Mexican Immigrant Replenishment and the Continuing Significance of Ethnicity and Race[1]

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The literature on assimilation and ethnic identity formation largely assumes that the durability of ethnic boundaries is a function of the assimilation measures that sociologists commonly employ. But this literature fails to account adequately for the role of immigration patterns in explaining the durability and nature of ethnic boundaries. Using 123 in-depth interviews with later-generation Mexican Americans, this article shows that Mexican immigrant replenishment shapes ethnic boundaries and ethnic identity formation. The sizable immigrant population sharpens intergroup boundaries through the indirect effects of nativism and by contributing to the continuing significance of race in the lives of later-generation Mexican Americans. The presence of a large immigrant population also creates intragroup boundaries that run through the Mexican-origin population and that are animated by expectations about ethnic authenticity. The article illustrates the importance of immigrant replenishment to processes of assimilation and ethnic identity formation.

INTRODUCTION

The growth of the immigrant population in recent decades has raised questions about whether today's immigrants and their descendents will

integrate into American society. Social scientists often frame their questions by comparing today's immigrants to the large wave of Europeans that came to the United States during a previous era (Foner 2000, 2005; Perlmann 2005). The latter's assimilation may seem unremarkable from a contemporary standpoint, but perhaps it should be considered a "miracle" (Greeley 1976), given the inferior place that European immigrants once occupied in American society (Higham [1955] 1963). For European immigrants and their children, ethnicity, and indeed race,[2] once significantly structured daily life, determining their access to schools, labor unions, marriage partners, and neighborhoods, as well as their quotidian interactions with the native-born population (Higham [1955] 1963; Roediger 1991, 2005; Ignatiev 1995; Jacobson 1998).

Yet, with the birth of each new generation in the United States, the salience of race and ethnicity for these "white ethnics" declined. The structural aspect of their assimilation—movement out of ethnically concentrated neighborhoods, college attendance, intergenerational gains in occupational status, and, most significantly, intermarriage—ultimately led to a thinning of ethnicity's importance in their lives (Alba 1990; Waters 1990) and to their becoming "white." The ethnic boundaries that once defined these groups have all but disappeared, leading to a symbolic form of ethnicity that is characterized by "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, p. 9). Indeed, this symbolic ethnicity is an inconsequential aspect of their social identity that they can invoke optionally (Waters 1990).

Social scientists have largely assumed that the fading of ethnic boundaries and the resulting symbolic, optional, and inconsequential nature of ethnic identity are functions of the measures that assimilation models commonly employ: socioeconomic status, residential location, language abilities, and intermarriage (see Waters and Jiménez 2005). But this canonical account falls short by not adequately addressing the role that immigration patterns play in ethnic identity formation. The symbolic,

[2] I use Cornell and Hartmann's definitions of ethnicity and race. Borrowing from Schermerhorn (1978), they define ethnicity as "a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood" (Cornell and Hartmann 1998, p. 19). They define race as "a group of human beings socially defined on the basis of physical characteristics" (p. 24).

optional, and inconsequential ethnic identity of white ethnics today was formed against a backdrop of radically reduced levels of immigration. World War I, restrictive immigration laws passed in the 1920s, the onslaught of the Great Depression in the 1930s, and World War II combined to slow European immigration to a mere trickle. The virtual cessation of European immigration meant that each generation born in the United States came of age in an American society that was decidedly less immigrant in character, and these American-born ethnics thus had less contact with individuals who carried a "thicker" (Cornell and Hartmann 1998) form of ethnic identity. Yet the literature on assimilation is relatively silent on explaining *how* the halt of immigration contributed to the racial and ethnic identity formation of white ethnics.[3] Hitherto, social scientists have merely asserted that immigration patterns affect ethnic identity (Massey 1995; Alba and Nee 2003), or claims about its effect have been wrapped in polemic assertions about the relationship between immigration and American identity (Huntington 2004).

The lack of explicit theorizing is perhaps due to the dearth of sociological research on the ethnic identity formation of later-generation individuals from groups for which immigration is ongoing—groups that experience immigrant replenishment.[4] If ethnicity takes a symbolic, optional form after immigration ceases, what form does it take when the immigrant population is replenished with new waves of immigrants? This article takes up this question by considering the case of the Mexican-origin population in the United States.[5] My study is primarily concerned with the effect of immigrant replenishment on the boundaries that distinguish ethnic groups, and not the cultural "stuff" these boundaries enclose (Barth 1969). Ethnic boundaries "are patterns of social interaction that give rise to, and subsequently reinforce, in-group members' self-

[3] See Roediger (2005, chap. 5) for an account of how the halt of European immigration affected perceptions of European-origin groups shortly after the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924.

[4] Tuan's (1998) analysis of later-generation Japanese- and Chinese-origin Americans is a notable exception. Her analysis demonstrates the ways in which immigration from all Asian countries (not just Japan and China) shapes her respondents' ethnic identity. Likewise, Erdmans (1998) documents the divisions among Polish Americans and Polish immigrants in Chicago Polonia over how best to advocate for change in communist Poland. Neither of these groups experience replenishment on a scale that matches Mexican immigrant replenishment.

[5] In this article, the term *Mexican American* refers to individuals whose ancestry is Mexican and whose family has been in the United States since before 1940. I use *Mexican immigrant* to refer to individuals who were born in Mexico and now reside in the United States. *Mexican origin* refers to all people, foreign or native-born, who are of Mexican descent. I refer to people who have no Mexican ancestry as *non-Mexicans* and I use *white* and *Anglo* interchangeably.

definition and outsiders' confirmation of group distinctions" (Sanders 2002, p. 327). In practice, ethnic boundaries provide a basis on which individuals distinguish "us" from "them" in everyday life.

This study shows that immigrant replenishment is a significant factor determining ethnic identity formation among later-generation Mexican Americans. It demonstrates that ongoing immigration shapes the extent to which ethnicity is a symbolic, optional, and inconsequential aspect of identity. Interviews with later-generation Mexican Americans and participant observation in Garden City, Kansas, and Santa Maria, California, provide evidence that although Mexican Americans exhibit significant signs of structural assimilation, the influx of Mexican immigrants sharpens the boundaries that circumscribe Mexican Americans and creates boundaries that slice through the Mexican-origin population. The data reveal two types of boundaries that are reinforced by the large presence of immigrants. The first are *intergroup* boundaries, which animate distinctions between Mexican Americans and non-Mexicans. Mexican Americans confront intergroup boundaries in two ways. First, they experience the indirect effects of nativist sentiment aimed at immigrants. Foreign-born Mexicans are the primary targets of anti-immigrant antipathy, but expressions of this antipathy have the indirect effect of sharpening the boundaries between Mexican Americans and non-Mexicans. Second, Mexican immigrant replenishment refreshes the salience of race in the lives of Mexican Americans. In a context of heavy Mexican immigration, skin color serves as a cue of ancestry, nativity, and, in some cases, legal status. The most apparent way in which the large immigrant population shapes race is that Mexican Americans are sometimes mistaken for foreigners. But even Mexican Americans with lighter skin are marked by non-Mexicans as "foreign" when the latter use surname as an indicator of ancestry and nativity.

Mexican American respondents also confront *intragroup* boundaries, or social fissures that run through the Mexican-origin population. Intragroup boundaries become evident when respondents face high expectations about group authenticity from Mexican immigrants and young members of the second generation. Mexican immigrants define "authentic" Mexican ethnicity, and Mexican Americans are treated as ethnic outsiders when they are unable to live up to the criteria for group membership that coethnics impose. Mexican Americans respond to such boundaries by attempting to avoid them altogether and by challenging those who impose them.

THE MEXICAN-ORIGIN POPULATION AND IMMIGRANT REPLENISHMENT

Mexicans first had a significant presence in the United States in the year 1848, when the United States and Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ending the U.S.-Mexican War.[6] The treaty stipulated that Mexico cede what is today the southwestern United States for $18 million. Under the treaty, ethnic Mexicans who lived in the southwestern territory—no more than 50,000 of them—became American citizens (Jaffe, Cullen, and Boswell 1980 [cited in Massey et al. 2002, p. 25]). The first significant wave of Mexican migrants did not begin entering the United States until shortly after the turn of the 20th century, however. The Mexican Revolution, combined with a growing demand for labor in the expanding agriculture industry in the United States, American labor shortages during World War I, and diminished numbers of Chinese and Japanese immigrant laborers,[7] "pulled" Mexicans northward in search of work. In Mexico, agrarian reform induced mobility among Mexican peasants, while an expanding rail system linked Mexico and the United States, easing the movement of migrants northward (Cardoso 1980).

