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## Roll Over, Michael Barone—Even Fourth-Generation Mexicans Are Failing

By [Steve Sailer](#)

Social scientists get a [lot of guff](#) for [not being "real scientists"](#). But I've [always](#) admired the best ones immensely.

Sure, an astronomer (say) can tell you with exactitude [when the next solar eclipse will occur](#). Still, most people don't feel strongly about the timing of eclipses. It's easy to be objective when you deal with things rather than with people.

In contrast, human beings get [passionate](#) about [what is uncovered by social scientists](#). In fact, much of what social scientists have learned has been [gut-wrenching](#) for [the researchers themselves](#), who typically fall well to the left politically.

Social scientists can't always overcome their biases. But when they do, the results are admirable.

The newest example: the impressive multi-generational study of Mexican-American assimilation carried out by two UCLA sociologists, [Vilma Ortiz](#) [[Email her](#)] and [Edward E. Telles](#) [[Email him](#)] of UCLA's [Chicano Studies Research Center](#).

Their 2008 book, [Generations of Exclusion: Mexican Americans, Assimilation, and Race](#), decisively concludes a long-running debate about Mexican immigrants.

Telles and Ortiz write:

**"Despite sixty years of [political](#) and [legal](#) battles to improve the education of Mexican Americans, they continue to have the [lowest average education levels](#) and the [highest](#) high school [dropout rates](#) among major ethnic and racial groups in the United States. ... However, leading analysts, apparently believing in the universality of assimilation, argue that this is the result of a large first and second generation population still adjusting to American society. ... These and other scholars predict that Mexican Americans will have the same levels of education and socioeconomic status as the dominant non-Hispanic white population by the fourth generation."**

East Coast pundits, such as [Michael Barone](#) and [Tamar Jacoby](#), frequently suggest that, while Mexican Americans may appear to be lagging alarmingly, that's mostly because they've all just recently arrived from Mexico.

After all, whoever saw a Mexican in [New York](#), [Washington](#), or [Boston](#) before the last decade or two? So their future is wide open! [Pigs could have wings!](#)

This will happen by the third generation, or maybe the fourth—but in any case, *Real Soon Now*.

Due to "**the great, slow, mysterious absorptive alchemy of assimilation**" (to quote Jacoby's [review](#) in *National Review* of Barone's 2001 book [The New Americans](#)), the descendents of Mexican immigrants will no doubt be flourishing just like the descendents of the Ellis Island immigrants.

So why enforce the borders?

This conventional wisdom, however, doesn't make much sense.

- First, three or four generations is a *long* time to wait for the problems caused by today's illegal immigration to abate.

As John Maynard Keynes [pointed out](#), in the long run, we are all dead. Personally, I will be dead and gone well before the fourth generation offspring of [today's immigrants](#) are in their prime.

- Second, it's particularly ridiculous to bet the country on a multigeneration-long gamble on illegal immigration when the promised payoff by the 22nd Century is *not* that we'll then be better off—the pledge is merely that by then we won't be as worse off as we've been for the whole century!
- Third, if we don't stop immigration, as we did in 1924, then this “**long run**” can't even *theoretically* arrive.
- Fourth, and most important, the conventional wisdom is *not true*.

To natives of the Southwestern United States, like myself, this conventional wisdom that Mexicans are just newcomers who will turn into [Italians](#) or [Jews](#) in "**only**" three or four generations is simply Eastern ignorance.

Mexican Americans are new to the East, but they've been in the [Southwestern U.S.](#) since [before there was a U.S.](#) The 1920 Census found one million Hispanics in the U.S.—that's an ample sample from which to draw conclusions.

Social scientists in the mid-20th Century paid intense interest to [European ethnic newcomers](#) and [African Americans](#). But Latinos were largely overlooked. Telles and Ortiz note that Mexican Americans

**"were well off the radar screen of the largely Eastern and Midwestern-based social sciences. At best, they were viewed as some inexplicable frontier anomaly."**

This lack of awareness *still* allows Eastern writers descended from [Ellis Island immigrants](#) to spin fantasies about the benign long-run effects of Mexican immigration, based largely on ethnocentric nostalgia about their own lineages' spunky underdog wonderfulness.

Indeed, many Eastern elites seem to regard expressions of skepticism about illegal Mexican immigrants as [personal insults](#) directed at their [beloved ancestors](#). They're more concerned about the issues of 1908 than of

2008.

During the [Great Society](#), UCLA organized the first major survey, the [Mexican American Study Project](#). In 1965, UCLA academics interviewed 1576 individuals of [Mexican descent](#) in the two largest Mexican American metropolises of the time, Los Angeles County and San Antonio.

