mexican American officials is due in part to the Twenty-fourth Amendment, which banned the poll tax and eliminated the English-only literacy requirements for voting in some states. Redistricting following the 1980 census, as well as a substantial growth in the Mexican American population, have also contributed to the rise in the number of Mexican American elected officials (Feagin and Feagin, p. 274).

## **FEDERAL LEGISLATION AND NATIONAL POLICY**

With the slow yet steadily increasing number of Mexican American elected officials, significant pieces of federal legislation have been introduced and enacted into law. During the recent past, Mexican American lawmakers have supported the creation of the federal Fair Employment Practices Commission, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the subsequent series of civil rights and affirmative action legislation. In 1968 the Bilingual Education Act was passed into federal law; in 1974 subsequent amendments were sponsored by New Mexico Congressman Joseph Montoya. That same year, Congress, with the urging of many Hispanic and non-Hispanic elected

officials alike, encouraged the adoption of bilingual or multilingual ballots where census data documented a substantial number of non-English-speaking people.

In 1976 the Congressional Hispanic Caucus was created with the election of several Hispanics to the House of Representatives. Since then, the caucus has acted as a viable force within Congress, consistently supporting legislation on behalf of Mexican Americans and other disadvantaged groups (Vigil, pp. 91-92). Two of the most prominent public policies affecting Mexican Americans and Hispanics in general are immigration reform and the "English as Official Language" policy. Although the members of the caucus did not agree with each other on the specific initiatives of the policies, both of these issues were and continue to be a high priority for the caucus.

## **MILITARY STATUS**

According to the 1990 census, there are 59,631 Mexican American men over the age of 16 serving in the armed forces, 7,924 of whom are naturalized citizens, while the remainder are native-born. The number of Mexican American women in the armed services is significantly lower; 5,025 native-born Chicanas are active members of the military.

## **INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP CONTRIBUTIONS**

Mexican Americans have made significant and lasting contributions to virtually every element of American culture and society. The following individuals represent merely a sample of this growing community's achievements.

### **BUSINESS**

Born to undocumented Mexican parents in Miami, Arizona, Romana Acosta Bañuelos (1925– ) was deported at the age six during the Repatriation Program of the 1930s. After returning to the United States at age 19, she converted a small tortilla factory into Romana's Mexican Food Products, a multimillion-dollar firm. In 1971 she became the first Mexican American to serve as treasurer of the United States.

### **EDUCATION**

Born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, George I. Sánchez (1906-1972) directed his energies to improving the quality of education available to Mexican Americans as well as defending their civil rights. *Forgotten People: A Study of New Mexico* (1940), one of his many publications, revealed the inadequacies of the educational system for Mexican Americans in his home state. Sánchez served as president of LULAC and, in 1956, founded the American Council of Spanish-Speaking People, a civil rights organization.

### **FILM, TELEVISION, AND THEATER**

Mexican American dancer and choreographer José Arcadia Limón (1908-1972) was a pioneer of modern dance and choreography. Edward James Olmos (1947– ), received critical acclaim for his portrayal of the *pachuco* in the stage and film version of Luis Valdez's *Zoot Suit* and for his role as Jaime Escalante in the film *Stand and Deliver*. In addition to his appearances in other movies of merit, Olmos starred in "Miami Vice," a popular television series of the 1980s. Paul Rodríguez, who has worked in a number of television series and movies, is perhaps the most popular and widely recognized comedian of Mexican descent in the United States. The head of his own company, Paul Rodríguez Productions, in 1986 he released his first comedy album entitled "You're in America Now, Speak Spanish." The son of Mexican migrant farmworkers, Luis Valdez (1940– ) is the founding director of the Teatro Campesino, an acting troupe that was originally organized to dramatize the oppressive existence of the migrant worker. In addition to directing the stage and film version of *Zoot Suit*, he wrote and directed the film *La Bamba*, about the Mexican American rock star Ritchie Valens.

## **FOLKLORE**

Born in Brownsville, Texas, Americo Paredes (1915– ) achieved national and international recognition for his research and scholarship in the area of folklore and Mexican American popular culture and served as president of the American Folklore Society. Among his many noteworthy publications are *Folktales in Mexico* (1970) and *A Texas Mexican Cancionero* (1976).

## **LABOR**

César Chávez (1927-1993) was born in Yuma, Arizona, to a farmworking family. Chávez attended over 30 schools as a youth because of the mobile pattern of existence of migrant agriculture. In 1962, after working as a community organizer in the CSO, he moved to Delano, California, and soon became the head of the United Farm Workers, AFL-CIO. From the mid-1960s to his death, Chavez dedicated his life to improving the living conditions, wages, and bargaining power of Mexican and Mexican American farmworkers by means of organized work stoppages, demonstrations, hunger strikes, and boycotts.