Even as the U.S. Congress passed restrictive immigration quotas in the 1920s to drastically reduce levels of European immigration, it left open the legal pathway for Mexican immigrants. Lawmakers and rank-and-file Americans saw Mexicans as a preferred source of labor, since it was widely believed that they would eventually return to Mexico rather than permanently settle in the United States. But the onslaught of the Great Depression cast Mexican immigrants as low-wage replacements for Americans workers, souring perceptions of Mexican immigrant labor. In response, the U.S. government sponsored mass repatriations of Mexican immigrants during the 1930s, the only decade during which Mexican immigration declined.[8]

World War II and a growing agriculture industry in the western United States created renewed demand for Mexican immigrant labor. Beginning in 1942, the United States and Mexico entered into a bilateral guest worker program known formally as the Emergency Farm Labor Program, but more popularly called the Bracero Program. For more than two decades,

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[6] For a thorough and concise history of Mexican immigration, see chap. 3 in Massey, Durand, and Malone (2002).

[7] In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, effectively ending the flow of Chinese workers to the United States. When Japanese immigrant laborers took their place, similar nativist sentiment took hold, and the U.S. and Japanese governments signed the Gentlemen's Agreement in 1907, whereby Japan agreed to stop issuing passports to Japanese citizens who wished to emigrate to the United States.

[8] According to Massey et al. (2002, p. 34), 458,000 Mexicans were deported between 1929 and 1937.

until 1964, the Bracero Program supplied low-wage labor to American agriculture, primarily in the Southwest (Calavita 1992). A year after the program concluded, Congress passed sweeping immigration reform that allocated visas more equitably across countries and regions of the world. The reform included a cap on migrants from nations in the Western Hemisphere, including Mexico, and represented the first formal limitation on Mexican immigration.[9]

Following the end of the Bracero Program, a period of unauthorized Mexican immigration began that continues to the present. Former braceros who stayed in the United States provided a rich source of social capital for subsequent Mexican migrants (Massey et al. 2002, p. 42). More recent economic and policy forces have helped perpetuate the rise in unauthorized Mexican immigration. The passage of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which provided amnesty to more than 2 million unauthorized Mexican immigrants, added border security and introduced fines for employers who knowingly hire unauthorized immigrants. Each of these provisions, combined with the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border in the 1990s, had the unintended consequence of perpetuating unauthorized Mexican immigration (Massey et al. 2002; Cornelius 2005). Additionally, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), a trilateral trade accord among Canada, the United States, and Mexico that took effect in 1994, further integrated the U.S. and Mexican economies, creating the type of conditions that initiate and perpetuate migration (Massey 1999). Meanwhile, economic instability in Mexico widened the wage differentials that make northward migration attractive to Mexican migrants.

Today, Mexico is the largest source of immigration to the United States. Mexican immigrants make up nearly 9.8 million, or 30%, of the total foreign-born population (Passel 2004). A large proportion of the Mexican immigrant population is unauthorized. Passel (2006) estimates that more than half of all Mexican immigrants are in the United States without documentation.

Mexican migration to the United States is different from other immigration in many respects, including magnitude, proximity of the sending country, and prevalence of unauthorized entry. But the long history of Mexican immigration makes it especially distinctive from other immigrant groups.

[9] The 1965 immigration act placed a 20,000-person-per-year quota on all Eastern Hemisphere nations, and a cap was set at 170,000 for the Eastern Hemisphere overall. The 1965 law also capped visas for Western Hemisphere countries at 120,000 per year, without stipulating a per-country limit. In 1976, Congress imposed a 20,000-person-per-year visa limit (excluding family reunification) on Western Hemisphere countries, including Mexico.

Figure 1 compares the number of foreign-born individuals from Mexico with numbers from several prominent European sending countries with deep histories of immigration.[10] It is noteworthy that Mexican immigration continued to rise after European immigration declined. The diverging patterns are particularly prominent in the period after 1970, when the foreign-born Mexican population spiked as the number of foreign-born individuals from European countries continued its downward path. Indeed, later-generation Mexican Americans descended from early waves of immigration live in an American society where migration from their ancestral homeland remains prominent.[11] In sharp contrast, European-origin immigrants are largely absent from the ethnic landscape that later-generation white ethnics negotiate.

ASSIMILATION AND THE MEXICAN-ORIGIN POPULATION

The continuous influx of immigrants has created a Mexican-origin population that is a mix of immigrants, second-generation individuals, and later-generation descendents of earlier immigration waves. As table 1 shows, the Mexican-origin population is both large and generationally diverse. While a majority of Mexicans in the United States are either first or second generation (immigrants or children of immigrants), nearly one in three is third or later generation (grandchildren and beyond). As figure 1 and table 1 make clear, ethnic identity formation for later-generation Mexican Americans takes shape against a backdrop of heavy immigrant replenishment.

The composition of the Mexican-origin population, combined with Mexican Americans' history of colonization *and* immigration, has led sociologists to divergent conclusions about whether Mexican Americans are assimilating in ways reminiscent of the European immigrant groups of yesteryear or becoming part of a "rainbow underclass" (López and

[10] Other countries not listed in figure 1 also have long immigration histories in the United States. However, I compare Mexican immigration to European immigration because the sociological literature on later-generation individuals is largely based on descendents from the latter.

[11] The immigrant character of the Mexican-origin population was persistent throughout the 20th century. As González-Baker et al. (1998, p. 87) show, foreign-born Mexicans made up at least 32.1% (and as much as 65.7%) of the total Mexican-origin population in the United States throughout the 20th century, except in 1970, when they constituted only 16.7% of the Mexican-origin population. Although the recent and heavy influx of Mexican immigration represents an unprecedented upsurge in absolute terms, the foreign-born Mexican population does not constitute an unusually large proportion (just 38% in 2000) of the total Mexican-origin population relative to previous time periods.
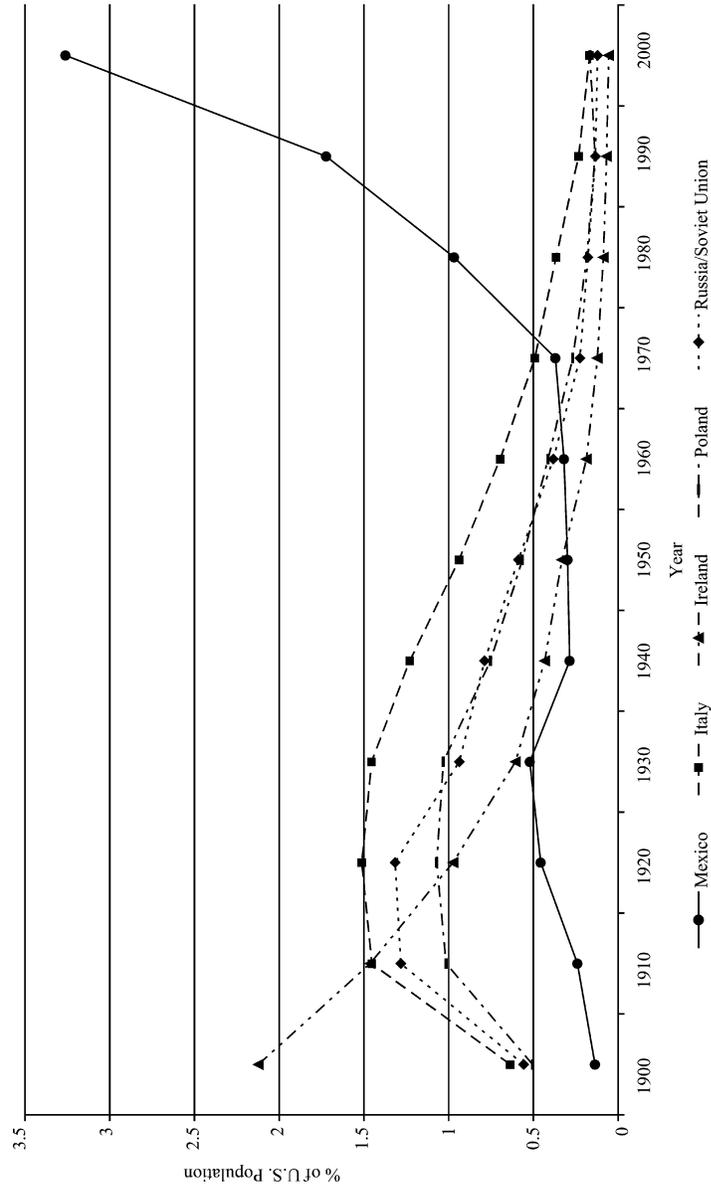
FIG. 1.—Number of foreign-born immigrants from Mexico and selected European countries as a percentage of total U.S. population, 1900–2000. Data are from the U.S. census.

