

## ONE Introduction

Sitting just southwest of Manhattan less than a mile from the Statue of Liberty is the most renowned symbol of U.S. immigration: Ellis Island.<sup>1</sup> During the period of heavy European migration, which lasted from roughly 1880 to 1920, twenty-four million migrants came to the United States from countries such as Ireland, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Austria, and Russia, seeking religious and political freedom and economic opportunity. Half of them passed through Ellis Island before venturing on to other destinations in the industrializing United States. But a series of events conspired to all but end the great European migration. World War I, restrictive immigration laws passed in 1917, 1921, and 1924, the Great Depression, and World War II slowed European migration to less than a trickle. The rapid decline of migration from Europe meant that a large facility to process immigrants was no longer necessary, so Ellis Island closed in 1954.

During the ensuing decades, Ellis Island stood as an abandoned and decaying relic of U.S. immigration. Looters pilfered what remained in the crumbling buildings, and vandals defaced the property. Pollution and the harsh weather in the New York Harbor deteriorated the ornate exterior of the main building. As Ellis Island lay empty and forgotten, the children and grandchildren of those who passed through it came of age. Many moved out of the ethnically concentrated neighborhoods in which they had grown up, attended college, contributed to war efforts, joined the American middle class, and married individuals outside their ethnic group. As these processes unfolded, the fears about racial contamination that had been prominent in public debates just a few decades earlier and the inability of southern and eastern European immigrants to assimilate disappeared. By the 1980s the grandchildren of these European immigrants were adults, and their assimilation into American society appeared complete. Their ethnic ancestry was scarcely a determinant of their opportunities and life chances. Their ethnic identity entered a "twilight" (Alba 1985).

Today, boats filled with people still arrive at Ellis Island, but they are not brimming with poor, tired immigrants. Instead, they carry tourists who come to visit what is now a National Park Service Monument and an immigration museum. The buildings are no longer dilapidated: the brick and stone Beaux-Arts façades are immaculately clean, the tiled floors and ceiling shine, and a fresh coat of paint blankets the interior. Many visitors come to Ellis Island hoping to recapture part of their family's past in the research center, where computers provide access to a massive database listing the names of immigrant ancestors who where processed there. Some visitors are so inspired by their visit that they pay a fee to have their immigrant ancestors' names inscribed on the American Immigrant Wall of Honor. As a visit to Ellis Island suggests, the immigrant experience is a distant influence for descendants of early European immigrants. The often difficult journey of their immigrant ancestors is now largely imagined through family trees or lives only in pictures and museums, like the one at Ellis Island. Indeed, Ellis Island represents an American dream fulfilled.

More than twenty-eight hundred miles southwest of Ellis Island is

an equally notable immigrant gateway: the border crossing between San Diego, California, and Tijuana, Mexico. Like Ellis Island, the San Diego–Tijuana crossing has a prominent place in the history of U.S. immigration. As some European immigrants poured into the United States through Ellis Island at the beginning of the twentieth century, Mexican migrants journeyed through Tijuana (and many other cities along the border). In 1910, there were roughly 222,000 Mexican-born individuals living in the United States. By 1930, the number of Mexican immigrants had swelled to 617,000, or 4.3 percent of the total foreign-born population (González Baker et al. 1998: 87). The passage of these early Mexican immigrants differed significantly from that of their European counterparts. Many traversed the land on foot or by train or in some cases arrived by river, but they did not cross an ocean. Early Mexican immigrants did not pass through processing facilities, and most were never required to show documentation when crossing into the United States or back into Mexico.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, these Mexican immigrants, like their European contemporaries, immigrated in search of a better life.

What has become of the later-generation descendants of early Mexican immigrants? We know that some of the children and grandchildren of these immigrants moved out of ethnically concentrated neighborhoods, joined the military, intermarried, and experienced socioeconomic mobility, though to a more modest degree than descendants of European groups. We also know that American society discriminated against the descendants of these early Mexican immigrants because of their ethnic origin. And we know that many of these descendants voiced their grievances about this treatment during the Chicano civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

What we do not know as well is how ethnic identity plays out in the lives of later-generation Mexican Americans.<sup>3</sup> Has their ethnic identity entered a twilight? Is their ethnic origin an important part of their identity? This book explores these questions by examining what it means to be Mexican American—a descendant of the earliest Mexican immigrants—in the United States today.

Contrasting the contemporary scene at the San Diego–Tijuana border

crossing to the one found at Ellis Island suggests an answer to these questions. A trip to the San Diego–Tijuana crossing reveals no museums, exhibits, ancestral research center, or monuments honoring the early Mexican immigrants. The San Diego–Tijuana crossing is the busiest border crossing in the world. Thousands of people—workers, tourists, migrants, and smugglers—cross each day. Hundreds of cars line the highway leading through the main passage point, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents inspect vehicles for contraband and unauthorized migrants.<sup>4</sup> Heavy metal fences and Border Patrol agents guard the area surrounding the main border crossing thoroughfare, and stretching east and west, a tall (and in some places multilayered) fence separates the two countries. Along some portions of the border, large stadium lights illuminate patches of open space where migrants may attempt to cross. Border Patrol agents roam these areas in jeeps and all-terrain vehicles searching for drugs, unauthorized crossers, and those who smuggle either of these. In more remote areas of the border east of San Diego, white wooden crosses memorialize individuals who have died attempting the trip north. These remote areas are also where organized “civil defense corps,” like the Minutemen, monitor the border. For descendants of early waves of Mexican immigrants, the scene at the San Diego–Tijuana border does not represent a nostalgic look into America’s past. And to many in the United States, Mexican immigration is seen as a threat to the nation’s future.

Mexican Americans, unlike their later-generation European counterparts, live in a society in which emigration from their ethnic homeland is prominent. Although many Mexican Americans are several generations removed from their immigrant origins, thousands of immigrants from Mexico—representing 31 percent of all foreign-born individuals in the United States today—continue to enter this country (Migration Policy Institute 2008). Equaling the force of this demographic dominance are fiery debates about the social, economic, and political changes to the United States resulting from the influx of Mexican newcomers. The intensity of these debates is a function of not just the large number of Mexican immigrants but also their characteristics: they are generally poor, have little formal education, and concentrate in low-wage, low-

status jobs, and the majority—54 percent—are in this country without legal authorization (Passel 2006).

