

Gray Matters

## Hispanics' 'third-generation U-turn'

*Immigrants rise. Their children rise. Their grandchildren fall back.*

By Álvaro Ortiz

[Houston Chronicle](#) (October 8, 2014)

A [recent study](#) from The Urban Institute reveals what María Enchautegui, the study's author, calls "the U-turn" of third-generation Hispanic immigrants: The first and second generations make economic and other gains in the United States; but the third generation falls back.

Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Enchautegui found that, among Hispanics 16 to 18 years old, 86 percent of first-generation immigrants were enrolled in school in 2010 and 2013 -- a rate that rose to 91 percent in the second generation, but declined to 87 percent in the third generation.

A similar pattern held in Hispanics 19 to 22 years old; and in Latina immigrants from 16 to 22 who neither attended school or worked.

Participation in community activities also increased from the first to the second generation, she found -- but slightly decreased for the third generation. The same went for voter turnout in the 2010 mid-terms and the 2012 Presidential election.

Although Enchautegui's data does not show why this U-turn happens, she offers a theory: The first generation is full of immigrant zeal; the second generation grows up hearing their parents' immigrant narrative, stories of hard work and self-betterment. The researcher thinks that perhaps the third generation, less exposed to those stories, becomes a bit complacent.

That theory is somewhat backed by other scholars, such as Vilma Ortiz. Ortiz, from the sociology department at the University of California-Los Angeles analyzed the life of Mexican-Americans in California in her 2008 book "Generations of Exclusion."

Another possible explanation for the U-turn is that some education professionals have low expectations for Hispanic students. That's what Gilda Ochoa, of the sociology department at Pomona College, suggests in her 2013 book "Academic Profiling: Latinos, Asian-Americans, and the Achievement Gap."

Ochoa spent 18 months conducting about 200 interviews with faculty members and students from a Southern California public high school. Based on her research, some Hispanic students were ridiculed by instructors for enrolling in advanced courses. In some cases, when they sought academic counseling about their college options, they faced more obstacles than their Asian peers. Ochoa refers to this as a "system of academic profiling." It's not a term that she coined, but one used by one of the very teachers she interviewed.

Though Ochoa's research focused on a single school, it's not hard to believe that academic profiling occurs across the U.S.

Enchautegui's U-turn study goes in the opposite direction: Instead of focusing tightly, she draws on national data. But it's easy to see how her the trends she detected particularly affect Texas. According to demographic projections, Hispanics will become 50 percent or more of the state's population around the year 2040.

That demographic moment will arrive sooner -- around 2030 -- in Harris County. And many members of that new Hispanic majority will be third-generation immigrants.

Enchautegui emphasizes the third generation's U-turn and its causes need more research. I agree: We cannot prevent what we do not understand.

As much of a cliché as it may be, I firmly believe that America is the land of opportunity, and that the people who come to work and live here are seeking a better future -- perhaps even more for their descendants than for themselves. Grandparents dream of passing on their hard-won gains to their grandchildren. Fulfilling that dream only makes this country stronger.

*Alvaro Ortiz is a senior reporter for La Voz, the Spanish-language publication of the Houston Chronicle, and specializes in covering Houston's and Texas' Hispanic community.*