TABLE 1
GENERATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE MEXICAN-ORIGIN
POPULATION IN THE UNITED STATES, 2001

Generation	Number	% of Total
First	8,248,840	38
Second	4,523,608	21
Mixed (2.5)*	2,034,859	9
Third or later ...	6,860,380	32
Total	21,667,687	100

NOTES.—Numbers obtained from the March 2001 Current Population Survey. Weights used. Includes persons who self-identified as "Mexican American," "Chicano," or "Mexicano."
* The 2.5 generation comprises U.S.-born individuals who have one U.S.-born parent and one Mexican-born parent.

Stanton-Salazar 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). On one hand, the lion's share of research suggests that ethnicity and race negatively shape the life chances of the Mexican-origin population, even into later generations. This scholarship points to the historical circumstances under which Mexicans were first incorporated into the United States and to their ensuing racialized status (Acuña 1972; Barrera 1979; Almaguer 1994). Many studies of Mexican American intergenerational progress in education and wages support such a view, noting increases in educational attainment and wages from the first to the second generation but a flattening of progress from the second to the third (Bean et al. 1994; Wojtkiewicz and Donato 1995; Ortiz 1996; Livingston and Kahn 2002; Telles 2006). Phenotype appears to play a significant role in the nature of assimilation. Mexican Americans with darker skin tend to have lower levels of educational attainment (Murguía and Telles 1996) and lower wages (Telles and Murguía 1990), and a nonwhite racial identification on census forms is associated with a decline in the likelihood of intermarriage (Qian and Cobas 2004). Research on the assimilation of today's Mexican American second generation generally adds to the pessimism. Some suggest that persistent discrimination, low human capital, and an hourglass economy drive second-generation Mexican Americans on a downward path of assimilation into a "rainbow underclass" (López and Stanton-Salazar 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). While this line of research does not directly address the question of ethnic identity formation among later-generation Mexican Americans, it implies that ethnic boundaries between people of Mexican descent and the rest of American society remain rigid and impede the formation of an optional, inconsequential ethnic identity.

A growing group of social scientists counter that previous research is unduly pessimistic about the assimilation of Mexican Americans. Taking account of generation and cohort, recent studies show that Mexican Amer-

icans make significant intergenerational progress where income and education are concerned, though the third generation still lags behind its Anglo counterpart (Smith 2003, 2006; Reed et al. 2005; Alba 2006; Duncan, Hotz, and Trejo 2006). Furthermore, second-generation Mexican Americans, the group that has attracted the most concern about negative assimilation outcomes, do not exhibit characteristics that conform to a strict definition of an underclass (Waldinger and Feliciano 2004; Perlmann 2005; Waldinger, Lim, and Cort 2007). The clearest indicator of the rigidity of social boundaries is intermarriage, and recent findings show that Mexican Americans' exogamy rates are high, increase across generations (Rosenfeld 2002; Macias 2006), and are on par with earlier cohorts of white ethnics (Perlmann and Waters 2004). Taken together, these findings suggest a softening of the boundaries that impede assimilation. If race and ethnicity are weaker barriers to mobility for Mexican Americans than previous research suggests, what remains unclear is whether or not these gains translate into the symbolic form of ethnicity implied by canonical accounts of assimilation.

METHODS, RESEARCH SETTING, AND RESPONDENTS

Data for this article come from 123 in-depth interviews with later-generation Mexican Americans and from participant observation in Garden City, Kansas, and Santa Maria, California, during 2001 and 2002.[12] I interviewed respondents whose ancestors have been in the United States since 1940 or before, who are of Mexican descent on both their mother's and father's sides of the family, and who have lived in their respective cities for most of their lives. I interviewed people whose families have been in the United States since before 1940, in order to find a population whose time in the country matches that of the later-generation white ethnics who have been studied in other research on ethnic identity (Alba 1990; Waters 1990). Since mixed ethnic origins complicate identity formation in unique ways (Salgado de Snyder, Lopez, and Padilla 1982; Harris and Sim 2002; Jiménez 2004), I did not include Mexican Americans of mixed ethnic ancestry in the sample so as not to conflate unique identity processes owing to multiple ethnic backgrounds with the identity processes of Mexican Americans who consider themselves to be "unmixed" in America's racial and ethnic schema. To be sure, intermarriage is a key feature of assimilation, accounting for the onset of the symbolic and optional form of ethnic identity found among white ethnics. Mexican-descent individuals

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[12] A list of respondents and their key demographic characteristics is available from the author upon request.

exhibit high rates of intermarriage across generations (Rosenfeld 2002; Perlmann and Waters 2004; Macias 2006). By excluding the offspring of interethnic unions, this article may underestimate Mexican American assimilation and overestimate the effect of immigrant replenishment on assimilation, since unmixed Mexican Americans may feel more attached to a single ethnic origin. Yet elsewhere (Jiménez 2004), I show that the multiethnic offspring of these unions gravitate toward their Mexican ancestry despite their mixed status, and the continuing salience of Mexican ethnicity presents challenges to multiethnic individuals similar to those found among the unmixed Mexican Americans interviewed for this article.[13]

Garden City is a small city in southwestern Kansas. The 2000 U.S. census reports that 34.7% of the town's 28,451 residents are of Mexican origin. About half of the Mexican-origin population is foreign-born. The history of Mexican immigration to Garden City is best described as interrupted. Between roughly 1900 and 1930, Mexican immigrants came to the area to build the railroads and work the sugar beet fields (Avila 1997). Mexican immigrant settlement shifted away from Kansas to other states in the middle of the 20th century, and there was a nearly 40-year hiatus in Mexican immigration to the state (Durand, Massey, and Charvet 2000). In 1980, the largest beef-packing plant in the world opened near Garden City; in combination with changes in federal immigration laws that spurred a Mexican immigrant diaspora (see Durand et al. 2000), this plant opening caused a resurgence of immigration from Mexico to Garden City (Stull 1990).

Santa Maria is located on the central coast of California. According to the 2000 U.S. census, 52.3% of Santa Maria's 77,423 inhabitants are of Mexican origin. As in Garden City, roughly half of the Mexican-origin population is foreign born. Unlike Garden City, however, Mexican migration to Santa Maria was constant throughout the 20th century. While there was a hiatus in immigration to Kansas, California became an increasingly popular destination for Mexican immigrants in the middle of the 20th century (Durand et al. 2000). Agricultural work has always attracted Mexican immigrants to Santa Maria, but advances in agricultural technology in recent years have created a year-round demand for the low-

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[13] If the labels that parents provide for their children on census forms are any indication, multiethnic Mexican Americans may be more likely to identify with their Mexican roots. Using 2000 U.S. census data, Duncan and Trejo (2005) show that the youngest child born to a Mexican-identified wife and a non-Mexican husband receives a Mexican label in 63.5% of all cases. The youngest child from unions between a Mexican-identified husband and a non-Mexican wife receives a Mexican label in 71.1% of all cases. Census responses should not be taken as a representation of subjective identity, but these trends are nonetheless suggestive.

wage labor that Mexican immigrants provide (Palerm 1997, 2006). Mexican immigrants are the primary, if not only, source of agricultural labor in the city.