Drawing on interviews and participant observation with later-generation Mexican Americans in Garden City, Kansas, and Santa Maria, California, I show in this book that these Mexican immigrants significantly shape what it means to be a later-generation Mexican American. Although later-generation Mexican Americans display a remarkable degree of social and economic integration into U.S. society, ongoing Mexican immigration, or immigrant replenishment, sustains both the cultural content of ethnic identity and the ethnic boundaries that distinguish groups. Mexican Americans' everyday experiences reveal that their ethnic identity is connected to contemporary Mexican immigration in ways that make that identity simultaneously more beneficial and costly than it would be without the ongoing immigration. Immigrant replenishment provides the means by which Mexican Americans come to feel more positively attached to their ethnic roots. But it also provokes a predominating view of Mexicans as foreigners, making Mexican Americans seem like less a part of the U.S. mainstream than their social and economic integration and later-generation status might suggest. Mexican Americans are not systematically excluded from full participation in American society. But the large presence of Mexican immigrants prevents Mexican Americans from being fully regarded as part of the quilt of ethnic groups that make up the "nation of immigrants." In practice, the core of the nation is composed of descendants from immigration waves that ended long ago.

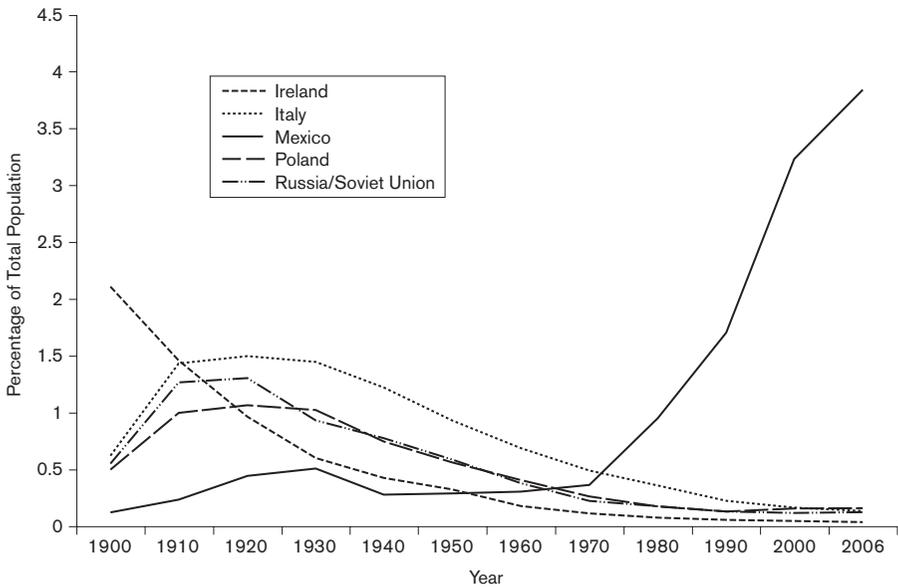
#### IMMIGRATION, ASSIMILATION, AND THE PLACE OF MEXICANS

Explaining the experiences of Mexican Americans has proven difficult for scholars. The uniqueness of the Mexican-origin population in the United States relative to virtually any other ethnic group explains much of the difficulty. Unlike true immigrant groups, the first Mexicans in the United States were a colonized people whose presence here was not of their choosing. In 1848, the United States and Mexico signed the

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ending the U.S.-Mexican War. The treaty stipulated that Mexico cede much of what is today the American West and Southwest to the United States for eighteen million dollars. Under the treaty, the estimated fifty thousand Mexicans who lived in the southwestern territory became U.S. citizens.<sup>5</sup> These individuals represent the first significant presence of the Mexican-origin population in the United States and, indeed, the first Mexican Americans.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo also established a border stretching over two thousand miles along the southwestern portion of the United States, a second source of exceptionalism. The length of the border and the close geographical proximity of the United States to Mexico means that people of Mexican origin do not have to travel far to come to the United States, nor do Mexicans in the United States have far to go to visit their ethnic homeland. Many Mexicans traveled regularly between the two countries in the years after Guadalupe Hidalgo, and many continue to make frequent trips back and forth (Roberts, Frank, and Lozano-Ascencio 1999; Smith 2005a). Although some European migrants traveled back to their country of origin (Wyman 1993), distance, cost, and inconvenience of travel mitigated the ease of doing so.

It was not until the early part of the twentieth century—more than fifty years after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed—that the first major wave of Mexican immigration began and has continued virtually uninterrupted to the present day. The number of Mexican immigrants entering the United States has increased in each succeeding decade, with the exception of the 1930s (for reasons I discuss in the next chapter), and the number of unauthorized Mexican immigrants in the United States has increased precipitously in the most recent decades (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002; Passel 2006). No other group has a history of significant immigration that spans the periods of the great European migration, the post-1965 immigration, and the period in between,<sup>6</sup> and Mexicans are certainly the only group whose presence in the United States stems from both colonization and immigration. Figure 1 vividly shows the historical distinctiveness of Mexican immigration relative to selected European-origin immigrant populations. What is especially noteworthy is that Mexican immigration continued after European immigration declined.



*Figure 1.* Number of foreign born from Mexico and selected European countries as a percentage of the U.S. total population, 1900–2006. Sources: U.S. Decennial Census; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.

After 1970, the foreign-born Mexican population spiked, while the number of foreign-born individuals from European countries continued to descend.

The exceptional nature of the Mexican-origin population also stems from the size and characteristics of its foreign-born population. No other group constitutes a greater share of immigrants in the United States today. According to estimates based on the 2006 American Community Survey, Mexican immigrants make up nearly 31 percent, or 11.5 million, of the total U.S. foreign-born population. The next largest foreign-born population comes from China and accounts for only 5.1 percent of all newcomers (Migration Policy Institute 2008). Furthermore, levels of unauthorized Mexican migration are high. Demographer Jeffrey Passel (2008) estimates that 59 percent of the total unauthorized U.S. population

comes from Mexico, and more than half of all foreign-born Mexicans are in the United States without authorization.

The exceptional characteristics of the Mexican-origin population—a colonized group *and* an immigrant group; an old immigrant population *and* a new one; part of the established native-born population *and* the foreign-born population—make it difficult to explain the Mexican-American experience using existing theoretical perspectives. The more than eighty years of social science research on immigration, race, and ethnicity offer important but unstable analytical platforms for understanding the Mexican-American experience. Theories of assimilation have either completely missed people of Mexican origin or been applied too narrowly to a particular segment of this population. Interpretations emphasizing racialization resulting from colonization have too easily dismissed assimilation for ideological reasons, downplayed evidence of assimilation among Mexican Americans, and not considered how ongoing immigration affects the Mexican-origin experience. Newer theories of assimilation recognize Mexican-immigrant replenishment as significant, but the application of these theories in survey research conceives of assimilation as too static to fully appreciate how immigrant replenishment affects intergenerational change in ethnic identity. A fuller understanding of the Mexican-American experience emerges by attending to the implications of ongoing Mexican immigration for ethnic identity formation.

