



LATINO POLICY & ISSUES BRIEF

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MEXICAN AMERICANS AND INTEGRATION AND SEGREGATION

by
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A report drawn from *Generations of Exclusion: Mexican Americans, Assimilation, and Race* (2008), an update of the classic *The Mexican American People* (1970), a longitudinal and intergenerational study on the extent of assimilation among Mexican Americans over four generations.

One facet of assimilation is the degree to which members of a racial/ethnic group are exposed to or interact with members of other groups. Exposure and interaction are indicated by residential integration, intermarriage, and interracial friendships. Our study reveals that Mexican Americans' exposure to other groups generally increases with each successive generation and that social isolation for the group has decreased since the 1960s. The assimilation of Mexican Americans is slow, however, compared to that of European origin groups (Alba and Nee 2003).¹

RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION

When immigrants come to the United States they tend to settle near those of the same ethnic group. Eventually they venture out to new neighborhoods,

and their children often live even farther away from the ethnic community. Assimilation theorists predict that the large majority of immigrant families will be fully integrated in American cities by the third generation (Alba and Nee 2003). As Figure 1 shows, residential segregation among Mexican Americans is declining by generation. The percentage of original respondents residing in the ethnic community in 1965 dropped from 59 percent for the first generation to 38 percent for the third generation. This did not change much between 1965 and 2000, however. Fully 54 percent of second-generation children continued to reside in predominately Hispanic neighborhoods. Among fourth-generation children, 38 percent resided in these neighborhoods, just as they did when they were growing up with their third-generation parents in 1965.

These findings reflect the fact that Hispanic neighborhoods are more common today in Los Angeles and San Antonio than they were in the 1960s. Residential assimilation has occurred, but it has been offset by the influx of immigrants into Hispanic neighborhoods, especially in Los Angeles. Residential segregation reinforces the use of ethnic language and culture, which in turn generates more ethnic concentration. Respondents that remained in Los Angeles and San Antonio tended not to experience residential assimilation,

but those who moved out of the greater Los Angeles and San Antonio areas settled in cities and neighborhoods that were more integrated.

INTERMARRIAGE

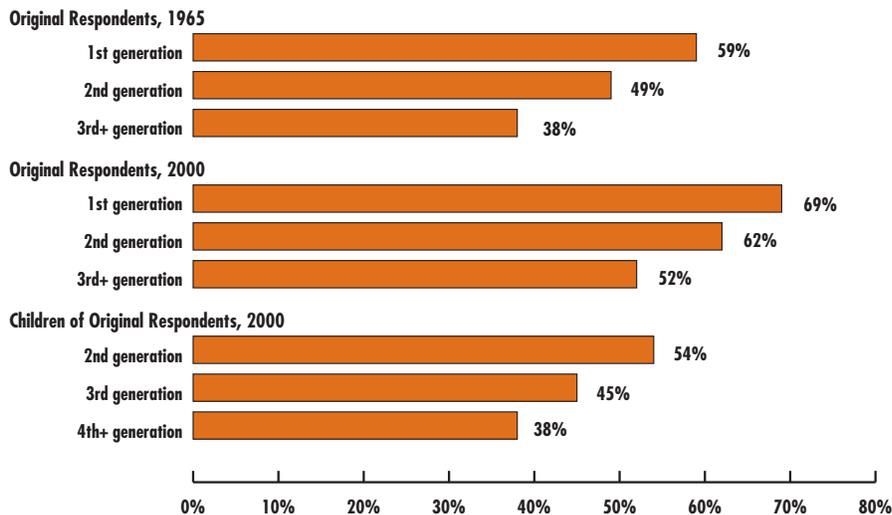
Intermarriage is often considered to be the ultimate sign of assimilation because it indicates a willingness to cross racial/ethnic boundaries at a very intimate level. Assimilation analysts believe that when a large number of persons are willing to accept members of other groups as spouses, social boundaries between groups are relatively weak (Alba and Nee 2003). Ties to an ethnic-group culture tend to diminish for the second and third generations, and as immigration slows and intolerance abates, intermarriage is expected to increase. According to assimilation theories, most of the third generation will no longer marry within their group (Alba and Nee 2003).

Figure 2 shows that marital assimilation increased across all generations. In 1965, only 10 percent of first-generation and 17 percent of third-generation original respondents reported that they had married non-Hispanics. In 2000, percentages for intermarriage were much higher for third- and fourth-generation children, yet most children reported that they were married to other Hispanics. Intermarriage is related to residential segregation: a Mexican American child who grew up in a relatively integrated neighborhood in the 1960s was more likely to marry a non-Hispanic person as an adult.

