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Mexican-Americans as a Minority Group in the U.S.A.

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The United States' history with Mexico is a very rich and complex one. There is no single viewpoint as to how the conditions of entry influenced assimilation for Mexicans immigrating to the United States, mostly for the reason that no story is alike. To understand assimilation, we must first take note of the difference between assimilation and acceptance. Acceptance would be when the minority group has already been accepted and is now one collective group with the majority. Assimilation is the actual process of becoming accepted and blending with the culture of the majority group. One stance we can approach is to identify and explore multiple different variables that can be considered when discussing Mexican immigrant assimilation, such as citizenship, private property rights, and education.

Annexation

Mexican immigrants to the United States faced limited geographical mobility and a ton of spatial segregation. The separation of racial groups in housing and education was strongly tied to spatial patterns. This was especially a significant issue with immigrants to New Mexico. A big part of this issue had to do with the building of Anglo-American institutions, homes, and cultural regions around New Mexican societies that had already been there for years before they even started interacting with the Anglo-Americans. Social prejudices kept New Mexicans in lower-paying jobs as they felt less worthy than Anglo-Americans, which in turn limited the group's ability to change socioeconomically. There were a lot of areas that were predominantly New Mexican areas, and there were also areas that consisted of predominantly Anglo-Americans. The status of New Mexicans improved from 1912 to 1950, in part due to the emergence of the middle

class of New Mexicans. Instead of just having “low class” and “high class”, there was now a middle ground. This shifted the socio-economic categories, which in turn created a shift in areas of residency and led to many New Mexicans moving to urban cities.

Perception and judgment is a very significant part of everyday human life. However, these aspects played a huge role in the difficulty of assimilation for the Mexican immigrants. Anglo-Americans thought extremely lowly of Mexicans and treated them as second-class citizens. Native born, upper-class Californians were especially harsh and nicknamed the Mexican born as “cholos” (which today is not considered as terrible of an insult) and considered them to be little more than slaves and annoyances to the public. The government had a hard time dealing with the titles of Mexican immigrants as well. In the late 80’s, the use of "Hispanic" was pretty much ended by the federal government. This began with the 1980 Census in order to identify and include all people of Spanish-speaking backgrounds with origins from the western hemisphere. Since then, Mexicans have been redefining themselves and how they are perceived in our society, for example, the evolution of the term “Chicano”. In the mid-1960’s, this was a political term of choice that identified a Mexican American person who worked to promote social change within movements of the 60’s and 70’s. The older generation of immigrants and the richer people believe it to be an insult to be called “Chicano” since it was used to refer to unsophisticated immigrants. The generation of political activists changed the term into something that created a sense of pride in the Mexican community and culture. There are still major issues with the perception of Mexican-Americans today, such as stereotypes, how to define the Mexican “race”, and racism towards Mexicans, but vast improvements have been made since the initial immigration of Mexicans.

Early Assimilation

One thing that must be addressed while examining how conditions of entry influenced early assimilation for Mexicans immigrating to the United States is whether or not they had legal recourse or resources that made them equal to others living in those societies at this time. To fully examine this, we first must understand what the term “legal recourse” means. According to the definition, “legal recourse is an action taken by an individual or a corporation to attempt to remedy a legal difficulty.” One action which made Mexicans more equal in Mexico was the 1812 Constitution of Mexico. The legal color gradient was addressed in the document, with the passage of laws like the prohibition of recording an individual’s race in government, baptismal, wedding, or death records. The Mexican government hoped that by including this in the Constitution, this would attempt to formally unify a new nation. Several decades later, in 1855, Mexico began requiring U.S. farm owners to create legal contracts for Mexican workers. This move guaranteed fair wages and humane work conditions.

An important factor in Mexican immigrants’ assimilation into the United States would obviously be the issue of citizenship. Citizenship essentially means “the status of being a citizen,” meaning that you have the right to live there, work, vote, and pay taxes. Citizenship was initially addressed in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ratified in 1848. This treaty was signed in the Villa de Guadalupe Hidalgo, between Mexico and the United States, ending the Mexican-American War. Multiple articles addressed the question of what exactly citizenship meant for Mexicans currently living within the United States. Article 8 explicitly states Mexicans who live in previously Mexican territories and remain in the United States a year after ratification, not declaring intentions of citizenship, would be considered U.S. citizens. Article 9 delves further

into the subject and declares that Mexicans who elected to change their citizenship were given “the employment of all rights of citizens of the United States, according to principles of the Constitution” (Small). The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo also granted blanket naturalization and transferred full civilian rights to former Mexican citizens. Mexicans today are the biggest group of eligible immigrants- a ½ of 12 million U.S. legal permanent residents. The approval time for U.S. citizenship varies by person and location- it can happen in as short as five months or last two years or more. In order to become a U.S. citizen: “A legal permanent resident must be at least 18; lived in the U.S. for five years, show proficiency for basic English, pass a background check, demonstrate knowledge of U.S. history and government, and swear allegiance to the U.S.” (Bahrampour).