### *Classical Foundations: Built without Mexicans*

The intellectual foundations of the study of immigration and ethnic change were built without considering the Mexican-origin experience; thus, discussions about how later-generation descendants of earlier immigrants experience American society rarely include Mexican Americans. Instead, in such discussions people of European origin most often come to mind. The weak attachment, if any, that later-generation descendants of European immigrants have to an ethnic identity is more or less taken for granted. These individuals commonly describe themselves as “European mutts”—people whose ancestors have inter-

married to such an extent that they trace their ethnic roots to multiple strands (Lieberson and Waters 1988). People who descend from the great European migration scarcely experience discrimination based on their racial or ethnic identity, and their ancestry does not systematically determine the types of opportunities they enjoy (Alba 1990). Ethnicity holds a symbolic place in their identity, and ethnic attachments are characterized as “a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior” (Gans 1979: 9). Indeed, they can invoke any particular strand of their ethnic identity when they choose, should they feel a little more ethnic on any given day, or deemphasize their ethnic identity in order to feel part of a larger collective not defined in ethnic terms (Waters 1990).

This was not always the case. Southern and eastern European immigrants who came to the United States at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries by no means enjoyed ethnicity as an optional part of their identity. In recent years, historians of European immigration and race have muddied the often taken-for-granted position that these immigrants and their descendants had an easy time assimilating because they were white. A closer look at the history of assimilation reveals that many European-origin immigrants occupied an inferior racial status. Their legal status as “white” entitled even “swarthy” ethnic groups, such as the Italians, to full participation in American society, unlike blacks, who were legally barred from it (Guglielmo 2003). Many people in the early twentieth century wondered, nonetheless, if European immigrants could ever be assimilated (Higham 1963; Jacobson 1998; Roediger 1991, 2005). Yet European immigrants and their descendants struggled down the long and bumpy path of assimilation and, after several generations, came out “white” at the other end (Ignatiev 1995; Jacobson 1998; Roediger 1991, 2005).

Sociologists were among the closest observers of this process from its early stages and laid the foundation for the way that immigration, race, and ethnicity came to be understood for much of the twentieth century. Robert E. Park, Thomas Burgess, and W.I. Thomas, part of “the Chicago School of Sociology,” took great interest in the European

immigrants who flooded into mostly East Coast and midwestern cities, such as Chicago. They took seriously the idea that urban life shapes how immigrants encounter American society, and their early studies focused on the role that spatial location plays in how people from different ethnic groups interact (Park, Burgess, and McKenzie 1925; Wirth 1928). Their studies of immigrants in urban centers laid the groundwork for theories of assimilation. As sociologists Richard Alba and Victor Nee (2003) point out, early definitions of assimilation characterized the process not as forced homogenization but as the convergence of groups that became incorporated into a common way of life. Yet early thinking about assimilation is most often associated with Park's "race-relations cycle" (1950), which posited four irreversible stages of race relations, which begin with contact between groups, are followed by competition, give way to accommodation, and conclude with assimilation.

Assimilation, sociologists discovered, took generations to unfold, and the end of this process would be most evident among the third generation. Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole's (1945) study of "Yankee City," a New England town with large numbers of European immigrants, identified generation as the key temporal marker of assimilation. They noted gains made in occupational status from the first generation to the second and argued that all groups were moving ahead, though perhaps at a different pace. They emphasized that the pace of assimilation varied by skin color, with darker-skinned groups (such as Sicilians and Greeks) experiencing slower assimilation than lighter-skinned groups. Nonetheless, assimilation came to be thought of as an inevitable and irreversible process that progressed linearly from generation to generation.

If the Chicago School built the foundation for how we think about assimilation, sociologist Milton Gordon constructed the house. Gordon's (1964) landmark work argues that assimilation is a multidimensional process wherein "structural assimilation," or the entrance of immigrants into primary-group relationships with the host society, leads to "identificational assimilation," or the assumption of a sense of "peoplehood" (81). According to Gordon, once structural assimilation takes place, all other forms of assimilation, including identificational assimilation, follow (70).

By the late twentieth century, the third- and fourth-generation

descendants of southern and eastern European immigrants came of age and reached the end of the long and rocky path of assimilation. At the end of this path was the symbolic (Alba 1990; Gans 1979) and optional (Waters 1990) nature of ethnic identity that we see among white ethnics today. Indeed, the story about American assimilation theorized by Park, Warner, and Srole and by Gordon seems to have applied for European groups.

Unfortunately, the Mexican-origin experience did not form part of the empirical basis for early formulations of assimilation theory, though Mexican immigration was certainly a part of an earlier period of immigration most often associated with European groups. During the 1910s, Mexican immigrants accounted for 4 percent of all arriving immigrants. As European immigration slowed in the 1920s, the proportion of foreign-born Mexicans rose to 11 percent (González Baker et al. 1998: 88).<sup>7</sup> With their analytical lens squarely focused on eastern and midwestern cities, sociologists largely ignored the experiences of Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans in the Southwest.<sup>8</sup> Had they included the Mexican-origin experience, the canonical accounts of assimilation might have been formulated differently. The history of the Southwest for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is fraught with systematic exclusion of Mexican Americans from mainstream U.S. society (Meier and Ribera 1993). Though Mexican Americans were legally considered white, their socioeconomic mobility, patterns of residential location, and maintenance of ethnic identity did not evince a pattern of assimilation that mirrors that of European-origin groups (Grebler et al. 1970).<sup>9</sup>

Classic assimilation theory is also ill fitted for explaining the Mexican-American experience, because it posits assimilation as an inevitable and mostly irreversible process. Embedded in claims of the inevitability of assimilation is the assumption that immigration eventually stops, as it did for European-origin groups beginning in the late 1910s and the 1920s, and so each new generation born in the United States has less contact with immigrants of the same ethnic ilk. The diminished contact that later-generation white ethnics have with immigrants from their ethnic homeland most certainly contributed to the development of a symbolic form of ethnic identity and the weakening salience of

European-origin ethnic categories. But this was never an explicit part of the theory. Mexican immigration, in contrast, has shown no such cessation; thus, the “Mexican” category remains a prominent part of the ethnic landscape that later-generation Mexican Americans negotiate.