I chose these two sites for theoretical purposes. I hypothesized that variation in historical patterns of immigration would yield differences between the two cities in terms of boundary formation. This variation does yield some differences, but it has a much smaller effect on Mexican Americans' ethnic identity than I expected. In the end, the recent and heavy Mexican immigrant influx to both cities over the last 20 years suppressed any pronounced differences related to the question of this study.

I also chose Garden City and Santa Maria because both cities are relatively small in size, which maximizes interactions between Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans. I do not argue that Mexican Americans in Garden City and Santa Maria are representative of Mexican Americans nationwide. Both of these cities are semirural, and Mexican Americans tend to reside in urban settings, although not exclusively. The small size of these cities may not allow for the spatial mobility that metropolitan areas permit. Yet size does not seem to yield notable differences between the experiences of Mexican Americans in Garden City and Santa Maria and those of Mexican Americans in other, more populated locales. Indeed, the findings from this article are consistent with those from research conducted on later-generation Mexican Americans in larger urban and suburban settings (Ochoa 2004; Macias 2006).[14]

Respondents range in age from 15 to 98. I interviewed people from a wide array of occupational and educational backgrounds in order to have a broad cross-section of Mexican Americans in each city. Although the dominant industries in these two cities produce primarily blue-collar jobs, later-generation Mexican Americans do not work in the dominant industries. Instead, they have mostly gained middle-class status through blue-collar and semiprofessional occupations, while others have entered the middle and upper middle classes through professional occupations. I obtained respondents using snowball sampling. I relied on a few key informants in each city to recommend several initial respondents, and then asked these initial respondents to recommend others. I made efforts to minimize sample selection bias by drawing respondents from several different networks of individuals.

I asked each respondent the same set of questions, although there was

[14] Settlement in agricultural vs. industrial areas may differentially confer economic and social opportunities that in turn shape ethnic identity construction. As Di Leonardo (1984) shows, different economic contexts on the West and East coasts significantly shaped the formation of ethnic identity among Italian Americans.

variation in follow-up questions depending on respondents' answers to initial questions.[15] Interviews lasted between one and four hours, were conducted entirely in English, and took place in the locations where respondents felt most comfortable (in most cases this was the respondent's home). Of the 127 individuals I contacted, 123 accepted my invitation to be interviewed. I tape-recorded all interviews and had them professionally transcribed. I analyzed the interviews using ATLAS.ti, a software package that allows users to attach coding categories to relevant parts of the transcripts in order to compare similarly coded portions of text across interviews. Data collection and analysis were simultaneous processes in this project. I began analyzing my interviews during data collection in order to explore in future interviews theoretical insights and nuances that I identified in earlier encounters (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Weiss 1995).

Data also come from participant observation in the major high school in each city, at city government meetings, at holiday celebrations, and in some respondents' place of work, as well as from my interactions with respondents before and after interviews and through the course of my daily life in each city. I also conducted 20 semistructured interviews with civic and community leaders and other key informants (such as police officers, schoolteachers, and business leaders) in order to better understand the local dynamics of immigration, race, ethnicity, and class.

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC VIEW OF MEXICAN AMERICANS

Before examining the main findings, it is important to consider the overall assimilation of Mexican Americans in Garden City and Santa Maria. I use ethnographic data to describe in general terms the structural aspect of their assimilation. Mexican Americans in my sample are not statistically representative of Mexican Americans in Garden City, Santa Maria, or nationwide. Yet the patterns I identify are not anomalistic. Studies employing representative samples show that Mexican Americans nationwide exhibit patterns of structural assimilation similar to those I report here.

Mexican Americans in Garden City and Santa Maria are anything but socially isolated. They exhibit the structural forms of assimilation that, according to Gordon (1964), lead to the thinning importance of ethnicity in daily life. Though they may not have fully caught up with native-born whites, they make significant intergenerational gains along several important dimensions of assimilation. Changes from one birth cohort to the next reveal the nature of their structural assimilation. Birth cohort and generation are highly correlated among later-generation Mexican Amer-

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[15] A copy of the interview guide is available from the author upon request.

icans because they descend from similar waves of immigrants. The oldest respondents (age 56 and older) thus tend to be the children of immigrants; respondents from the middle cohort (ages 36–55) tend to be the grandchildren of immigrants; and the youngest cohort (ages 15–35) is composed mostly of the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of immigrants. I organize this overview of Mexican Americans by cohort both because of the correlation between age and generation and because the historical events (World War II, the Civil Rights movement, etc.) that individuals experience as part of a cohort help explain their structural assimilation (Alba 1988; Waters and Jiménez 2005; Jiménez and Fitzgerald 2008). My discussion of cohorts is restricted to this section of the article, because Mexican Americans of all cohorts similarly experience the inter- and intragroup boundaries in the present era.

In terms of education and occupational status, each cohort of Mexican Americans has improved upon the position of the previous one. Respondents from the oldest cohort (age 56 and older) completed only high school, but many achieved middle-class status through blue-collar employment.[16] Many bought homes in working-class, predominantly Mexican American neighborhoods that now contain a large number of Mexican immigrant residents. Marriage across racial and ethnic lines is rare for these oldest respondents, as social taboos and their lower-class status mitigated exogamy (Kalmijn 1998).

The middle cohort of Mexican Americans (ages 36–55) has generally achieved higher levels of education and occupational status than the previous cohort. Among the members of this cohort are judges, politicians, lawyers, engineers, doctors, architects, small business owners, teachers, law-enforcement officers, and bankers, as well as individuals who have obtained middle-class status through blue-collar work. Despite the small size of these cities, Mexican Americans exhibit the kinds of residential assimilation found among their European-descent counterparts (Massey 1985; Alba 1990). Most live in middle-class neighborhoods, away from the poorer sections of town where immigrants concentrate. The taboo against partnering with non-Mexicans among the oldest cohort does not seem to factor into how members of the middle cohort choose their significant others. Partnering across racial and ethnic lines is in fact common among members of the middle cohort.[17]

The youngest cohort (ages 15–35) exhibits a pattern of further assimilation over time. Many of these respondents have completed or are cur-

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[16] Similarly, Ortiz (1996) finds that Mexican Americans in Los Angeles have entered the middle class largely through blue-collar work.

[17] Many respondents did, however, note that their Mexican background impeded them from dating or marrying non-Mexicans in the past.

rently in college, while those still in high school express aspirations for college attendance.[18] Those still in school participate in extracurricular activities, similar to the later-generation Mexican American students that Matute-Bianchi (1986) describes in her research in a California high school. While I cannot be certain about the future occupational fortunes of respondents still in school, they have high aspirations and are generally successful students, which suggests that they are likely to move ahead of their parents.[19] Those who do have careers are among the middle and professional classes in each city and include teachers, lawyers, doctors, school administrators, and clergy. As in the middle cohort, dating and marriage across racial and ethnic lines is common. No respondent from this cohort described race and ethnicity as being significant factors in their choice of dating and marriage partners.

The Mexican Americans in this study have almost no familial connection to their ethnic homeland, nor do they exhibit any evidence of transnational behavior, seen among some immigrants and even second-generation Mexican Americans (Roberts, Frank, and Lozano-Ascencio 1999; Smith 2005*a*). Only a handful of respondents have ever been to Mexico, and even fewer have ventured beyond popular tourist destinations.

The patterns of structural assimilation I report in this ethnographic overview are not unique to Mexican Americans in Garden City and Santa Maria; they parallel recent findings that employ representative samples. Particularly with respect to intergenerational increases in education and wages (Smith 2003, 2006; Reed et al. 2005; Alba 2006; Duncan et al. 2006; Alba et al. 2008), residential mobility (South, Crowder, and Chavez 1996; Duncan et al. 2006), intermarriage (Rosenfeld 2002; Perlmann and Waters 2004; Macias 2006), and diminishing ties to Mexico (Rumbaut 2002), the patterns of structural assimilation of Mexican Americans in Garden City and Santa Maria appear to be well within the range of what would be expected given findings from survey research.[20]

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[18] While aspirations and expectations are not the same, many students with whom I spoke were well on their way to realizing their aspirations, given that they were doing well in school and took part in extracurricular activities.