Private Property Rights were also addressed in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Article 8 addresses private property, “[t]heir property rights would be respected as those of American citizens were respected.” Spanish/Mexican-granted land rights would be recognized by U.S. law to the same extent as Mexican law as said by Article 10. There was expectation after the Mexican-American War that Mexican Americans would continue with the legal ownership of their land, but the U.S. began taking the land away from the settlers. Due to a slow legal system, insufficient finances, a language barrier, and limited legal land documentation, they could not fight these actions. The discovery of gold in 1849 furthered disregard for land ownership in California, especially when in 1849 the California legislature enacted a foreign miner’s tax. When Colonel Kearney took control of New Mexico in 1846, the current citizens of the territory believed that they would have their property and religious rights respected. A lot of the citizens resented having their land overtaken, being cut off from Mexico, the lack of sovereignty, and the ethnocentric attitude of the occupying American soldiers.

There is a huge stark difference when comparing Americans living in a high concentration of Hispanics versus Mexican immigrants. In terms of education, some Anglo parents and school board members went so far as to argue that Mexican children needed to be segregated from white children because they did not learn as fast or valued education as highly. Today, 30% have a bachelor's degree or higher. The Educational Act of 1891 brought compulsory attendance and the use of English in communities. In comparison to 30% of Non-Mexican Immigrants, only 6% of Mexican immigrants have a bachelor's degree or higher. The median age for the native-born population is 36 while the median age of immigrants was forty years. Americans living in a high concentration of Hispanics are usually subject to whatever higher-level education the person pursued, not often blue collar jobs. Social prejudices tended to keep Nuevomexicans in less prestigious, lower-paying jobs which limited their ability to change socioeconomically. Most Mexican immigrants start off working blue collar jobs.

Education for Mexican immigrants was not an easy aspect of immigration. Before the 1890s there were schools for Mexicans to attend in the United States; however, the schools were split by language and religion categories and then by ethnicity. Anglo-Americans, Native Americans, and Mexicans were all split up. In 1889, the start of the first formal and public secondary education schools (state universities) came about. The first real public school system was in New Mexico, but no progress was really made until the 1890s when the Education Act of 1891 was finalized. The government made an effort to make an education system that unified races, which at the same time meant the government was trying to work out issues that stemmed from people who have different cultures. These efforts were somewhat futile for a lot of reasons, for example, the funding was a lot of money, and the language barrier was difficult to overpass. On January 6, 1912, an amendment was added to Section 10 of Article 12 of the Constitution

that said children of Spanish descent would not be denied admission into public schools or put in separate schools, and would be treated equally like all the other children in public schools. The Bill of Rights was later enacted and Hispanics were further protected, “[t]he rights, privileges and immunities, civil, political and religious, guaranteed to the people of New Mexico by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo shall be preserved inviolate” (Small).

The language barrier for Spanish speaking natives caused a lot of issues in their assimilation. Obviously, there were communication issues between races, which made it especially hard for Mexicans to adjust in the United States (and another reason Mexican-Americans were discriminated against). One way that Mexican immigrants exercised their right to their language was through newspapers. Before the beginning of the 20th century, there were at least sixteen Spanish-written newspapers established in Los Angeles, California. The Mexican American Press used this resource to end discrimination against their community and make a name for them. Today, the assimilation has grown vastly. According to a recent survey, regarding children of Hispanic immigrants to the U.S, 92% spoke English well or very well, although 85% spoke at least some Spanish at home (class paper). The study also found that third-generation Hispanic immigrants primarily speak only English and do not speak any Spanish at home (class paper).

Unlawful unifications and intermarriage between settlers and natives was a big social issue during this time. These unifications were common, and many lineages of Indian-Mexicans were the result of this. Mexican families would also take in Native American orphans or hire Native Americans as help. Poor American settlers would also end up marrying poor Mexican immigrants in order to gain status within the community and to have the chance to widen the economic opportunities. Richer U.S. entrepreneurs would also try to advance and achieve more

authority and power in the rivalry for territory through numerous alliances to the residents, such as through marriage. However, miscegenation between Americans and “Nuevomexicanos” seems to only have happened at the two furthest ends of society: the poor marrying the poor, and the rich marrying the rich. Mexicans also married Americans in order to get citizenship (which is something that is still seen today). Many Mexicans came over to the United States and wanted to stay, so they would marry somebody in order to not have to return to Mexico.

Economically, New Mexico started to thrive from 1850 to 1912, which caused the gap between large corporations and the people to widen. But even in America, Mexicans were often left in the dust, in low paying, less respected jobs. This was the case because of social discrimination more so than formal laws. Americans didn’t want to share the well-paying jobs with them, so they would give them all the jobs that nobody else wanted and they knew that the Mexicans would take them, because they would be jobless otherwise. During WWI, many Americans went to war, therefore leaving positions for Mexicans to take. However, as soon as the soldiers returned from war, they took their jobs back from the Mexicans. After the Great Depression, the dislike against Mexicans grew, since they were now, more so than ever before, seen as competition for the little work there was.