*Mexicans and the Changing Lens of Race and Ethnicity*

By the time scholars did pay close attention to ethnic Mexicans, a second and even third generation had been born in the United States. Given what scholars knew about European-origin assimilation in the 1960s and 1970s, they might have been spurred to apply a similar interpretation to the second- and third-generation Mexican Americans. But at that time assimilation did not appear to be turning out the same way for Mexican Americans as it was for European-origin groups. Mexican-American assimilation was slower paced and more uneven (Grebler et al. 1970). Interpretations of the Mexican-origin experience were also colored by the ethnic politics of the time. The civil rights movement and the subsequent ethnic pride movements of the 1960s and '70s refocused the lens through which scholars saw race and ethnicity, bringing to national attention the experiences of nonwhite groups, particularly African Americans, but also Mexicans Americans, Puerto Ricans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. In both scholarly and popular circles, *assimilation* became a dirty word. The mostly descriptive theory that the Chicago School put forth came to be seen as a worldview that prescribed a hollowing out of nonwhites' culture, forcefully supplanting it with a homogeneous white-dominant culture. This understanding of assimilation cut against the grain of the major tenets of the ethnic pride movements and a nascent multicultural ideology that followed.

The changed understanding of racial and ethnic relations and the slow progress of Mexican Americans led a new generation of scholars to reject assimilation as a way of explaining the experiences of ethnic Mexicans. Inspired by Marxist revolutions in Latin America and the thinking of black and Chicano activists, scholars turned abroad for models describing the relationship between the Mexican-origin population and American society, identifying colonialism as a fitting analogue

(Gutiérrez 2004). “Internal colonialism” (Blauner 1969) became a popular concept for understanding relations between nonwhite groups and whites. The perspective posits that this relationship is characterized by a colonial-like situation in which white colonizers and colonized nonwhites (Mexicans included) “are intermingled so that there is no geographical distance between the ‘metropolis’ and the ‘colony’” (Barrera 1979: 194).

It was also during this time that the first generation of Mexican-American historians emerged from graduate school. These Chicano historians focused on the United States’ annexation of Mexico in 1848 as the central event shaping the Mexican-origin experience. They emphasized the ensuing history of discrimination experienced by people of Mexican origin, viewing the present-day Mexican-origin population as inheritors of a legacy of colonization (Acuña 1972; Almaguer 1975; Barrera 1979; Camarillo 1996; Griswold del Castillo 1979). They argued that Mexican Americans’ status as second-class citizens was a direct outcome of their colonized status in U.S. society and that Mexicans were not experiencing assimilation, but rather racial subjugation in a castelike social system. Their interpretations provided a necessary modification of previously dominant historical accounts that either left out Mexicans altogether or painted them as uncivilized obstacles to American progress.

The way that the Mexican-origin population came to be understood both inside and outside the academy affirmed its place as an aggrieved minority group. After the 1960s, this view came to be the taken-for-granted way of understanding the Mexican-origin population, and its germination among policy makers did not take long. As sociologist John Skrentny (2002) shows, members of Congress and the White House pushed to broaden the reach of race-based civil rights policies to include Mexican Americans despite a modest Mexican-American lobby. The notion that people of Mexican descent were an American minority also became evident in the everyday lexicon related to race and ethnicity, in media portrayals, and in race-based programs. Indeed, Mexicans are commonly listed among African Americans, Native Americans, other Latino groups, and (occasionally) Asian groups as aggrieved minorities that suffer discrimination and blocked entrance into America’s social, political, and economic mainstream.

This perspective is reflected in more recent writing about people of Mexican descent and about later-generation Mexican Americans in particular. Anthropologist John Ogbu (1991) distinguishes between voluntary minorities—“immigrant minorities [that] have generally moved to their present societies because they believed that the move would lead to more economic well-being, better overall opportunities, or great political freedom” (8)—and involuntary immigrants—“people who were brought into their present society through slavery, conquest or colonization” (9). Zeroing in on the annexation of the American West and Southwest from Mexico, Ogbu asserts that Mexican Americans constitute an involuntary minority, whose presence in the United States follows from this experience.

Similarly, Gilda Ochoa’s (2004) study of the relationship between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants in La Puente, California, adopts a “power-conflict” perspective, which links whites’ historical treatment of Mexicans to their position in U.S. society today. Ochoa argues that conflict between Mexican Americans and their immigrant brethren is rooted in the internalization of the very assimilationist ideology and policies that stripped early Mexican-American generations of their culture. What emerges from Ochoa’s account is not a story of assimilation like the European immigrant experience, but one of conflict and struggle for power and equality.

Colonization may have set the stage for the unequal treatment of ethnic Mexicans during the late nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, but very few Mexican Americans are the direct descendants of the estimated fifty thousand original colonized Mexicans. The overwhelming majority of Mexican-descent individuals trace their roots to voluntary migration. In fact, had there been no migration from Mexico in the twentieth century, the Mexican-origin population in the United States would be only a small fraction of its current size, perhaps 14 percent (Edmonston and Passel 1994). And so the question is whether the original colonized condition is so pervasive and institutionalized that subsequent Mexican immigrants and their descendants continue to suffer from its legacy.

The evidence suggests that it is not. Part of the problem with seeing

the Mexican-origin population as a colonized group that has suffered from an unshakable second-class status is that this view ignores intergenerational differences among people of Mexican descent and thus glosses over evidence pointing to very real improvement in the standing of Mexican Americans over time (see Jiménez and Fitzgerald 2007). Since Mexican immigration has such a long history, ethnic Mexicans vary in how far back they can trace their origins in United States. Many trace their roots back multiple generations, while others have recently arrived from Mexico. A focus on generational differences shows that, over time, far too much intermarriage (Rosenfeld 2002), residential mobility (Brown 2007), interethnic contact (Brown 2006; Telles and Ortiz 2008), and socio-economic mobility (Alba 2006; Smith 2003, 2006; Telles and Ortiz 2008) have occurred for Mexican Americans to be seen as a group relegated to the margins of American society.

#### *Assimilation for Mexican Americans?*

Recognizing the shortcoming in interpretations of the Mexican-origin experience that rely too heavily on the effects of colonization, more recent scholarship has turned back to assimilation theory, adjusting its tenets to explain the experiences of contemporary immigrants and their descendants, and of ethnic Mexicans in particular (Brubaker 2001). Recent thinking about assimilation differs from previous scholarship in the way it conceives of the social, political, and economic trajectories that immigrants and their descendants follow. Whereas the canonical view of assimilation implied a linearly upward path into the American mainstream, some scholars now think of assimilation as having multiple trajectories, including a “downward” path (Gans 1992). Demand for highly skilled labor in today’s hourglass economy may hinder opportunities for upward social mobility among less-skilled immigrants.<sup>10</sup> More recent thinking about assimilation also posits race as a key variable determining assimilation patterns. Discrimination against nonwhite immigrants, such as Mexicans and West Indians, derails their entrance into the mainstream, pushing them into a racialized position in American society (Waters 1999). Thus, some sociologists conceive of assimilation as a “seg-

mented" process, in which immigrants and their children assimilate into one of many segments of U.S. society, depending on the context of their reception, their relative human capital, and the social capital embedded in their coethnic community (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993).<sup>11</sup>