[19] Because of time and financial constraints, I was unable to interview Mexican Americans who have left Garden City and Santa Maria but who otherwise fit the sample-selection criteria. Individuals often leave a city to pursue better educational and occupational opportunities. These individuals have effectively moved "up and out" of Garden City or Santa Maria. Such movement is an important part of assimilation for any ethnic group. As I did not interview anyone who had left these cities, I am unable to capture fully how those who left compare in their ethnic identity formation to those who stayed.

[20] Findings from nationally representative samples show that although Mexicans make significant intergenerational gains in education and income, they still lag behind native-born whites. Duncan and Trejo (2005) and Alba (2006) suggest that this pattern may

IMMIGRANT REPLENISHMENT AND INTERGROUP BOUNDARIES

Given that Mexican Americans in Garden City and Santa Maria show significant structural assimilation, canonical theories of assimilation and ethnic identity would predict that they now experience ethnicity as a symbolic, optional, and inconsequential aspect of their identity. Yet this is not the case. Instead, Mexican Americans experience rigid intergroup boundaries resulting from the presence of a large immigrant population.

The overarching perception among non-Mexicans in Garden City and Santa Maria is that the Mexican-origin population is a "foreign" group. Because of their large numbers, concentration in low-wage work, high levels of poverty, and predominant use of Spanish, Mexican immigrants are the most visible among people of Mexican descent in both cities. The large proportion of unauthorized immigrants also makes Mexican immigrants the center of much media and political attention, adding to their visibility both locally and nationally. Although there is also a foreign-born population from other countries in each city, Mexicans have come to represent all immigrants because they make up the overwhelming majority of newcomers in both places.[21] There is thus a commonsense assumption that to be foreign born is to be Mexican, and to be Mexican is to be foreign born, and likely unauthorized.

The interviews make clear two significant ways in which the large immigrant presence reinforces intergroup boundaries that make ethnicity consequential and a less optional aspect of Mexican Americans' identity: through the indirect effects of nativism aimed at Mexican immigrants and through the ways in which immigrants contribute to the significance of race in the lives of respondents.

Indirect Effects of Nativism and Intergroup Boundaries

Because of their large numbers and frequently unauthorized status, Mexican immigrants are the primary targets of anti-immigrant antipathy, or what Higham calls "nativism." According to Higham ([1955] 1963, p. 4), nativism is "an intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground

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be partly attributable to attrition from the Mexican-origin population, which takes place when more upwardly mobile multiethnics cease to identify as Mexican on surveys. Bean and Stevens (2003) argue that low human capital and the unauthorized status of many of today's Mexican immigrants means that Mexican Americans may take more than the usual three generations to assimilate.

[21] The 2000 census indicates that 84% (20,622) of Santa Maria's foreign-born population (24,647 total) was born in Mexico. In Garden City, 76% (4,867) of the foreign-born population (6,404 total) was born in Mexico. Filipinos are the second largest immigrant group in Santa Maria, representing only 7% (1,794) of the total foreign-born population. In Garden City, Vietnamese immigrants make up the second largest immigrant group, representing 7% (451) of the total foreign-born population.

of its foreign (i.e., 'un-American') connections." Non-Mexicans voice nativist sentiments in anti-Mexican terms, tying their general displeasure about changes resulting from immigration to Mexicans in particular. Mexican Americans become aware of these nativist expressions through interpersonal encounters and through the more public and highly visible expressions of nativism that abound in each city.

Although nativism is not directed at Mexican Americans, it sharpens intergroup boundaries between them and non-Mexicans. Mexican Americans who are well integrated into the core social, political, and economic structures in each city have ample opportunities for interactions with non-Mexicans. As Barth points out (1969, p. 10), "Ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction and acceptance, but are quite to the contrary often the very foundations on which embracing social systems are built." It is through these interactions that Mexican Americans get an up-close and personal view of nativism and the intergroup boundaries it animates.

Nearly all respondents report witnessing anti-Mexican nativism expressed by non-Mexican friends, peers, co-workers, and strangers. The experiences of Ryan Bradley typify those of many respondents.[22] Ryan is a 16-year-old, third- and fourth-generation high school student in Santa Maria who lives in a large house in the upper-middle-class subsection of the city. He attends a private school where he is one of a handful of middle-class, later-generation Mexican Americans. As with many respondents, Ryan's ethnic identity becomes most important to him when he experiences the rigid intergroup boundaries that nativism crystallizes.

> If there's a threat that's apparent on somebody else who is of the same descent that I am, and the other person is being totally racist about it, and it's all just hate of color, that's when my background comes to be more important to me. . . . That's when [my ethnic background] steps up to me. . . . I have a friend, when we were in junior high we were just the same. And then when we hit high school he got all into the confederate flags and all the weird stuff and him and a bunch of the guys would always be drawing Nazi signs or whatnot and saying, "KKK rocks" and stuff like that. And he was picking on this guy that I didn't know. And he was Mexican and they were bagging on him because he was Mexican and I'm just sitting there going, "Hey. I'm Mexican too." [He said,] "No, no, no, this doesn't concern you. You're cool. This guy is not." And I'm just like, "Hey, back up." And I just totally got in his face because I was getting mad. . . . They were calling him a wetback and just totally dissing on him because he was Mexican. I don't know if they had a problem with him because of who he was but that's not what I heard coming out of their mouths. And I didn't think that was cool at all.

[22] I have changed the names and identifying characteristics of respondents in order to protect their anonymity.

Even though Ryan's peer makes it clear that he is not directing the comments at Ryan ("No, no, no, this doesn't concern you. You're cool"), the peer presents his nativist leanings in a language that invokes ethnicity, sharpening the boundaries that circumscribe all people of Mexican descent. As is the case for Ryan, several respondents' interpersonal networks contain many non-Mexicans. Yet it is precisely because of these ties that respondents regularly witness nativism of the sort that Ryan recalls.

The increased use of the Spanish language resulting from Mexican immigration inflames nativist fears, sharpening the intergroup boundaries that Mexican Americans encounter. Non-Mexicans are often quick to express their discontent about the proliferation of the Spanish language and the limited ability of Mexican immigrants to speak English. Respondents experience the indirect effects of nativism when they witness these expressions. Consider the case of Marcela Muñoz, a 19-year-old, third- and fourth-generation college student in Garden City, who works as a customer service agent at a local retail store. Marcela relayed the following instance in which an Anglo customer expressed anger over the Spanish-language phone menu on the customer service line.

> We have a Spanish recording. And a guest called and she was asking about American flags. [I said,] "No Ma'am. We're not scheduled to get any more until July. We're sorry for the inconvenience." . . . But she just opened her mouth and she was like, "Oh and by the way, what is up with that Mexican crap?" Like that. So I of course was like, "Ma'am, over half of our community understands Spanish." And she started going off on me. I was like "Ma'am, I'm Mexican American." And she didn't know what to say! She just hung up.

Because Marcela speaks without an accent and was not visible to the caller, the caller likely assumed that Marcela was not Mexican, and she was therefore comfortable expressing her discontent. But the caller's nativist rant invokes ethnicity, as she voices her discontent with the phone menu as a problem not only owing to immigrants' use of Spanish but directly related to people of Mexican origin.

Mexican Americans also become aware of pervasive nativism through more public and visible proclamations. Established residents use public forums, such as speeches, demonstrations, and the opinion sections of local newspapers, to express nativist fears about the ways in which Mexican immigrants have changed each city. These expressions most often center around the increasing use of Spanish, a perception that immigrants take advantage of misguided multicultural policies, and a belief that immigrants are a drain on public resources (Sánchez 1997).[23]

[23] Since Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans negotiate different labor markets,

It is not the frequency of these public expressions but rather their high visibility that accounts for their power to harden intergroup boundaries. Most notorious among the public denouncements of immigrants in Santa Maria are statements made in 1990 by the current mayor. A leader with a reputation for being brash and outspoken, the mayor pointed to Mexican immigrants as the source of what he perceived to be growing blight in the city. Speaking to a local civic organization, he proclaimed,

> At this time in Santa Maria, we have a Mexican problem. We have a difficulty with scads of illegal aliens that have come across the border, and they've made our neighborhoods look not like Santa Maria neighborhoods. In certain streets people [are] gathered around drinking beer, smoking cigarettes. It's not a formidable experience for a lot of the older people who have been here for a long time. . . . That's not speaking, of course, of our Santa Maria Mexicans that have been here forever. Those people came here with the idea of becoming Americans. (Sparks 1990, p. A5)

Despite the mayor's qualification that he was not speaking about long-time Santa Maria residents of Mexican descent, his proclamation that Santa Maria has "a Mexican problem" etched a lasting memory in the minds of Santa Maria's Mexican American population. Many respondents still referred to this verbal attack on Mexican immigrants in the interviews I conducted nearly 12 years after the fact.