Under Roosevelt’s new deal from 1933 to 1944, some of the Mexicans were able to find jobs and helped repair the infrastructure. The Manhattan Project also helped to employ many Mexican workers, although the tension towards them was still very present. After WWII, an act called the “G.I. Bill” helped provide jobs for veterans, which also helped many Mexicans find work and build a middle class in New Mexico. Many jobs were to be found in mining, since not many Americans were willing to fill them.

In all of the major states Mexicans immigrated to, the conditions of entry influenced early assimilation for Mexicans differently. After the Civil War, Texans discriminated against Mexicans just as much as they discriminated against African Americans. As a result, many of them had to move to urban neighborhoods in order to get away from such bad treatment. There, they would speak in their native language, celebrate their own holidays, but at same time, took part in American culture. Most of their lives consisted of their own culture and they barely assimilated. Texas Rangers and other Texans killed thousands of Mexicans brutally between 1848 and 1870. As a result, a border patrol was formed in 1914 to prevent more Mexicans from immigrating. This caused a lot tension between Mexican Americans and Anglos.

In California, the discrimination against Mexicans was slower and a little subtler. Anglos would stop paying Mexicans for their work and other actions just like it. This tension was only made worse by the Great Depression, which narrowed the job opportunities everywhere. Americans wanted to send Mexicans back to Mexico so they would have more jobs, which not only made it a lot harder for Mexicans to immigrate, but also to assimilate, since they were not accepted by the people around them.

In New Mexico, the situation was a little different due to a larger Mexican population of the people living there. However, there was a huge gap between the lower Mexican class and the higher American class. This gap resulted in a split of communities of just Mexicans, just Americans, and a couple of mixed cultures. The communities of Mexicans were barely assimilated to American culture, since they were not around it a lot, which caused an uneven assimilation across the state.

In Arizona, the discrimination was very present, especially within the school system. Mexicans did not have as great of an education as those that were white did, which led to an even

slower assimilation than there already would have been. The Mexicans acculturated rather than assimilated, which means that they kept their culture but started adding more and more of the American culture to their lives. Overall, Mexican immigrants had a very difficult immigration and assimilation process. Although the conditions have greatly improved since the initial immigration, there is still a long way to go in our society in order for Mexican immigrants to be completely accepted by everyone without racial bias.

Continuing Assimilation

Mexican American citizens have long had a deep and complex relationship with the United States, only exemplified by their involvement in the Great Depression and World War I. Immigration from Mexico and other places was the cause for many conflicts between the U.S. citizens and immigrants. European immigrants had an easier time migrating, since they were more accepted by the Anglo-Americans than the Mexicans and other Latinos, due to the fact that their skin-color looked similar. Due to many conflicts, a 1924 Immigration Act was placed that limited the amount of immigrants coming to the U.S. Mexico did not have the same numerical restrictions placed on them as other countries, however they still had to suffer under the “anti-immigrant” mindset the people of the time had, such as measures that were being taken to keep Mexican-Americans out of public institutions (MacDonald 307). Some people even went that far as to try to send Mexican Americans back to Mexico, even though they were legal U.S. citizens.

In the 1920's, the Anglos were constantly trying to separate themselves from the “lower class” Mexican Americans. (MacDonald 310) The founding of the organization League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) in 1929, was a response to the Mexican American's

request for “relief from discrimination, employment disputes, and other injustices.” (MacDonald 311). After the Second World War, LULAC became more and more active in fighting against racism and discrimination against Hispanics in Texas. LULAC helped many Mexican Americans win their cases against Anglo-Americans, which was a sign of resistance. Alongside the Civil Rights Movement, there was another lesser known social uprising occurring. Every day Mexican Americans fought against the discrimination of their children and their families, in order to give them a better future.

For Mexican immigrants, gaining their rights was a process that involved people all over the country, and many leaders and organizations took action for things such as voting rights, housing limitations, educational segregation, etc. In the early 1960s, Edward R. Roybal, a Mexican-American politician, ran for a position on the L.A. city council, and community activists in turn created the Community Service Organization (CSO) which registered over 15,000 new voters in Latino areas. That was just the beginning of expanding Mexican-American voting rights. National Council of La Raza, founded in 1968, has helped Mexican immigrants in countless ways. The National Council of La Raza is a Hispanic civil rights organization in the United States that supports the advancement of Latino families. The NCLR controls over 115 charter schools that provide quality education to over 25,000 Latino students each year. More recently, they also built health clinics and trained health educators to provide care and health information to over 100,000 Hispanic people since 2006.