Unlike earlier accounts of assimilation that largely eschewed the Mexican-origin population, segmented assimilation places Mexicans at center stage. In fact, Mexicans have come to be seen as an exemplary case of segmented assimilation. When the theory has been applied to Mexican Americans, analyses have emphasized how the long history of Mexican immigration and discrimination has created an entrenched and hostile context of reception for the contemporary second generation. According to segmented assimilation, this negative reception, combined with the low levels of parental human capital and the adoption of an "oppositional" orientation toward the U.S. mainstream, lead the Mexican-American second generation on a steep, downward path of assimilation into a potential "rainbow underclass" (López and Stanton-Salazar 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).<sup>12</sup>

What about later-generation Mexican Americans? This question is particularly important, because two generations constitute a short time frame for gauging the full extent of assimilation, which has always unfolded over the course of multiple generations. The experiences of later-generation individuals are a much better indicator of group assimilation. Empirical studies show that later-generation Mexican Americans are not part of an underclass, as segmented assimilation might predict. Like internal colonialism, segmented assimilation offers a far too pessimistic interpretation of the Mexican-American experience. Later-generation Mexican Americans appear to have made considerable social, political, and economic progress, even if it is more modest than that of later-generation white ethnics (Smith 2003, 2006; Telles and Ortiz 2008).

Some scholars who are looking beyond the second generation maintain that earlier versions of assimilation are nearly as applicable today as they were in the past. They have called into question the taken-for-granted notion that the Mexican-origin population is radically different from European groups. In their resuscitation of assimilation theory,

sociologists Richard Alba and Victor Nee (2003) argue that the major principles of the canonical view are still at play for today's immigrant groups, including Mexicans and Mexican Americans, partly because anti-discrimination laws provide a more level playing field for today's immigrants as compared with the past. For Alba and Nee, Mexican-American assimilation is happening, although at a slower pace than among their white counterparts. Similarly, sociologists Marta Tienda and Faith Mitchell are cautiously optimistic in concluding that "there are many signs that Hispanicity will become a symbolic identity rather than that of a disadvantaged minority" (2006: 15). Indeed, a large body of research shows that people of Mexican origin make significant progress from one generation to the next concerning income and education, though later-generation individuals still lag behind their white counterparts (Alba et al., forthcoming; Reed et al. 2005; Smith 2003, 2006; Telles and Ortiz 2008; Tienda and Mitchell 2006). Another key yardstick of assimilation is intermarriage, which more than any other indicator captures the rigidity of social boundaries between groups. Mexican intermarriage rates appear to be relatively high and increase with each generation born in the United States (Macias 2006; Perlmann and Waters 2004; Rosenfeld 2002). If patterns of labor-force participation are any indication, the Mexican-American second generation does not conform to a strict definition of an underclass (Waldinger and Feliciano 2004; Waldinger, Lim, and Cort 2007). Assessing the assimilation prospects of more recent Mexican immigrants, Frank Bean and Gillian Stevens (2003) echo this view. They argue that because most Mexicans enter the United States without authorization, they are at a disadvantage that requires more than the typical three generations to overcome. Nonetheless, they believe that assimilation is the predominant trend for descendants of Mexican immigrants.

Other observers of later-generation Mexican Americans have a much less sanguine assessment of their progress. In a sweeping longitudinal study of intergenerational assimilation among Mexican Americans in Los Angeles and San Antonio, sociologists Edward Telles and Vilma Ortiz (2008) draw on data collected from respondents in 1965 and 2000, as well as from the original respondents' children in 2000, to reveal

complex and often counterintuitive assimilation patterns. Central to their analysis are patterns of educational attainment. They show a clear pattern of educational advancement between parents and their children, suggesting some degree of assimilation. But they also find a decline when comparing individuals of different status in generation since immigration: fourth-generation Mexican Americans in Los Angeles and San Antonio have, on average, fewer years of education than third-generation Mexican Americans. Other measures of assimilation, such as English-language use, intermarriage, and contact with non-Mexicans, suggest a story of slow-paced assimilation. Yet racial and ethnic identity is clearly an important part of life for Mexican Americans in their study: large numbers of third- and fourth-generation individuals identify themselves as “Mexican,” some cultural practices survive, discrimination is still a prominent part of their lives, and most live in neighborhoods with a Hispanic majority. In the end, the relatively low socioeconomic attainment of later-generation Mexican Americans, which explains the slow pace of assimilation in social and political life, leads Telles and Ortiz to rather bleak conclusions. In their data they see a population that has assimilated in some dimensions of life but has not experienced assimilation where it counts most: in educational attainment. Since education is a linchpin for virtually all dimensions of assimilation, Telles and Ortiz conclude that racialization best characterizes their experiences: “Although they have lost some ethnic cultural attributes like language, most fourth-generation Mexican Americans in our study experience a world largely shaped by their race and ethnicity” (2008: 265).

Telles and Ortiz convincingly show that Mexican-American and European-origin assimilation have not proceeded on the same track. However, they also show clear signs of assimilation in a number of dimensions, including education, in which, on average, Mexican Americans are going to school longer than their parents. And so the picture of Mexican-American assimilation may not be as bleak as they conclude. Given the very dark history of discrimination that people of Mexican-origin have faced and immigration’s continual restocking of the U.S. Mexican-origin population with targets of anti-Mexican nativism, the

evidence of assimilation that Telles and Ortiz and others document (Alba 2006; Smith 2003, 2006), however modest, should perhaps be regarded as significant.

These more recent versions of assimilation theory illuminate the importance of intergenerational change among people of Mexican origin but still provide limited insight into the processes that explain Mexican-American ethnic identity formation. As survey research shows, intergenerational distinctions among people of Mexican origin are particularly important, because the population is a vast mix of individuals of different status in generation since immigration. This mix has implications for processes of assimilation that survey data cannot fully capture, however. Whether those who study the data believe that Mexican-American assimilation is proceeding at a slow pace or is marked by exclusion across generations, their analyses imply a process of assimilation that is overly static. Assimilation in this survey research is conceptualized as a process that takes place on a metaphorical set of narrow escalators. Beginning with the immigrant generation, each new generation born in the United States rides on a stair ahead of the previous, and assimilation is thought to be taking place so long as the escalator and those who ride it proceed on an upward slope until they reach the top floor, where ethnic distinctions in most realms of life have faded. Understanding ethnic identity formation, a key dimension of assimilation, requires a more dynamic conceptualization of assimilation. It is more like a large and wide staircase, where individuals with different generational statuses may be positioned in front of, in back of, or next to one another. As they negotiate this assimilation staircase, these individuals interact, influencing one another's ethnic identity. Given the long history of Mexican immigration to the United States, understanding the ethnic identity formation requires a method and theoretical model that explain how the different actors on this staircase shape the ethnic identity of later-generation Mexican Americans. In particular, a complete understanding of Mexican-American ethnic identity must account for how Mexican immigrants, who continually step onto the staircase anew, affect the ethnic identity of the Mexican Americans who have been climbing it for several generations.