FRIENDSHIPS

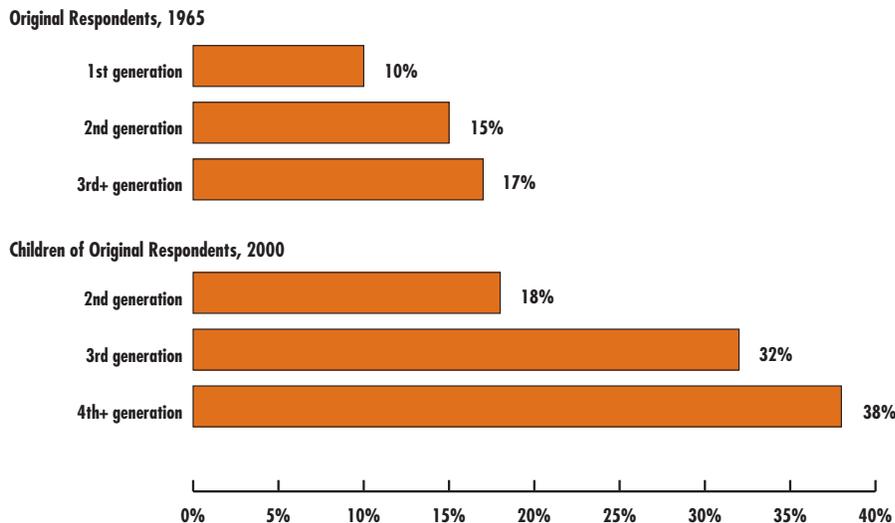
The number of friendships that a person has outside his or her ethnic/racial group

Figure 1. Percentage Living in Mostly Hispanic Neighborhoods



Source: Telles and Ortiz 2008.
 Note: Third- and fourth-generation respondents include subsequent generations.

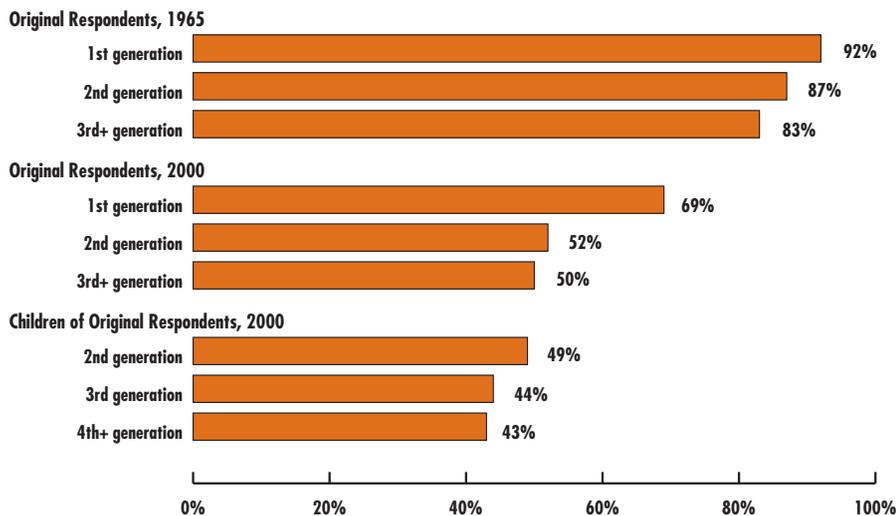
Figure 2. Percentage Married to a Non-Hispanic



Source: Telles and Ortiz 2008.
 Note: Third- and fourth-generation respondents include subsequent generations.

is another indicator of assimilation. As with intermarriage, residential assimilation is a major determinant of the development of such friendships. Figure 3 shows that the friendships of all respondents were more diverse in

2000 than in 1965. The percentage of second- and third-generation original respondents reporting that their friendships were mostly or only with other Mexican Americans fell by more than 30 percentage points between 1965

Figure 3. Percentage Having Mostly or Only Mexican American Friends

Source: Telles and Ortiz 2008.

Note: Third- and fourth-generation respondents include subsequent generations.

and 2000. By the fourth generation, the percentage reporting mostly or only Mexican American friendships had dropped to 43 percent.

CONCLUSION

The social interaction of Mexican Americans with other groups has increased with each generation, consistent with the predictions of assimilation theory. Nevertheless, residential and marital integration is slow. Although they reported

considerable social contact with others, especially white Americans, many fourth-generation Mexican Americans had Hispanic spouses, lived in mostly Hispanic neighborhoods, and had mostly Mexican American friends. To a large extent, this ethnic retention is the result of continuing immigration from Mexico.

NOTES

1. The immigration of Mexicans to the United States is the largest and longest migration from a single country in our nation's history. Scholars

disagree considerably on how extensively Mexican Americans are assimilating into U.S. society. Results reported in *Generations of Exclusion* reveal that Mexican Americans are not assimilating as consistently or as rapidly as predicted.

These results are drawn from a longitudinal and intergenerational research study based at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center. In 1965–66, Mexican Americans living in Los Angeles and San Antonio were interviewed (referred to as the 1965 survey). Of these original respondents, 684 were re-interviewed in 1998–2002 (referred to as the 2000 survey), plus 758 of their adult children (up to two per family). The two surveys provide data for a systematic analysis of assimilation over four generations. Key measures of assimilation—including education, socioeconomic status, language, religion, family values, intermarriage, residential segregation, ethnic identity, and political preference—are explored in CSRC Policy and Issues Briefs Nos. 17–21.

WORKS CITED

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MEXICAN AMERICANS AND INTEGRATION AND SEGREGATION

A longitudinal and intergenerational study on Mexican American assimilation shows that social isolation has decreased for Mexican Americans, yet their assimilation has been slower than it was for European-origin groups.

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