## **LITERATURE**

Lucha Corpi (1945– ) is a notable poet and novelist whose works often address the struggles of women in contemporary society. Primarily known as a poet, she is perhaps best known for her series "The Mariana Poems," which appear in her *Palabras de mediodía/Noon Words* (1980). Rolando Hinojosa (1929– ) was one of the first Chicano writers to achieve national as well as international fame. His *Estampas del valle y otras obras: Sketches of the Valley and Other Works*, a series of "sketches" that portrayed Mexican American life in a fictional town in Texas, won the Premio Quinto Sol for Chicano literature. Another of his works on the same theme, *Klail City y sus alrededores*, won the prestigious international award, Premio Casa de las Americas, in 1976. Born in Linares, Mexico, in 1907, literary critic Luis Leal is one of the most productive, most

respected, and most honored scholars of Latin American and Chicano literature. In addition to teaching at numerous universities, he has written some 16 books and edited dozens of others.

## **MUSIC**

Eduardo Mata (1942– ) is among the most respected conductors in the world. The former director and conductor emeritus of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, he was awarded the White House Hispanic Heritage Award in 1991. Singer and musician Lydia Mendoza (1916– ) was the first interpreter of rural popular Tejano and border music to acquire star status through her many recordings. Grammy award-winning Tejano singer and entertainer Selena Quintanilla Perez (1971-1995), best known as Selena, had achieved international fame at the time of her murder in April 1995.

## **POLITICS**

After her election as a state assemblywoman in California in 1982, Gloria Molina (1948– ) was voted into the Los Angeles City Council in 1987. In 1991 she was elected to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, thus becoming the first Hispanic in California to be selected by voters to serve at these three levels of government.

## **RELIGION**

The first Mexican American to be named as a bishop of the Catholic church in the United States, Patrick F. Flores (1929– ) worked in the diocese of Galveston-Houston and became the director of the Bishop's Committee for the Spanish-Speaking. He has been a strong defender of the civil rights of Hispanics in the United States for over four decades and has won many honors for these efforts, including the Ellis Island Medal of Honor in 1986.

## **SCIENCE**

A renowned physicist and educator, Mexican American Alberto Vinicio Baez (1912– ) and his co-researcher, Paul Kirkpatrick, developed the Kirkpatrick-Baez Lamar X-ray telescope, which was later approved for flight on the Freedom Space Station. A pioneer in X-ray radiation, optics, and microscopy, Baez has also made noteworthy achievements in the field of environmental education; he has served as chairman of the Committee on Teaching Sciences of the International Council of Science Unions and as chairman emeritus of Community Education, International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, Glantz, Switzerland. Chemist Mario Molina (1943– ) earned national prominence by theorizing, with fellow chemist F. Sherwood Rowland, that chlorofluorocarbons deplete the Earth's ozone layer.

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*El Sol.*

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**RADIO**

**KQTL-AM (1210).**

Covers Southern Arizona and Northern Mexico.

**Contact:** Bertha Gallego, Director of Operations;

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**Address:** P.O. Box 1511, Tucson, Arizona 85702-1511.

**Telephone:** (602) 628-1200.

**Fax:** (602) 326-4927.

**KXKS-AM.**

Founded in 1969, went to all-Spanish format in 1982. 10,000 watts, covers 150 miles out from center of Albuquerque.

**Contact:** Bertha Gallego, Director of Operations; Kelly Cunningham, General Manager.

**Address:** 6320 Zuni S.E., Albuquerque, New Mexico 87108.

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**KDB-59 (Telemundo Affiliate).**

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**WGBO-66 (Univision Affiliate).**

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**WSNS-44 (Telemundo Affiliate).**

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**Telephone:** (312) 929-1200.

**Fax:** (312) 929-8153.

## **ORGANIZATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS**

**Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional, Inc. (National Mexican Women's Commission)**

Founded in 1970. Current membership: 5,000, in 23 chapters. Supports increased rights and opportunities for Hispanic women in education, politics and labor. Publication: *La Mujer* ("The Woman") semiannual.

**Contact:** Nina Aguayo Sorcin, President.

**Address:** 379 South Loma Drive, Los Angeles, California 90017.

**Telephone:** (213) 484-1515.

**Fax:** (213) 484-0880.

### **Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund.**

Founded in San Antonio in 1968 in response to a historical pattern of discrimination against Mexican Americans. Protects and promotes the rights of over 25 million Latinos in the United States in employment, education, immigration, political access, and language through litigation and community education.

**Contact:** Antonia Hernández, President.

**Address:** 634 South Spring Street, 11th Floor, Los Angeles, California 90014.

**Telephone:** (213) 629-2512.

**Fax:** (213) 629-0266.

### **National Association for Chicano and Chicana Studies, NACCS National Office.**

Founded in 1971. Membership of over 300 consists of college professors, graduate and undergraduate students, and diverse others whose professional or personal interests center on sociological, historical, political or literary themes or concerns pertaining to Mexican Americans. Sponsors annual conference and publishes selected proceedings.