MEXICAN-AMERICAN ETHNIC IDENTITY AND  
THE PRIMACY OF IMMIGRANT REPLENISHMENT

Understanding Mexican-American ethnic identity formation involves more than the “usual suspect” independent variables that explain assimilation and ethnic identity formation: socioeconomic status, residential location, language ability, and intermarriage (see Waters and Jiménez 2005). A critical but often overlooked variable shaping ethnic identity formation is the duration of an immigration wave. Canonical accounts of assimilation took the cessation of immigration as a given, and the effects of a *lack* of immigrant replenishment were thus never an explicit part of the theory. Internal colonial theory ignored generational differences altogether, positing people of Mexican descent as a single race group that suffered from a legacy of colonialism. Clearly, vast differences exist in the ethnic identity of foreign-born Mexicans and later-generation Mexican Americans. The theory of segmented assimilation points to how a history of immigration has soured the societal context of reception for today’s second-generation Mexican Americans (Portes and Rumbaut 2001), but the narrow focus on the children of Mexican immigrants leaves us with little clue as to how ongoing immigration shapes the ethnic identity of those most generationally distant from the immigrant point of origin. Accounts of assimilation among later-generation Mexican Americans emphasize the importance of ongoing immigration for the collection and analysis of survey data, but they do not suggest *how* ongoing immigration shapes a key dimension of assimilation: ethnic identity formation. When scholars have recognized ongoing immigration to be a key feature distinguishing the Mexican-origin population from other immigrant groups, they have merely asserted that immigration patterns affect ethnic identity (Alba and Nee 2003; Massey 1995; Telles and Ortiz 2008), or they have wrapped claims about its effect in polemic assertions about immigration restriction and American identity (Huntington 2004b).

This book shows *how* the ethnic identity formation of later-generation Mexican Americans is shaped by ongoing immigration, while also considering the factors that other research has identified as central to the Mexican-origin experience: race, class, a history of colonization, the

proximity of the border. The book sets out to accomplish two broad goals. The first is to show how the duration of an immigration wave shapes assimilation. In doing so, I borrow Alba and Nee's definition of assimilation, which they describe as "the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary social and cultural differences" (2003: 11).

I argue that assimilation processes have much to do with the duration of an immigration wave. When immigration ceases, so too does abundant access to the ethnically linked symbols and practices that immigrants bring with them fresh from the homeland. These symbols and practices change over time, waning in salience and acquiring form and meaning heavily influenced by life in the United States. The ethnic distinctiveness of groups also declines when immigration stops. Without a substantial number of immigrants, groups come to be defined less by the foreign-born members and more by U.S.-born individuals, who, over the course of generations, generally enter the U.S. mainstream. Indeed, others have thoroughly shown that among groups who are not being replenished by substantial numbers of immigrants, ethnic symbols and practices become less important to people's lives, and ethnic distinctions decline such that ethnicity becomes a symbolic, optional, and inconsequential part of identity (Alba 1990; Gans 1979; Waters 1990).

When immigrants continually replenish the native-born coethnics, as has occurred with the Mexican-origin population, access to the symbols and practices that epitomize the expression of ethnicity is abundant. These symbols and practices are available through personal interactions with those who are generationally closer to the immigrant point of origin, through institutions, and through the mass media. Immigrant replenishment also adds to the ethnic distinctiveness of a group. Foreign-born members are highly distinguishable from the mainstream because of their cultural and socioeconomic characteristics, and they come to define what it means to be a member of the ethnic group for both group members and nonmembers. Immigrant replenishment thus makes ethnicity less symbolic, less optional, and more consequential for all members of the replenished group.

The consequences of replenishment depend in large part on the status that the replenishing immigrants occupy in U.S. society. If the immi-

grant group occupies a low status in the host context—as is the case with the largely poor, laboring, and unauthorized Mexican-immigrant population—then those who are members of the ethnic groups being replenished may experience status degradation. If, on the other hand, the status of the immigrant population is high—as with some highly skilled Asian-origin groups—then the status of the previously arrived members of that ethnic group rises through their affiliation with the high-status immigrants. Ethnic groups may be negatively recognized in some dimensions of society but positively recognized in others, resulting in immigrant replenishment's production of uneven effects on status. An ethnic group may, for example, be positively recognized for its work ethic and cultural vibrancy but also negatively recognized because of its low levels of education and perceived lack of assimilation.

In the case of later-generation Mexican Americans, the perpetual influx of Mexican immigrants for the past hundred years is a central factor shaping ethnic identity formation. Mexican Americans' daily lives do not evince unbreakable exclusion or second-class citizenship. Instead, Mexican Americans exhibit a significant degree of socioeconomic assimilation, particularly considering the history of discrimination they have endured. They are in many ways well integrated in the social, political, and economic dimensions of American life. Yet they do not experience the sort of symbolic and optional form of ethnic identity witnessed among European-origin individuals, because ongoing Mexican immigration makes Mexican ethnicity a vibrant part of the ethnic landscape.

Ethnic identity is consequential to Mexican Americans in both beneficial and costly ways. On one hand, Mexican immigration makes ethnicity enjoyably salient to later-generation Mexican Americans. Mexican Americans have ample opportunities to celebrate their ethnic origins through language, food, music, and holidays—aspects of ethnicity seen as pleasurable in an age of multiculturalism. Furthermore, the immigrant-driven growth of the Mexican-origin population gives greater clout to the Mexican-origin population in U.S. society, which often positively recognizes ethnicity in politics and popular culture.

On the other hand, Mexican Americans experience the costs of ethnic identity in a context of poor, largely unauthorized Mexican-immigrant replenishment. People of Mexican origin are racialized as an undesir-

able foreign group, sharpening the ethnic boundaries that Mexican Americans encounter in daily life. Furthermore, Mexican immigrants inform what it means to be an “authentic” person of Mexican descent. Mexican Americans are often unable to deploy the requisite ethnic symbols and practices that would allow them to live up to a norm of ethnic authenticity determined by Mexican immigrants.

For later-generation Mexican Americans, today’s immigration is seen through the lens of the immigrant experience within their own family, coloring their view of whom should be allowed in or kept out. Decisions that Mexican Americans make about everything, from the types of organizations they join to where they live and where they send their children to school, highlight the importance of immigration to their ethnic identity.