The statement ignited such a strong reaction in part because the mayor couched his nativist worries as problems related to a single population: "Mexicans." Identifying blight in the city as a "Mexican problem," the mayor tied poverty, crime, and overcrowding to Mexicans; thus, his statements reflected not just concerns about these issues but a general animosity toward all people of Mexican descent. Some respondents recall being upset by the fact that the mayor spoke about Mexicans as a group. As Gigi Bartolome, a 61-year-old, third-generation retired retail clerk in Santa Maria reflected, "It kind of made me mad because he was talking about Mexicans. What he actually was talking about was illegals. But he said 'Mexicans,' so every Mexican in town took it as *them*."

Garden City has also seen its share of public expressions of nativism. During the 2002 election campaign for the state board of education, won by a candidate who ran on an anti-immigrant platform, the local newspaper sponsored an online chat room where individuals could share their views on education and unauthorized immigration. Several of the messages that readers posted in support of the winning candidate's views resembled the following:

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no respondent mentioned Mexican immigrants as a source of competition for jobs, nor did they cite other forms of direct economic competition with immigrants.

> If they want to live in OUR country . . . LEARN THE LANGUAGE
> FIRST!!! You wouldn't catch me going to a foreign country without know-
> ing their language. Mexicans can at least learn our language before they
> come over here, well enough [so] you don't have to keep asking them what
> they are saying. I don't feel that illegal or legal Mexicans should go to any
> of our schools, like the other person said, it puts a damper on OUR society!
> And further more, [no one], and I mean [no one], is going to tell me that
> this community belongs to the Mexicans now and that America belongs to
> them, as did one gentleman in a college course I was taking did [*sic*]. It's
> like we're being taken over by aliens! (posted 9/9/2002)

Like the mayor, this author directs anger about the proliferation of Spanish language use and the large influx of Mexican immigrants toward all "Mexicans"; indeed, the author's anti-immigrant sentiment is in essence an anti-Mexican expression.

Common to all of these nativist assertions is that their impetus comes from changes, either social or economic, that Mexican immigration brings about. The comments do not express antipathy for Mexican Americans directly. As I stated earlier, respondents do not exhibit the levels of poverty, residential concentration, and social isolation readily found among their immigrant coethnics. But nativist expressions employ an all-encompassing language that tightly links antipathy toward immigrants to the Mexican-origin population. Couched in this way, the ire is seemingly directed at anyone with a Mexican background, including later-generation Mexican Americans.

Internalizing Nativism and the Effect of Intergroup Boundaries

How does nativism expressed in personal interactions and public forums influence Mexican Americans' ethnic identity? The hardening of inter-group boundaries comes from the fact that Mexican Americans internalize this nativism as part of their own ethnic identity. Cornell's (2000) conceptualization of ethnicity as a narrative provides a useful framework for understanding how the boundaries that nativist expressions make salient are not merely imposed on Mexican Americans but are actually adopted by them. Cornell argues that groups of individuals select, plot, and interpret events that are common to their experience. 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 [a] group" (Cornell 2000, p. 42). Precisely because it is a very salient part of their historical *and* present-day experience, immigration and the struggles of immigrant adaptation are at the core of the Mexican American ethnic narrative. Nativist expressions directed at Mexican immigrants make these core events salient, activating respondents' identity as people of Mexican descent.

The comments of Mike Fernandez, a 19-year-old, third- and fourth-generation community college student in Santa Maria, illustrate how nativism activates respondents' own Mexican immigrant narrative. Mike lives in an upper-middle-class neighborhood and graduated from a private high school. He describes his family as "a white family who is Mexican," because Mexican traditions play only a small role in his family life. Yet his immigrant narrative comes to the fore when he encounters the nativist expressions that other respondents mention.

> Somebody will say something about Mexicans or something like that and it's not said towards me, it's not directed towards me. But at that point, I'll feel myself discriminated against. I'll put the discrimination on myself, feeling that even though they're not directing it towards me, I can't help but feel that it's degrading towards me in some way, when in fact I know it's not meant directly towards me—it's a general comment. But it just kind of makes me uncomfortable.

The reason that Mike provides for his discomfort reflects his attachment to a larger narrative centered on the immigrant experience:

> Just because they're speaking about a Mexican family or a Mexican person and I know that, though my family is not in that position, that I know somewhere along down before me, somebody in my family, I'm sure, has been in that position. And although I'm not in it, and probably never will be in that position, I just think that [in the past] my ancestors were in that position and people were the same way towards them.

Although many respondents, like Mike, have only a vague idea about their family's immigrant history, contemporary Mexican immigrants are an in vivo representation of their family's historical struggles. When respondents witness anti-Mexican nativism, it evokes the immigrant experience as a central part of their own ethnic identity. To borrow Mike's words, Mexican Americans "put the discrimination on" themselves, and when they witness nativism directed toward Mexican immigrants they "can't help but feel that it's degrading towards" them. Hence, verbal attacks on Mexican immigrants become an affront to all people of Mexican descent, both foreign- and native-born. It is not through overt forms of discrimination that these Mexican Americans experience intergroup boundaries, as middle-class African-Americans do (Feagin 1994). Rather, Mexican immigrants are a prism through which nativism refracts into the lives of Mexican Americans.

Immigrant Replenishment, Intergroup Boundaries, and the Continuing Significance of Race

Race matters in the lives of Mexican Americans, and the large and continual influx of Mexican immigrants refreshes its salience and imbues it with meaning. People of Mexican origin have experienced racialization in the United States for over 150 years, as historical and more contemporary accounts attest (Acuña 1972; Almaguer 1975, 1994; Telles and Murguía 1990; Murguía and Telles 1996; Ngai 2004). But the meanings attached to racial markers are unstable and must be understood in the context from which race derives its meaning.[24] The contentious historical relationship between Mexicans and Anglos in the Midwest (García 1996) and West (Meier and Ribera 1993; Almaguer 1994; Camarillo [1979] 1996; Griswold del Castillo and de León 1997) lurks in the background, but it is the large Mexican immigrant influx that most significantly structures how respondents experience race. Indeed, in a context of heavy Mexican immigration, notions of race are intimately tied to ancestry, nativity, and even legal status.

The intersection of Mexican immigrant replenishment and race is most apparent when respondents are mistaken for immigrants. Mexican Americans display a range of skin color, and those with dark skin are especially vulnerable to being marked as foreign. Take the case of Ronnie Hinojosa, a 48-year-old, third-generation salesman in Garden City. Ronnie has dark skin and speaks with a midwestern twang typical of many Garden City natives. He lives in a middle-class neighborhood with his wife, an Anglo, and their two small children. Because of his dark skin, individuals whom he encounters often assume that he is an immigrant who speaks like a native-born American. Ronnie relayed the following experience to illustrate:

> I was at work and this lady called in. She wanted to know about a [stereo] or [CD player] or something and I told her all about it and I said, "Who am I speaking to?" And she told me her name was [Dana]. . . . I said "My name is Ronnie. I work in [electronics]." [She said,] "OK, I'll come and see you, Ronnie." She came in and the other salespeople came and she said, "Is Ronnie here? I didn't get his last name." I came up and said, "What can I do? My name is Ronnie. What's yours?" She said, . . . "So you're the one I talked to. You're Spanish! I didn't know that. The way you spoke I didn't even realize you were Spanish." See what I mean? It's just my

[24] The racial and ethnic identities shift depending on time and place. Jacobson (1998) forcefully documents the historical instability of race. Smith (2005b) shows that Mexican immigrants and the second generation in New York have an experience of race that is radically different from that of their counterparts in cities that have long been popular destinations for Mexican immigrants, such as Los Angeles, because the racial and ethnic context is different in each place.