The Chicano movement began in the 1960s and never had a definitive ending. The Chicano Movement was originally created with three goals in mind: to restore land, to ensure rights for farm workers and to create education reforms. The initial activism of the movement dates all the way back to the late 40s. In 1947 there was a case, *Mendez v. Westminster* Supreme

Court, that ended the segregation of Latino students from white students. It was a significant case especially because it was viewed to be a predecessor to *Brown v. Board of Education*, in which the U.S. Supreme Court determined that the “separate but equal” school policy went against the Constitution. Ever since then, the Chicano movement gained more popularity and significance in society, particularly in eastern Los Angeles. Throughout the 60s, East L.A. became a center of political and social activity for the Chicano movement. This was due largely to the fact that in 1958, Cesar Chavez located the headquarters for the Latino civil rights group, Community Service Organization, to East L.A. He led strikers on a 300-mile march from Delano, a city in Northern California to Sacramento, under the the United Farm Workers Union in order to encourage a grape boycott. Showing support for this union was a big factor in being a part of the Chicano movement. It was important to the members of the Chicano movement how they advertised themselves to the public, as this is how they gained power and attracted members. Members of the movement “confronted racism and racial self-hatred head on, using the slogan "brown is beautiful" and promoting an allegiance and affection to the Indian-Mestizo physical features” (Rosales). The Chicano movement continued to evolve its goals by creating a concrete voice for themselves through the creation of a political party.

The La Raza Unida party was established in Texas in 1970. It served as an alternative to the two-party system and sought social, economic, and political self-determination for Chicanos, other minorities, and the disenfranchised through local and state politics. An organization called the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), was started by five men studying at St. Mary’s in 1967. These same men helped to establish the La Raza Unida Party. It was initially organized around county, local, and school district elections in Texas. The main differences within La Raza Unida were ideological differences between Gutierrez and Gonzales. “Gutierrez

wanted to balance power through local action while Gonzales called for a nationalist and socialist sociocultural revolution” (Raza Unida Party Records). The decision to put the 1972 general election ballot was made at its first state convention in 1971, with party members conducting petitions and voter registration drives. The party organized and ran gubernatorial candidates Ramsey Muniz and Mario Compean as well as challenging the election law that required a party to obtain 20% of the overall vote. “This law was promptly overruled by the U.S Department of Justice in 1976 and they were allowed to hold primary elections without having to pay filing fees” (Reid). Chicano scholars challenged perceptions of Mexican Americans by establishing Chicano studies programs through various universities, which promptly raised the political conscious of the Mexican American youth.

The migrant worker’s movement was started after farmworkers had been denied a decent life in the field and in the community for more than a century. “By the early 1960’s things were beginning to change and within another 15 years, more than 50,000 farm workers were protected by union contracts” (UFW). The National Farm Workers Association was started by Cesar Chavez in 1962. Chavez was the son of a family of poor farmworkers and he had risen through the ranks of the grassroots Community Service Organization to become the national director. The cofounder was Dolores Huerta who was a CSO farmworker activist. When CSO refused to concentrate its efforts on organizing farmworkers, Chavez left to found the NFWA. He traveled for three years to meet with groups of farmworkers in their homes.

Mexican-American civil rights culminated amongst the Chicano movement, beginning during the 1940s. The GI Forum was founded in 1948 and promoted Mexican-American participation through political activism. Along with the introduction of the GI forum upon the conclusion of WWII, the GI bill provided Mexican-Americans who served the in the military

free health care, affordable mortgages, and free education. Along with the GI Bill and Forum, the MAPA (Mexican American Political Association), founded in 1959, helped kick-start the Chicano movement that would come to blossom during the 1960s. Activists organized mass walkouts in Denver and Los Angeles in the late 1960s and early 1970s that focused their attention on issues such as police brutality, unfair educational/employment options, and political disenfranchisement. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 provided a compromise in disenfranchisement and allowed Mexican-Americans a voice in political matters (as well as others who were racially discriminated against). The Chicano movement helped pave the way for Mexican Americans towards civil rights as they know it today and highlighted the positives in Mexican-American civil rights. Prior to this movement, Mexican-American civil rights were particularly restricted. Public schools were segregated until 1947 and it took until the 1960s for voting rights to be equal. Along the way, there were major court cases that spurred change in policy, favored Mexican-Americans, and pushed them back.

“Mendez vs Westminster” was a federal court case taking place in 1947 that questioned racial segregation in California districts. This was the landmark case that desegregated strictly Mexican schools and found the separate schools unconstitutional. The case was vital in the fight for equal rights because it was the first addressing desegregation in general. Not even a year later, “Delgado vs Bastrop ISD” came into fruition after Mexican-Americans in Texas’s public schools claimed they were denied the same facilities, education, and instruction as “other white races.” The segregation in schools was deemed unconstitutional and Mexican-Americans were then granted equal educational opportunity. Hernandez v Texas (1954) was the first (and only) Mexican-American civil rights case heard by a US Supreme Court after WWII. The official ruling stated that Mexican-Americans (as well as other racial groups) were protected under the

14th amendment, which officially desegregate schools. *Miranda v Arizona* (1966) was a supreme court decision providing citizens announcement of their rights upon arrest, which played a major role in changing law enforcement. *U.S. v Brignoni* (1975) was a landmark supreme court case that provided safety for Mexican/Hispanic drivers around the Mexican border, due to the fact that it ruled that patrol cars could not pull drivers over based on ethnicity. The patrolling officer must have factual evidence to pull them over. All of these court cases played a major role in Mexican-American assimilation.