A second goal of this book is to understand better the place of the Mexican-origin population in the U.S. racial and ethnic landscape. Previous scholarship has portrayed this group as an aggrieved minority that has experienced blocked mobility and exclusion from the U.S. mainstream. But Mexican Americans have experienced far too much assimilation to be regarded as such. Others have described the Mexican-origin experience as that of an ethnic group that is gradually assimilating into U.S. society.<sup>13</sup> But Mexican ethnicity remains much too highly salient for such a conclusion to be entirely valid. Neither of these characterizations fully describes the Mexican-origin population. Instead, the Mexican-origin population is best described as a permanent immigrant group that, because of ongoing immigration, perpetually deals with the turbulent process of assimilation.

The place in the racial and ethnic landscape is illuminated by conceptualizing ethnicity as a narrative. Stephen Cornell argues that “ethnic categories are categories of collective life stories” (2000: 45) created through the selection, plotting, and interpretation of certain events that are seen as common to the experiences of a group of individuals. Groups select events that may be big or small, episodic or quotidian, historical or ongoing. These events are plotted “in causal, sequential, associational, or other ways” and are linked to a particular ethnic group (43). Events are then interpreted, imbued with significance, and subject to claims about the extent to which they and the way they are plotted define the group.

The result of this process is the construction of a narrative that “captures the central understanding of what it means to be a member of the group” (42). Put another way, an ethnic narrative is an account that group insiders (and outsiders) tell about who “we” (and “they”) are.

The narrative approach to ethnicity is useful for understanding Mexican-American ethnic identity and how the greater immigrant population affects it, because, as Cornell points out, it is “event-centered.” Immigration is perhaps *the* defining event in the Mexican-American narrative, because it is both a past event *and* a present event. Immigration structures how the Mexican-American narrative is written from the outside in and, to a large degree, from the inside out.

Because Mexican immigration has been a nearly continuous feature of U.S. society for the last hundred years, immigration is a significant event that can be plotted at virtually any point in the Mexican-American narrative, helping to define people of Mexican origin as a poor and largely undesirable foreign group. The ethnic identity of Mexican Americans is constructed through their attempts to reconcile their own life experiences as ethnic Mexicans with a prevailing narrative of Mexicans as foreigner. At times, Mexican Americans’ experiences and life circumstances conform to this dominant narrative, because they too trace their roots to immigrant origins. But their experiences also conflict with the dominant narrative, since they are, in fact, Americans whose generational roots extend deeply into U.S. soil. Their narrative cannot be simply characterized as that of an aggrieved minority group struggling with a racialized status, nor can it be seen as that of an immigrant ethnic group passing through linearly related stages of assimilation. Precisely because immigration is an important part of both their historical *and* their present-day experience, immigration and the struggles associated with immigration and assimilation have become central to what it means to be Mexican American.

#### GETTING TO KNOW MEXICAN AMERICANS

If the aim of this book is to take into account how the various dualities that define the Mexican-origin population shape ethnic identity, then the

experiences of those most distant from the immigrant generation are the most revealing. I start from the premise that time in the United States matters in how groups experience American society. Although immigrants and the young second generation have garnered much attention from researchers and the media (García 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Huntington 2004b; López and Stanton-Salazar 2001; Rumbaut and Portes 2001; Smith 2005a), their experiences are not what provide the best purchase on how to understand the Mexican-origin population. The time that immigrants and the second generation have spent in the United States is too limited to tell the full story. If, in fact, the Mexican-origin experience is closer to that of an aggrieved minority that has experienced persistent exclusion, then the experiences of later-generation Mexican Americans will tell the tale. But if the case is that the Mexican-origin experience is really an immigrant ethnic group that has experienced assimilation from one generation to the next until ethnicity becomes a symbolic and optional part of identity, then the descendants of the earliest Mexican immigrants will reveal as much.

I began the research for this book by hypothesizing that the continual influx of Mexican immigrants plays a critical role in Mexican-American ethnic identity formation. I also began from the premise that other factors illuminated in the existing research—race, class, level of residential segregation, generation, and the history of relations between the Mexican population and American society—shape Mexican-American ethnic identity. In order to test my assumptions, I wanted to conduct research in a location that had both a large Mexican-American and a large Mexican-immigrant population and in a second location that had only a large Mexican-American population but no or only a few Mexican immigrants. These criteria led me to search for a place that has received a steady influx of Mexican immigrants over the course of the twentieth century and a second locale where the patterns of Mexican immigration were more similar to the temporally compressed European migration. Locating the former was relatively easy, since many places in the American West and Southwest have received a steady flow of Mexican immigrants. I chose to do this portion of the research in Santa Maria, a small city on the central coast of California. Santa Maria's agricultural

economy has always attracted Mexican immigrants. Because of its long history of Mexican migration, Santa Maria has large Mexican-American and Mexican-immigrant populations.

Identifying a location where Mexican immigration patterns resembled the European case proved to be far more difficult. An ideal locale would have been one in which Mexican immigration was compressed in a short period of time from the end of the nineteenth century to beginning of the twentieth century and where Mexican immigrants either did not travel or traveled in very small numbers after that. I could not locate nor am I aware of such a place. Garden City, Kansas, offered the closest approximation of what I was looking for. As with patterns of European migration, Garden City received a large influx of Mexican immigrants in the first third of the twentieth century, followed by a long immigration hiatus. This hiatus ended in the early 1980s, when the largest beef-packing plant in the world opened its doors near Garden City, precipitating a resurgence of Mexican immigration. Compared with Santa Maria's continual influx of immigrants, Garden City's pattern is best described as interrupted.

I expected the different historical patterns of Mexican immigration to yield significant differences in Mexican Americans' ethnic identity, but I found this not to be the case. Some differences existed, and I report them where relevant. But the heavy influx of Mexican immigrants to both cities in the last twenty years suppresses the differences I expected to discover. What emerges is not as much an account of how local patterns of immigration shape Mexican-American ethnic identity as an account of how Mexican ethnic identity throughout the United States is affected by massive contemporary Mexican immigration.

I interviewed 123 later-generation Mexican Americans—60 in Garden City and 63 in Santa Maria—during 2001 and 2002.<sup>14</sup> I interviewed Mexican Americans whose ancestors have been in the United States since before 1940, who are of Mexican descent on both their mother's and father's side of the family, and who have lived in the same city for most of their lives. I chose people whose families have been in the United States since before 1940 because I was interested in finding a population that roughly paralleled the later-generation European-origin Americans

who have been studied in other research on ethnic identity (Alba 1990; Waters 1990). The people I interviewed ranged in age from fifteen to ninety-eight. Whenever possible, I interviewed family members from different generations in order to learn how their experiences vary across generations and within families. I also made efforts to talk to people from a wide range of occupations and educational backgrounds in order to understand how social class may shape Mexican-American identity and interactions with Mexican immigrants. I found interview respondents by using a snowball sampling technique. I relied on a few key informants in each city to recommend several initial respondents, who then suggested names of other potential respondents.