> background and raising, and English—that if I didn't have any accent she just assumed I was just another salesman. . . . She was just shocked that I was a Mexican, and then the way I talked to her [on the phone], she thought I was just another educated, college white kid that worked in a nice department. That's who she wanted to speak [to], but she still bought something from me. But she thanked me for being knowledgeable of my products and [for speaking] English real well. I didn't question her but I didn't know what she meant by it. I kind of felt like maybe she felt like I just crossed the border and just got this job and I speak real good English.

Despite the fact that Ronnie is a third-generation Mexican American who speaks perfect English (and no Spanish, for that matter), the customer surmised from his skin color that he was an immigrant, like roughly half of the Mexican-origin individuals in Garden City. Without a substantial Mexican immigrant population in the area, the customer might have assumed that Ronnie was a Mexican American whose family, like so many others in Garden City, has been in the United States for several generations. But in a context of heavy Mexican immigration, dark skin becomes a frequently invoked indicator of foreignness.

Race has added meaning in a context of heavy *unauthorized* Mexican immigration. The unauthorized status of more than half of all Mexican immigrants (Passel 2006) and the political attention given to the U.S.-Mexico border only tighten the relationship among race, ancestry, nativity, and legal status. Both Garden City and Santa Maria have industries that employ large numbers of unauthorized workers.[25] Consequently, non-Mexicans often assume that people of Mexican origin are not only foreign but also unauthorized. Pedro Ramirez, a 52-year-old, third-generation high school teacher, recalled the especially troubling experience of being pulled over by an INS official while traveling in his pickup truck after doing yard work at a rental property he owns.

> It's this guy with a Smokey the Bear hat and wrap-around glasses. It's *la migra*. It's the INS! . . . So I get out [of my car] and the guy says "*¡vete aquí!*" [come here]. I go, "Oh no," and I'm laughing. I come over and say, "May I help you?" He says, "Do you speak English?" I said, "What the hell do you think I just said?" He says, "Do you have some ID?" I go, "What the hell do you want to know if I have ID for? I wasn't going past the speed limit. Besides, you're not a cop. You're [an INS official]. All right, I'll play your game." He said, "Do you have some ID?" So I pull out my driver's license and show him my wallet. "Do you have anything else?" I

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[25] While it is quite difficult to estimate the size of the unauthorized immigrant population in either city, a high ranking law-enforcement official estimates that around 15,000 unauthorized immigrants (roughly 61% of the city's total Mexican immigrant population) live in Santa Maria. A labor contractor in the area reported to me that he believes about 80% of the workers he hires are unauthorized. Passel (2004) estimates that 54% of the total national Mexican immigrant population is unauthorized.

> said, "Yeah." And I showed him my social security card. He wanted to reach for it and I go, "You ain't getting this. Forget that!" He goes, "You have anything else?" I go, "Sure I do." So I pull out my American Express card. And it's green. I said, "Don't leave home without it. This is harassment!" Guilt by association: Mexican needing a haircut and a shave on a Friday afternoon with bandana around his neck, with an old pickup truck loaded with mowers and edgers and stuff like that.

The large number of Mexican immigrants in Santa Maria, many of whom are farm workers, creates the perception that to be of Mexican descent is to be an unauthorized immigrant and a farm worker. The INS official who stopped Pedro clearly did not consider that Pedro might be a middle-class, third-generation Mexican American who was simply doing yard work on the weekend. Rather, the officer relied on the dominant image of Mexicans as unauthorized laborers to determine Pedro's identity.

Even if respondents do not have dark skin, they are not entirely immune to stereotypes about Mexicans as foreigners. Non-Mexicans frequently tag respondents who have a Spanish surname as immigrants. Surnames often serve as markers of ethnicity for all groups. They may signal when someone has, for example, Italian, Polish, or Irish ancestry. But when immigration is replenished, surnames mark not only ancestry but also nativity, as shown in the experience of Rolando Fernandez Jr., a 21-year-old, third- and fifth-generation college student in Santa Maria. Rolando recalled,

> Actually, freshman year in college, living in the dorms . . . I guess with a name like mine, I'd go over and say, "Hi! I'm [Rolando Fernandez]." And [they would say], "Oh really? Are you a foreign exchange student?" And I'd just kind of chuckle like, "No, actually I grew up about half an hour from here." [They would say], like, "Oh really? Where did you guys get . . . when did you come to the country?"

Similarly, others recalled regularly being asked, Where are you from? upon giving their surname in conversations with non-Mexicans.

Assumptions about the foreignness of Mexican Americans are not unique to Garden City and Santa Maria and can be encountered even in more urban settings. Gilda Ochoa's (2004) study of Mexican Americans in La Puente, California, shows that non-Mexicans confuse Mexican Americans for foreign-born Mexicans based their on skin color and surnames. Even when coethnic replenishment is minimal, immigrant replenishment from the same race group (even if not the same ethnic group) yields similar outcomes. Later-generation Japanese and Chinese Americans are lumped together with foreign-born Asians on the basis of phenotype. As Tuan (1998) shows, whites rely on perceptions of Asians as foreigners, expecting later-generation Japanese and Chinese Americans to exhibit a form of ethnic identity similar to foreign-born Asians. These

studies and my own research demonstrate that continuous Asian and Mexican immigration is a significant factor in the ascription of a foreign identity to later-generation U.S.-born individuals.[26]

ETHNIC EXPECTATIONS AND INTRAGROUP BOUNDARIES

Ethnic identities are not just assigned to groups and individuals; they are also asserted by group members themselves. The heavy influx of immigrants to Garden City and Santa Maria informs ideas about authentic expressions of Mexican ethnicity, giving rise to rigid intragroup boundaries that run through the Mexican-origin population.[27] Mexican immigrants and the young Mexican American second generation assert strong notions of ethnic authenticity in their interactions with later-generation Mexican Americans. These notions create stringent expectations that limit respondents' ability to freely assert their own versions of an ethnic identity. Immigrants and second-generation individuals regard Mexican Americans who fail to live up to these expectations as "inauthentic" Mexicans.

The options individuals have to assert an ethnic identity are dictated by the ways that coethnics regard such assertions. As Barth (1969, p. 15) notes, "The identification of another person as a fellow member of an ethnic group implies a sharing of criteria for evaluation and judgment. It thus entails the assumption that the two are fundamentally 'playing the same game.'" When the criteria for authentic expressions of ethnicity are rigid—when the "rules of game" are well defined—assertions of ethnic identity must pass strict muster. The presence of a large immigrant population raises the bar for what is regarded as ethnically authentic. While determinations of authenticity entail judgment about the ethnic "stuff" that boundaries enclose, they also sharpen the boundaries themselves.

The ethnic expectations that Mexican Americans face are particularly

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[26] The fact that nearly half (48%) of all people of Mexican origin identified their race as white in the 2000 U.S. census might appear to belie my claims about the continuing significance of race. One must be careful, however, when making inferences about ethnic identity from census categories. Respondents from Garden City and Santa Maria who said that they select "white" on the census forms also provided accounts of being mistaken for immigrants because of their skin color. Likewise, Dowling's (2004) analysis of Mexican-origin individuals' responses to U.S. census questions shows that Mexican Americans provide a range of rationales for their selection of racial categories on the census. Their selection of a white racial category does not necessarily signify an objective assessment of their phenotype, nor is it necessarily a reflection of their ethnic identity. Instead, they use the category "white" to communicate a national identity (i.e., American).

[27] These intragroup boundaries are not new. Fissures have always existed between U.S.-born and foreign-born Mexicans. See Gutiérrez (1995) for a history of relations between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants.

apparent as they relate to Spanish language use. Although many people of Mexican descent in the United States, including many of those in my sample, do not speak Spanish (Alba et al. 2002; Rumbaut, Massey, and Bean 2006), immigrants from Mexico and even young second-generation individuals consider Spanish language use a central component of Mexican identity. Interviews abound with stories of experiences in which immigrants or second-generation individuals call into question respondents' authenticity because of their inability to speak the mother tongue of their immigrant ancestors. School can be a particularly contentious setting for young respondents, as their Spanish-speaking peers use the ability to speak Spanish as a litmus test for authenticity. Faith Obregón, a 16-year-old, fourth-generation high school student in Garden City, relayed the following experience:

> They ask me, they say, "Are you white?" And I'm like, "No." Because I don't speak Spanish and this school is like if you speak Spanish, then you're a Mexican and if you don't then you're white. . . . Because, I don't know, they're just like "What are you?" [They ask,] "Like, are you half white?" Like, if I told them, "Yeah, I'm half white," they'd believe me. It's like, "No." And when I do tell them that I'm full Mexican, they're like, "Nuh uh!" They're like, "You're lying!" And then they ask, "Do you know Spanish?" It's like, "No." And then they think it's like so wrong that I don't know Spanish.