Minorities in America are constantly facing disparities in the Criminal Justice System. They are more likely to be referenced as arrestees, felons, and suspects. Hispanics have the 2nd highest imprisonments of minority groups (having a rate 3 times that of Whites). In a prison population of 100,000, 1,220 of those incarcerated are Hispanic (see Figure 1).

Age Group	Total	White	Black	Hispanic
Total	904	449	3457	1220
18-19yrs	785	302	2679	1058
20-24	2045	886	7276	2503
25-29	2520	1108	9749	2890
30-34	2355	1219	8690	2740
35-39	1889	995	7511	2134
55&older	164	112	540	401

Figure 1: This chart displays the average number of people out of 100,000 each race would be in a prison.

Prosecution is a process that also favors whites and is tougher on minorities. The prosecution process is often subject to discretion, which also leaves the door open for biases and

corruption. Studies also suggest that Hispanics are five times more likely to be searched compared to whites when being pulled over. Severity in punishment, on average, is not as harsh. The average length of sentence for Hispanics is 46 months while the sentence for whites is 62 months on average (diversity PowerPoint). Drug convictions are 21% of overall Hispanic convictions, but in federal prisons, 57% of Hispanics are behind bars because of drug crimes, whereas whites only made up 32%. Mexicans as well as other Hispanics have disparities in the CJS and are working to see out bigotry.

In 1972, The Mexican American Legislative Caucus, composed of Hispanic members of the Texas House of Representatives, was formed. It was necessary after their numbers had grown due to state redistricting. Their meetings became more formal in 1975 when the group became a considered a caucus, with senators of Mexican American descent participating and contributing their ideas. This group lobbies to other politicians and fights for legislation that would help improve the lifestyle of Mexican Americans. The reason for the formation of this group began when leaders recognized that there was a huge disparity in how much Mexican Americans were being represented compared to Caucasians. Between 1900 and 1953 only two Hispanics served in the Texas legislature. It wasn't until the 60th Texas Legislature in 1968 that there was a relatively high amount of representation (10 representatives and one state senator). By 1987, 25 Mexican Americans held legislative offices, with 19 of them in the House. This major increase in representation resulted from the start of the Mexican American Democrats in 1978. The MALC did not become an official part of the House of Representatives until 1981. In 1987, Al Houston and Eddie Cavazos formed the Mexican American Legislative Policy Council. This group oversees policies MALC supports and prepares research for the legislature and the community on issues affecting their constituencies. They also included African Americans, and even some

Caucasian members participated. The African Americans provided a connection to the Black Legislators Caucus and helped form a significant minority voting bloc. The caucus has played a role in writing legislation and determining its outcome on the floor. In 1984, the MALC pushed the Bilingual Education Act. In 1986 it passed unemployment-compensation legislation that included farmworkers for the first time since 1913. The Texas Observer called the 1985 MALC "the largest single voting bloc for social reform measures." In 1988, the MALC passed a minimum-wage bill for farm workers, ended conservative attempts to alter House Bill 72 on comprehensive education reform, and killed the so-called "English-only" movement. Caucus members fought for and won increased appropriations for higher education in South Texas and the border area. The MALC also worked to affect the redistricting process in 1991 and 2001, shaping the legislative districts in Texas until the year 2010.

The number of Latino officeholders has increased dramatically over the past decade. The only pre-1975 count of Latino officeholders found that in 1973, there were 1,280 in the six states with the largest Latino populations. By 2003, these same states had 4,130 Latino office holders. Nationally, there were 4,623 Latino office holders in 2003. Recently Latinos have been gaining access to elective office, but the amount of in Latino representation has barely kept pace with demographic growth. Because neither immigrants nor new births—the components of growth—can immediately vote, maintaining a ratio with population growth represents an achievement. Latinos are still underrepresented in the legislature, especially in states outside of the American Southwest. Less than 1 percent of officeholders nationwide are Latino. The majority of Latino officeholders are elected for local offices, such as school board members and city council members. Approximately 200 can be found in state legislative offices, in statewide offices, or in the U.S. Congress.