In 1965, the city of San Antonio was 40 percent Mexican, while the much larger LA County was 10 percent Mexican. Many Mexican Americans in [sleepy and segregated San Antonio](#) were mired in poverty. Their distant kin in [booming and more open Los Angeles](#) averaged about 50 percent higher incomes.

The respondents were classified into first generation (Mexican-born immigrants), second generation (American-born children of immigrants), and third generation (grandchildren of immigrants).

This kind of *cross-sectional* analysis is valuable but it's not totally definitive about assimilation. For that, you need *longitudinal* analyses that follow people over time. However, surveys that cover decades are extremely expensive.

(They are becoming more common, nonetheless. Upcoming: the incredibly ambitious [National Children's Study](#), which will track 100,000 children from *before their conceptions*, I am told. DNA samples will be taken from the parents and children and most conceivable environmental influences will be monitored over the years. So we'll eventually have definitive answers about nature v. nurture.)

Fortunately, workers in 1992 stumbled upon the 1965 survey forms in a storage room at the UCLA library. Sociologists affiliated with UCLA's [Chicano Studies Research Center](#) came up with the [audacious notion](#) of searching out the original respondents, then interviewing them again, along with some of their children. This would turn the old 1965 cross-sectional study into a much-needed longitudinal one.

This would allow progress to be tracked across four generations. And researchers could even inquire about the children's children, extending the analysis out to a *fifth* generation since immigration.

Years of detective work followed as the team of professors and grad students located the respondents who had been no more than 50 years old in [1965](#). In 2000, 35 years after the first survey, the new UCLA team re-interviewed 758 of the original subjects (who were born from 1915-1948). That's a 57% response rate, which is good after three and a half decades.

What's really interesting, though, is in 2000 that they also interviewed about 700 of the 1965 respondents' children, who were born 1946-66, roughly during the [Baby Boom](#). The 700 Baby Boomer children were all American-born and represent second through fourth generation Mexican-Americans.

To keep things simple in my summary of the findings, I'll ignore the original respondents and just report on these 700 Baby Boomer children of the old respondents (or, in one case, the Baby Boomer children's Generation X children).

Telles and Ortiz write with justified pride: "**As far as we know, this research design is unique and for many reasons it is the most appropriate for addressing the actual intergenerational integration of [immigrants and their descendants](#).**"

*Generations of Exclusion* lays out their findings methodically.

Their [multiple regression analyses](#) show that the key factor, driving all the others, is education. They conclude:

**"Throughout this book, our statistical models have shown that the low education levels of Mexican Americans have impeded most other types of assimilation, thus reinforcing a range of ethnic boundaries between them and white Americans."**

Telles and Ortiz don't have information on quality of education, such as SAT test scores might provide, just on quantity of years at school. But that's enough.

As is well known, American-born Mexicans average more years of education than do their Mexican-born immigrant ancestors. Unfortunately, as Telles and Ortiz report, the third and fourth generations of Mexican Americans do not continue to close the gap relative to non-Hispanic whites:

**"In education, which best determines life chances in the United States, assimilation is interrupted by the second generation and stagnates thereafter."**

The fourth generation (whose *grandparents* were born in America) was particularly unaccomplished:

**"Sadly and directly in contradistinction to assimilation theory, the fourth generation differs the most from whites, with a [college completion rate](#) of only 6 percent [compared to 35 percent for whites of that era]."**

The fourth-generation Baby Boomers averaged 0.7 years less schooling than the second and third generation Mexican Americans born in the same era.

Telles and Ortiz found:

**"...the educational progress of Mexican Americans does not improve over the generations. At best, given the statistical margin of error, our data show no improvement in education over the generations-since-immigration and in some cases even suggest a decline."**

In 2000, the UCLA interviewers also asked the Baby Boomer children of the original subjects about their *own* children (i.e., the grandchildren of the 1965 respondents). These grandchildren (who are third to fifth generation Mexican Americans, Generation X-ers born in the 1960s and 1970s) "**seemed to be doing no better than their parents**" at [graduating from high school](#).

But, don't worry, be happy. The *sixth* generation will assuredly get it into gear and catch up with the American mainstream. Only evil, uncouth people could possibly doubt that. Ask [Michael Barone](#). [[Email Barone](#)]

Seriously, America is *supposed* to be a [middle class country](#). Yet, what we appear to have on our hands here is a "**Permanent Proletariat**," which our [elites have corruptly saddled us with](#).

The Chicano Studies Research Center sociologists did find some good news on education. The 12 percent of the 700 Baby Boomers who started high school in [Catholic or other private schools](#) averaged 1.7 more years of schooling than the public school kids. Even after adjusting statistically for their higher average parental status, the Catholic school kids averaged an extra year of education.