**Contact:** Dr. Carlos Maldonado, Director.

**Address:** Chicano Education Program, Eastern Washington University, Monroe Hall 202, MS 170, Cheney, Washington 99004.

**Telephone:** (509) 359-2404.

**Fax:** (509) 359-2310.

### **National Council of La Raza.**

The nation's largest constituency-based Hispanic organization. Exists to reduce poverty and discrimination and improve life opportunities for all Hispanics nationally. Nearly 200 formal affiliates serve 37 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. Programmatic efforts focus on civil rights, education, health, housing and community development, employment and training, immigration and poverty.

**Contact:** Raul Yzaguirre, President.

**Address:** 1111 19th Street N.W., Suite 1000, Washington, D.C. 20036.

**Telephone:** (202) 785-1670.

### **Southwest Voter Registration Education Project.**

Founded in 1975. Conducts nonpartisan voter registration drives, compiles research on Hispanic and native American voting patterns and works to eliminate gerrymandered voting districts. Publication: *National Hispanic Voter Registration Campaign*. Regional planning committees publish newsletters.

**Contact:** Antonio Gonzalez, President.

**Address:** 403 East Commerce Street, Suite 220, San Antonio, Texas 78205.

**Telephone:** (800) 404-VOTE; or (210) 222-0224.

**Fax:** (210) 222-8474.

## **MUSEUMS AND RESEARCH CENTERS**

### **Center for Chicano Studies.**

Part of University of California, Santa Barbara. Supports and conducts research on historical and contemporary issues related to Mexican-origin population of the United States. Encourages and facilitates academic investigations and training of minority students. Sponsors events that increase public awareness and appreciation of Mexican and Mexican American culture.

**Contact:** Dr. Denise Segura, Director.

**Address:** Room 4518, South Hall, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, California 93106-6040.

**Telephone:** (805) 893-3895.

**Fax:** (805) 893-4446.

**Online:** <http://omni.ucsb.edu/ccs/>.

**Center for Mexican American Studies.**

Part of the University of Texas at Austin. Provides financial and technical support for research by faculty and graduate students. Offers courses as part of Ethnic Studies curriculum of College of Liberal Arts. Publication: *Monograph Series*.

**Contact:** David Montejano, Director.

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**Online:** <http://www.utexas.edu/depts/cmas>.

**Chicano Studies Research Center.**

Part of the University of California, Los Angeles. Promotes the study and dissemination of knowledge on the experience of people of Mexican descent and other Latinos in the United States. Publication: *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*.

**Contact:** Dr. Guillermo Hernández, Director.

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**Fax:** (310) 206-1784.

**E-mail:** gmo@csrc.ucla.edu.

**Online:** <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/csrc>.

**Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center.**

Latino arts and cultural institution. Sponsors instructional programming and presentations.

**Contact:** Pedro A. Rodríguez, Executive Director.

**Address:** 1300 Guadalupe Street, San Antonio, Texas 78207.

**Telephone:** (210) 271-3151.

### **Mexic-Arte Multicultural Works.**

Exhibits include work of Mexican artists, pre-Cortez implements, and photographs of the Mexican Revolution.

**Contact:** Herlinda Zamora, Director.

**Address:** 419 Congress Avenue, Austin, Texas 78701.

**Telephone:** (512) 480-9373.

### **Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum.**

Collections of Mexican art as well as presentations of current and past Mexican literary works.

**Contact:** Carlos Tortellero, Director.

**Address:** 1852 West 19th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60608.

**Telephone:** (312) 738-1503.

### **Mexican Museum.**

Pre-Hispanic, colonial, folk, Mexican, and Mexican American fine arts. Permanent collection as well as temporary exhibits.

**Contact:** Marie Acosta-Colón, Executive Director.

**Address:** Fort Mason Building D., Laguna and Marina Boulevard, San Francisco, California 94123.

**Telephone:** (415) 441-0404.

**Plaza de La Raza.**

Offers instruction in theater, dance, music, visual and communication arts. Exhibits include Mexican American folk art of surrounding region.

**Contact:** Rose Cano, Executive Director.

**Address:** 3540 North Mission Road, Los Angeles, California 90031.

**Telephone:** (213) 223-2475.

**Southwest Hispanic Research Institute/Chicano Studies.**

Part of University of New Mexico. Established in 1980. Coordinates and conducts investigations of interdisciplinary scope. Visiting Scholars Program funded by Rockefeller Foundation provides economic support to scholarly research of regional focus. Sponsors colloquium series that allows faculty to present findings of research to academic and local community. Publications: *Working Paper Series*.

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**SOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY**

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