The 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act was signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, in order to end quotas based on national origins. The goal of the INA was to prevent countries or immigrants with certain nationalities to have preference over others or be more limited than others. The decision whether someone was allowed to immigrate now depended on individuals rather than the need for more laborers. Also, the INA limited the immigration to 170,000 people from the Eastern Hemisphere per year. The President (as well as the Secretary of State) of the time predicted that this law would not change the influx of immigrants by a lot, but that turned out to be wrong. “In fact, the law changed the face of America. The major source countries of immigration radically shifted from Europe to Latin America and Asia. The number of immigrants tripled by 1978. It made the country the highly diverse, multinational, multiethnic, multicultural American nation of immigrants that it is today.” (Orchowski 40)

The conditions that changed in order to make this Act happen were economic, demographic, technological and most certainly political. The economic change in the years before the INA was enormous, due to events such as the Great Depression of 1929, World War II, and a war-torn economy between 1940 and 1945 (Orchowski 41). Demographic drivers, such as World War II, were the reason many people, especially Jews, wanted to immigrate to the U.S. New technology, such as cheaper travel with cars and planes, allowed more and more immigrants to come to the United States. Telephones allowed many Americans to communicate with their family in another country and talk to them about immigrating. Many of the people who had immigrated voted for the Democratic party, since they believed those politicians to be the ones who wanted to give them a better future.

There was a massive amount of social movements that were driving the INA. Both the Civil Rights movement and the Holocaust showed the bias, prejudice, and discrimination that

was going on, and America wanted to distance itself from that. The Civil Rights movement's goal was to make it illegal for everybody to discriminate against anyone because of race, color, religion or national origin. National origin was the basis on what the INA was built. The Holocaust, on the other hand, caused many Americans to feel guilt and shame about not knowing that so many millions of people were being killed. Like Orchowski said, "The Holocaust was perhaps the major reason that white America embraced the Civil Rights movement with such fervor and that President Johnson's Great Society goals were so quickly accomplished in two years under the banner of ending discrimination" (Orchowski 52).

The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act had the purpose of revising and re-assessing the status of unauthorized immigrants set forth in the INA. This bill gave illegal immigrants the opportunity to become legal if they fulfilled certain requirements. The requirements were as follows: "Applicants had to prove that they lived and maintained a continuous physical presence in the U.S. since January 1st, 1982, possess a clean criminal record, and provide proof of registration within the Selective Service. Moreover, applicants had to meet minimal knowledge requirements in U.S. history, government and the English language or be pursuing a course of study approved by the Attorney General" (Mees). Furthermore, this Act requires, "[e]mployers to show proof of their worker's legal immigration, made it illegal for anybody to hire illegal immigrants, and legalized certain agricultural illegal immigrants" (Coutin 179).

The authors of this reform had the goal of preventing people from hiring illegal immigrants in order to pay them less money than they would to a white worker. The reform required anybody who hired illegal immigrants to pay a fine and undergo other penalties, in the hope of reducing undocumented immigration. This reform did the opposite of what the authors

wanted; employers now did not hire or pay Hispanic people at all due to the risk. Many illegal people still worked, but were now hired through subcontractors, which meant that they got paid even less. (Massey 143–145). The amount of Latino immigrants to the U.S. did not increase because of the INA, in fact it increased despite the INA. Before this act, people were allowed to come to America without being considered a part of America's national origins quotas and their entry was not prohibited. Despite this fact, the immigration of legal Latin immigrants and the immigration of illegal Latino immigrants increased, "US immigration policy often has very little to do with trends and patterns of immigration. Even when policies respond explicitly to shifts in immigration, rarely are they grounded in any real understanding of the forces that govern international migration. Instead, over time the relative openness or restrictiveness of US policies is more strongly shaped by prevailing economic circumstances and political ideologies."

(Massey and Pren).

	Temporary Migrants	Legal Immigrants	Illegal Immigrants
1955	398,650	50,772	164,035
1965	20,286	37,969	37,116,
1970	0	44,469	177,125
1975	0	62,205	377,367
1980	3,323	56,680	329,098
1985	9,622	61,290	392,017
1990	16,891	57,667	292,606
1995	26,512	87,073	271,297

Figure 2: Mexican Immigration to the U.S. between 1955 and 1995

In Figure 2, one can see how the number of temporary, legal and illegal immigrants changed between 1955 and 1995. The rise of illegal immigrants coming from Mexico to the U.S. increased around the same time but due to other reasons than the INA, or the INS policies, such as the ending of the Bracero Program, a seasonal worker program that allowed the workers to come to the U.S. without their families. As a result of ending this program, the Mexican workers now weren't allowed to cross the border whenever they wanted to anymore. Many Mexican workers, mostly illegal, came to the Southwest looking for work, and were employed by American workers for lower wages than Americans (Orchowski, 105).

Reciprocal Cultural Assimilation

One of the biggest challenges for Mexican immigrants would be to simply get into the country in the first place. To become a United States citizen, there is a string of almost impossible requirements to get done within a short amount of time. As stated earlier in the paper, you must be 18 or older, hold a green card for at least five years, lived in the state for at least 3 months before filing the application, have been a continuous resident of the U.S. as a green card holder for at least 5 years, stay in the U.S. until you are naturalized, learn to read, write, and speak English and United States history and government, and “be a decent person” according to the principles of the Constitution (USCIS, 2013).