Unfortunately, Hispanics don't seem to be making much of an effort to enroll their children in Catholic schools. Although Latinos now make up [24 percent of preschoolers](#) (up sharply from 19 percent in 2000), Catholic school enrollment is dropping. *USA Today* reported recently:

**"As Pope Benedict XVI prepares to visit the USA next week, a [report](#) released today by a Washington education think tank finds that more than 1,300 Catholic schools, most of them in**

**big cities, have closed since 1990. ... Overall, Catholic school enrollment now stands at about 2.3 million, down from the peak of 5.2 million in the early 1960s.**" [[Catholic School Enrollment Dwindling](#) by Greg Toppo]

There's a popular Mexican saying: "*Me vale madre.*" It translates, PG-13 style, as "**I don't give a damn.**" And that seems to sum up the trend in [Mexican attitudes toward education](#) as they spend more generations in America. Indeed, third generation and higher Mexican Americans appear to be less likely to earn a college degree than African Americans, even though Hispanics [average higher IQs](#).

The UCLA researchers found, by doing a multiple regression analysis of the factors correlated with years of schooling, that

**"...rather than improvements in education in subsequent generations-since-immigration, as assimilation theory predicts, we find quite the opposite. ... Greater parental education, household income, social and cultural capital, and fewer children all contribute to more schooling. However, when these factors are held constant, the highest levels of schooling are for those who immigrated as children but were educated in the United States and the lowest for the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren of immigrants."**

The people of Mexican descent who show the most enthusiasm for school relative to their resources appear to be the "**1.5 generation**"—those who [came from Mexico as small children](#).

We Americans like to self-congratulate ourselves on how morally uplifting our culture is. But the objective evidence for this proposition is spotty. Which is why it's crucial that we allow in only immigrants with [more human capital](#) than the American average—because lots of immigrant lineages decay culturally as they [assimilate](#) in [Britney Spears's](#) America. We need to start with people well above the norm.

Telles and Ortiz conclude their chapter on Mexican Americans' education:

**"Unlike European Americans, education [gets worse as culture wears off](#)—a potentially explosive combination."**

Education is the most important element in *Generations of Exclusion*, but there is much else of interest. The researchers didn't ask directly about crime, but they did find that about 24 percent of the Baby Boomer generation admitted to having a "[family member involved in gang lifestyle.](#)" That one-in-four level was quite stable across the second, third, and fourth generations.

The great majority of American-born Mexican Americans could speak English, but according to the interviewers 24 percent of the fourth generation Baby Boomers still had a Spanish accent. This marks them out as a distinctive minority.

Self-identification as a minority was strong among the American-born Baby Boomer children (especially considering that nine percent of them had one white Anglo parent). "[Mexican American](#)" or some variation was the ethnic identity of choice for 44 percent. "**Hispanic**" (or another [pan-Latin term such as "Latino"](#)) was selected by 29 percent. "**Mexican**" or "*Mexicano*" was favored by 17 percent. Only eight percent selected "**American**," one percent "**white**," and one percent "**Anglo**."

Economically, Mexican Americans in poorer, more conservative San Antonio made more progress, reducing their income gap with Los Angeles Mexican Americans from 50 percent in 1965 to only 15 percent in 2000. Since in 2008 the cost of living in Los Angeles is [65 percent higher](#) than in San Antonio, the average American-born Mexican American's standard of living in San Antonio is no doubt higher than in LA.

A major reason for the relatively lousier economic progress made from 1965 to 2000 by LA's Mexican Americans: Los Angeles's enormous immigration. In contrast, Telles and Ortiz note that San Antonio has had "**surprisingly low levels**" of immigration since 1965.

The incomes of LA-born Chicanos were squeezed from below by the [flood of illegal aliens](#) from the south of the border, and from above by the [energetic legal immigrants](#) from places like [South Korea](#) and [Armenia](#), who came to dominate small business in LA, squeezing Mexican Americans out of small business ownership.

LA is developing a sort of "**neo-Hindu**" or [Ottoman Empire](#)-style quasi-caste system of [apparently hereditary occupations](#), where the [Cambodians bake the donuts](#), the [Filipinos draw the blood samples](#), and so forth. This has left American-born Mexican Americans fewer career paths open to them—other than to [boss around all the Spanish-speaking illegal immigrants](#).

In contrast, in San Antonio, with less immigration from 1965-2000, Mexican American citizens faced much less competition. So they made more economic progress.

It's all supply and demand.

The big story, though, remains education. In summary, the Telles and Ortiz assert:

**"America's public schools have [failed](#) most Mexican Americans, contrary to what they did for European Americans."**

Perhaps.

I suspect, however, it might be more accurate to say:

***"More Mexican Americans have [failed America's public schools](#), contrary to what [Asian Americans](#) have done."***

Still, I won't press the point on whose fault this mess ultimately is, since the two leftist Hispanic scholars have honestly made more than enough of what lawyers call "[admissions against interest](#)".

Their book is a monument to disinterested, objective social science.

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