I asked the Mexican Americans I interviewed about the importance of their ethnic ancestry in their daily lives and about how, if at all, they participate in various activities related to their Mexican background. I also asked them a set of questions about their perceptions of the influence that Mexican immigrants have on their lives. Finally, I asked them multiple questions about their opinions and attitudes toward Mexican immigrants and Mexican immigration. A copy of the full interview protocol can be found in appendix C.

When I was not conducting interviews, I spent my time becoming integrated into life in Garden City and Santa Maria. I lived with an established Mexican American family in each city, and members of these households were valuable “gatekeepers” to respondents, informants, organizations, and local history. I joined local gyms, volunteered in an ESL class, attended sporting events, frequented local establishments, spent time with civic organizations, attended conferences for local organizations, participated in organized recreational activities, and attended city council meetings. My time living in each city provided many occasions to gather observational notes. Casual conversations with Mexican Americans, Mexican immigrants, and non-Mexicans whom I encountered in my daily life proved to be rich opportunities for data collection and informed the in-depth interviews. I also designed opportunities to take field notes in order to understand the daily lives of my respondents. I spent time observing in the major high school in each city, in selected respondents’ workplaces, and during my interactions with respondents

before and after interviews. In the high schools, I observed student interactions in the classroom, between classes, and during free periods. I attended key city government meetings in order to understand how Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants participate in local politics. Since the workplace is an important arena of interaction among respondents, immigrants, and whites, I “shadowed” several respondents throughout their workday, paying close attention to Mexican Americans’ interactions with both Mexican immigrants and non-Mexicans.

I also interviewed key informants, including local civic leaders, elected officials, teachers in the high schools, and individuals who work in local industries, such as beef-packing in Garden City and agriculture in Santa Maria. These interviews provided valuable information that I used to contextualize my in-depth interviews and participant observations. The interviews also allowed me to understand better the social position of Mexican Americans in the community. Combined, the interviews and observations provided a full picture of the Mexican-American experience in these two cities. I refer readers interested in a more detailed explanation of the research methodology to appendix A.

My analysis focuses on the way in which the identities of the people I interviewed are tied to ethnicity. For the majority of my respondents, ethnicity is not necessarily their only social identity or even the most important one. Much of their daily lives is marked by uneventful encounters with family, friends, coworkers, and strangers in which their ethnic origins are minimally important. Nonetheless, plenty of “ethnic moments and events” contribute to the construction of a larger ethnic narrative to which the people I interviewed link a significant part of their identity.

This is by no means an exhaustive study of Mexican Americans. Rather, it provides an in-depth understanding of a particular group of Mexican Americans who are, broadly speaking, middle class and live in cities in predominantly rural areas. Its aim is to help readers better understand the complexity of the Mexican-origin population and the dynamic nature of immigration, race, and ethnicity in the United States.

In this book I explore several dimensions of Mexican-American ethnic

identity. In chapter 2 I contextualize the book with a historical overview of Mexican immigration and assimilation. There I also provide a more detailed introduction to Garden City and Santa Maria, including a history of Mexican immigration and a demographic snapshot.

In chapter 3 I take up the question of Mexican-American assimilation. Using both ethnographic data and the existing survey research, I show that later-generation Mexican Americans are not relegated to the margins of American society, nor have they experienced unshakable marginalization. Though they have not caught up with native-born whites in most measures of economic mobility, people of Mexican origin have experienced an appreciable degree of structural assimilation as measured by education, occupation, residential location, and intermarriage. The structural assimilation of Mexican Americans has also weakened the hold that ethnicity has on how parents raise their children. Over time, the use of the Spanish language diminishes, ethnic customs play a decreasingly important role in family life, and the ties that Mexican Americans have to family in their ethnic homeland diminish.

In chapter 4 I explore how the presence of a large Mexican-immigrant population shapes the practice of ethnicity among Mexican Americans. The continual influx of Mexican immigration provides ready access to ethnically linked symbols and practices that prevent the recession of ethnicity into the distant background of social life. Mexican Americans access ethnically linked symbols and practices through interactions with Mexican immigrants and second-generation Mexican Americans that range from serendipitous encounters to romantic partnerships. Institutions—churches, schools, restaurants, and grocery stores, as well as popular culture—also provide access to things Mexican. Informing Mexican Americans' desire to access these "ethnic raw materials" is a multicultural ideology that makes a strong attachment to an ethnic identity more desirable and even rewarding in U.S. society today.

In chapter 5 I move away from the practice of ethnicity to look at the boundaries that distinguish ethnic groups from one another. Mexican-immigrant replenishment sharpens ethnic boundaries between Mexican Americans and non-Mexicans, as well as intragroup boundaries that knife through the Mexican-origin population. The foreignness of Mexi-

can ethnicity created by the recent and heavy influx of Mexican immigrants reinforces intergroup boundaries between Mexican Americans and non-Mexicans, as well as intragroup boundaries among people of Mexican descent, making ethnicity far more than a symbolic, inconsequential, and optional part of their identity.

In chapter 6 I explore Mexican Americans' opinions about immigration and their perception of how the Mexican-immigrant population affects their own lives. When asked about their opinions of Mexican immigration and Mexican immigrants themselves, the overwhelming majority of respondents expressed accommodating views. They are much more ambivalent in their beliefs about how immigrants from their ethnic homeland shape how others view later-generation Mexican Americans, noting both the threat that poor, mostly unauthorized immigrants pose to their status and the increased social, political, and economic clout that comes from the growth of the Mexican-origin population.

In chapter 7 I examine how Mexican Americans translate their ethnic identity into action, paying close attention to whether they work toward unity with or division from their immigrant coethnics. The chapter shows that Mexican Americans are not inclined to participate in visible displays of either solidarity with or division from their coethnic immigrants. Instead, most reach out to Mexican immigrants in their everyday lives, although some seek to create social distance from an immigrant population that they see as a threat to their own social standing.

In the concluding chapter I provide a discussion of the theoretical and empirical contributions of the book. I return to the book's central findings to show that the Mexican-origin population is best characterized as a permanent immigrant group whose large immigrant population makes immigration and the struggles associated with assimilation defining events in the group's narrative. Immigration also significantly defines the relationship between the Mexican-ethnic narrative and a larger national narrative, which is based on immigration as a past event. I also show how attending to the extent and nature of immigrant replenishment provides for a more complete theoretical understanding of assimilation.