Present-day obstacles facing Mexicans would primarily be the wage gap and dealing with every-day prejudices. A shocking statistic is that the average household income of Mexican-Americans is 40% below non-Hispanic whites, something that is being passed off to lower education levels. It has been noted that workers who completed high school had higher wages than those that had not, which is particularly bad for Mexican-Americans due to their already slow economic progress. Prejudices could be affecting Mexican-Americans almost as much as their limited educational opportunities. Nowadays, whenever a television is turned on to the news, it can be noted that there is some sort of talk from politician about how there are so many Mexicans trying to escape past the border. If this type of hateful talk was spread around, prejudices that Mexicans are sending people to steal America’s jobs and that they are all rapists and thieves will not only continue, but they will be believed as fact.

One major contribution of Mexican immigrants is their effects on politics. According to the American Immigration Council, “In 2012, 11.8% (or 18.1 million) of all registered voters

were ‘New Americans’—naturalized citizens or the U.S.-born children of immigrants who were raised during the current era of immigration from Latin America and Asia which began in 1965—according to an analysis of 2012 Census Bureau data by the American Immigration Council. Of these, 15.2 million voted in 2012, representing 11.4 percent of all those who voted. 10.7 million registered voters were naturalized citizens, while 7.3 million were “post-1965” children of immigrants. Latinos accounted for 8.4% (or 11.2 million) of U.S. voters in the 2012 elections, and Asians 2.9% (3.9 million), according to the U.S. Census Bureau”.

Another significant factor of Mexican immigrants is their impact on the economy. According to Business Insider, “Mexican immigrants contribute about 4 percent to total U.S. GDP and they represent nearly 60 percent of unauthorized workers”. In states such as Nevada, Texas, Arizona and California, Mexican immigrants have contributed the most to the economy. Mexican immigrants also contribute the most to agriculture, construction, and food services. “In terms of contribution to U.S. GDP by sector about 5 percent of Mexican immigrants are engaged in agriculture forestry and fishing but they contribute to about 18 percent of U.S. GDP in this sector. Mexican immigrants contribute 13.4 percent to the construction sector's output and about 11.7 percent to the accommodation and food services sector's output.” (Business Insider). According to the American Immigration Council, if all unauthorized immigrants were removed from the United States, the country would lose \$551.6 billion in economic activity, \$245 billion in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and approximately 2.8 million jobs, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a 2008 report by the Perryman Group”.

Culturally, Mexican immigrants have affected the United States through things such as the implementation of the Cinco de Mayo holiday. Although the celebrations of this holiday are different between the two countries, Mexican immigrants have brought a part of their culture to

America and successfully assimilated an important tradition. Other important Mexican holidays, such as Dia de los Muertos, are also widely celebrated in the U.S. although obviously differently than how it is celebrated in its country of origin. According to the Library of Congress, “Mexican immigrants and their descendants occupy a more significant place in American cultural life than ever before. Mexican Americans often serve as high government officials, as well as local mayors, sheriffs, and school board members. Prominent artists and entertainers...all help keep Mexican Americans in the public eye. Mexican Americans now live in all regions of the country and can be found in most professions and trades. The greatest impact of Mexican immigration, though, may be its contribution to the growing Latin American influence on the everyday life of all Americans. Government projections show that, by the next two generations, more than 25 percent of the U.S. population will be of Latin American origin.” According to the Library of Congress, another huge factor of assimilation is the implementation of the growing Spanish language. “The nation's clothing, music, architecture, literature, and food have all been influenced by our growing Latin and Mexican American populations. American English has been most profoundly affected by immigration from Mexico and other Spanish-speaking nations. More people in the U.S. speak Spanish than ever before, and many find it a great advantage to speak more than one language” (Library of Congress).

The biggest aspect of life that Mexican immigrants have received from the United States is opportunity. Although, statistically, Mexican immigrants typically work lower-end jobs in the agriculture or construction field, they often receive benefits such as higher pay and health benefits from these jobs that they could not receive in Mexico. Another huge aspect is the level of education that Mexican immigrants can receive. This all began in the late 1800s and early 1900s when “The desire of low-income migrant families from Mexico to provide their children

with opportunities for education” (Countries and their Cultures). Mexican immigrants have a much greater opportunity of receiving secondary education when they come to the U.S., and the level of education that they receive is of substantially higher quality.

Mexico as a whole has contributed a lot to the United States. The U.S. wouldn't be such a melting pot of cultures if not for the help from Mexican immigrants who brought a massive amount of culture to the north. For Mexican immigrants, most signs lead to predictions of rising status and higher population in the United States. According to the Pew Research Center, “Hispanics will rise from 14% of the population in 2005 to 29% in 2050”. They say that “The Hispanic population, 42 million in 2005, will rise to 128 million in 2050, tripling in size. Latinos will be 29% of the population, compared with 14% in 2005. Latinos will account for 60% of the nation's population growth from 2005 to 2050” (Pew Research Center). However, it is important to note that although immigration is predicted to be the driving force of the population growth of the U.S. in the next 50 years, other possible changes in the future regarding immigration policy or even anything else could potentially affect the predictions. According to the Huffington Post, “As the baby-boom generation sails into retirement and the Mexican birth rate decreases, the U.S. will have a shortage of both skilled and unskilled labor, and will have to turn to other foreign countries to meet demand”. A bipartisan group of U.S. senators called the “gang of eight” are currently putting the finishing up an immigration reform proposal. This proposal is expected to include “a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, though critics want assurance that the federal government also will better secure the border” (Huffington Post). However, according to the Huffington Post, “In the future, Mexico may not be able to fill the void in the U.S. labor market. Currently, there may be more immigrants returning to Mexico than entering the U.S., according to the Pew Hispanic Center”. In addition to that, the birth rate in

Mexico has gone down from about 7 children per mother (1970) to about 2 children per mother (2007). “Mexico’s growing economy and middle class will make emigrating to a foreign country less attractive for many” (Huffington Post).

Mexican Americans have contributed to American society in many ways, such as politically, economically and culturally. There have been many Latino’s who have held an office in recent America’s politics, and many of them were Mexican American. Especially in states like California and Texas, it is normal for a large percentage of politicians to be Latino, and a large proportion of them is Mexican American. A huge demographic change and influence, is the percentage of Latinos of the population. Whereas 13.4 % of America’s population is black, 16% is Hispanic, and the largest group within the Hispanics are Mexican American. The educational level of Latin American’s is seen as a concern, since the high school and especially college graduation level is very low, especially compared to White-, Asian- and even African-American’s. In America’s economy today seems to be highly dependent on a highly educated workforce, and if the percentage of uneducated/ lower educated Latin (Mexican) Americans keeps rising, the economy will most likely adjust with it. Another possibility is that these Latin American’s without education will be the backbone of America’s economics, in the sense of them taking care of the jobs (such as mining, farming, and being a help in richer households) that higher educated people are in need of and that nobody else in the society wants to take care of.

Another contribution of Mexican American’s is their culture integrated in America’s culture. As written in ‘La Nueva California’ by David E. Hayes-Bautista, a 1849 “Gold rush” had attracted tens of thousands of Latino miners from Mexico, who stayed and brought with them their language, religion, and music which they then integrated in the existing Anglo-American culture. A few more examples of the cultural influence are newspapers, circuses,

musicians, and books circulating between the Mexican Americans. This was of course especially the case in California, Texas, and New Mexico, but as time went on also extended to other parts of the U.S. Mexican American's in return, received so many things back from the U.S. There is a reason why Mexicans keep coming to the U.S., even though it is dangerous and hard to make the trip (unless they come legally, which is still difficult). They are looking for a better life, a better future for themselves and their kids, a better education and political situation, and I believe most of them found that here. Mexico has a huge part of influencing American culture, in terms of everything from food to music. Taco Bell, an American fast-food chain, can claim its roots as a variety of Tex-Mex foods. Despite being highly Americanized, other places such as Chipotle, Tijuana Flatts, and Moe's can also claim that they have a Mexican influence in such dishes like tacos, burritos, nachos, and quesadillas. Tex-Mex food is derived from the culinary creations of Tejanos, who are residents of Texas that have either Mexican American or Creole Spanish heritage. Such music and dances, such as ranchera and mariachi, have had some popularity in the United States.

Mexican Americans in the United States today are still facing social discrimination, and the current political climate and candidates such as Donald Trump are not helping break the stereotypes. They are constantly being portrayed as lazy, and accused of "stealing jobs away from hard working Americans. Studies have shown that the educational levels of second-generation Mexican Americans improved dramatically, but the third and fourth generations failed to surpass, and the educational levels of all Mexican Americans still lag behind the national average. Economic status improved for second generation, but is still alarmingly low for later generations. Compared to other Hispanic subgroups, it has been much more of a struggle for Mexican Americans to assimilate and get accepted because of socioeconomic factors.

Mexican immigrants are the the largest immigrant origin group in the country, with 28% of the 42.4 million immigrant population (5.6 million unauthorized Mexican immigrants) living in the United States, one very large thing Mexicans have brought to the U.S. in regards to politics is the discussion of overall immigration reform. It's hard to ignore the millions of illegal immigrants coming to the country every year, but it's even harder to see our political system tear families of illegal immigrants apart. Despite the controversy and stigma surrounding this year's election, one thing Republicans and Democrats can agree on is the fact that how we deal with current illegal immigrants, particularly from Mexico, is wrong. Their methods of dealing with immigration might be vastly different, but we have Mexico to thank for bringing into the topic of discussion immigration reform.

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