For Faith and other respondents, asserting themselves as people of Mexican descent requires living up to expectations about the use of Spanish. Their inability to satisfy the gatekeepers of ethnic authenticity stems from the fact that their parents and grandparents did not transmit the Spanish language across generations. An ideology of Americanization that forced earlier generations of Mexican Americans to speak only English, combined with the many years that their families have been in the United States, means that young respondents are ill equipped to use Spanish to validate their ethnic roots to others who expect them to do so.

Adult respondents also encounter these boundaries when Mexican immigrants call into question their authenticity because of a lack of Spanish language use. Consider the case of Kyle Gil, a 35-year-old, fourth-generation auto body shop owner. Some Mexican immigrants who come into Kyle's shop react strongly when they realize that he does not speak Spanish. Kyle believes this treatment is a reversal of the type of prejudice that Mexican immigrants regularly encounter.

> They'll come in and they'll look at me [and say], "You speak Spanish?" [I answer,] "No, not really." [They say,] "You dumb or what? How come you don't speak Spanish?" And it's like I'm not good enough for them because I can't. So you get that reverse. It's tough.

Mexican Americans in other cities with large Mexican immigrant populations report similar experiences. Ochoa's (2000, 2004) research on Mexican Americans in La Puente, California, shows that conflict arises between Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans when the former make the latter feel uncomfortable about their inferior Spanish language skills (see also Menchaca 1995, chap. 9).

In addition to language, immigrants and young second-generation individuals often challenge Mexican Americans on their style of dress, tastes, and choice of friends. Some said that their popular, preppy style of dress left them open to criticism because it was closer to what many consider Anglo style. Ramón Ramos, an 18-year-old, fourth-generation high school senior in Santa Maria, is a case in point. Ramón describes himself as patriotic and aspires to a career in the military because he believes it will allow him to be a role model to other Mexican-origin students. However, some of his acquaintances equate his career aspirations, style of dress, and inability to speak Spanish with Anglo orientations, charging that he is not fully Mexican as a result.

> *A:* There's people at school [who] say that I'm white, I mean stereotyped by it. The brand I wear, which is Quicksilver, and Anchor Blue in shoes . . . [shows] I'm just trying to do something positive. Like I said, I want to be in the military, be a police officer. I want to be a positive role model for Mexican Americans. And that there's a place for us in law enforcement and the military.
> *Q:* Why do people think that you're white?
> *A:* Because of just the way I dress and type of music I like, sometimes, and because I don't know Spanish.

In the eyes of those who enforce the criteria for authenticity, Mexican ethnicity and "mainstream" American culture are at odds. Tastes and styles perceived to be devoid of Mexican overtones fail to meet the expectations about Mexican ethnicity that many immigrants and young second-generation individuals impose.

Although students never accused Lori Rojas, a 40-year-old, fourth-generation financial coordinator in Santa Maria, of acting white, she recalls being teased in junior high school because her involvement in school activities meant that she spent time with many non-Mexican students. Some of the Mexican immigrant and second-generation students perceived Lori's high level of participation and closeness to non-Mexicans to be a slight to her ethnic background.

> In junior high I did have a lot of trouble because some girls didn't believe me that I was Mexican when I would say I was Mexican. Or they would say that I didn't act like I was Mexican. So I had problems in junior high. . . . They wanted me to maybe dress like they did and act like they did and I didn't. I wasn't trying not to be, or act like it. I didn't feel I had to

> act a certain way because of my background. But I was a cheerleader, sports, outgoing, so I guess they felt I shouldn't have done that.

Confrontations with rigid constructions of ethnic authenticity are not unique to Mexican Americans. Among African-Americans, school success can be grounds for contesting an individual's authenticity. High-achieving African-American students are sometimes regarded by their lower-achieving peers as betraying their African-American roots if their school success appears to come at the expense of their allegiance to black youth culture (Carter 2005). Though it appears that charges of inauthenticity do not account for poor school achievement among blacks (Cook and Ludwig 1998; Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005), high-achieving students who do not display the cultural trappings associated with black youth culture are accused of "acting white" (Fordham and Ogbu 1986; Fordham 1996). Mexican Americans face similar authenticity tests. The difference, however, is that the large presence of Mexican immigrants is the primary source of the expectations used in gauging Mexican Americans' ethnic authenticity.

It is important to bear in mind that some Mexican Americans have a greater degree of choice about their ethnic identity (Eschbach and Gómez 1998; Jiménez 2004). Evidence of the optional nature of ethnicity for some Mexican Americans comes from recent studies showing that, over time, more upwardly mobile Mexicans Americans and those who are products of intermarriage stop claiming a Mexican identity on the U.S. census (Duncan and Trejo 2005; Alba 2006; Alba and Islam 2008). But the optional nature of ethnic identity in daily life appears to be limited to a few Mexican Americans. The fact that Mexican immigrants and second-generation Mexican Americans define ethnic authenticity greatly reduces respondents' option to freely assert their own interpretations of ethnic identity. Immigrant replenishment means that the criteria for authenticity are neither blurry nor loosely enforced. Because of immigrant replenishment, Mexican Americans come into constant contact with Mexican immigrants and second-generation individuals who are closer to the Mexican ethnic "ground zero" and who assert and enforce the criteria for authenticity. Respondents' inability to live up to these criteria sharpens intragroup boundaries. These boundaries are drawn along generational lines, with later-generation Mexican Americans falling on one side and those closer to the immigrant generation on the other. The end result is that Mexican Americans cannot symbolically or optionally assert their ethnic identity without being challenged.

MANAGING BOUNDARIES

The boundaries that Mexican Americans encounter place them squarely in the middle of two seemingly opposing identity construction projects. On one hand, non-Mexicans heighten the salience of intergroup boundaries that make ethnicity a more ascribed, less optional, and more consequential part of identity. On the other hand, intragroup boundaries create opposing pressures because Mexican Americans are said to be "inauthentic"—not Mexican enough. Respondents react to the two opposing identity construction projects by avoiding situations in which boundaries are likely to become salient and by attempting to break down boundaries when they do arise.

Where intergroup boundaries are concerned, respondents attempt to avoid encounters with nativism by emphasizing their nationality, or "Americanness," over their Mexican ethnic origin. While Mexican Americans do not deny their Mexican ancestry altogether, the threat of being mistaken for an immigrant leads them to signal in not-so-subtle ways that they are in fact part of the native-born population. In interpersonal interactions, respondents preempt stereotypes from strangers who they fear may confuse them for non-English-speaking immigrants. Donald Mercado, a 47-year-old, third-generation manager of a nonprofit organization in Garden City, speaks only English, but is often mistaken for a Mexican immigrant because of his dark skin. In order to fend off such assumptions, Donald initiates conversations with non-Mexicans in order to show his English proficiency and signal his American-born status.

> I think sometimes people will look at me and kind of be ready to say something to me because they are fearful that I'm going to say something in Spanish to them. That would catch them off guard. But what I do when I go to, let's say out of town or [an] out of town area, I usually will speak first and I'll always ask, "How are you doing? How are you doing? What's going on today?"

Bob Fernandez, a 52-year-old, fourth-generation graphic designer in Santa Maria, employed a similar preemptive greeting strategy in his interactions with his new neighbors:

> I think when I see the stuff in the newspaper, whether it's Hispanics or Mexicans or whoever that's doing it, it just brings a stigma onto all of us. Because I think there's a lot of the public out there that on first view, their initial thought is, "Oh, here's another Mexican." . . . You always wonder, moving [into a new neighborhood], are the neighbors across the street saying "Oh, here comes another Mexican family"? And I guess I'm the type of person that never lets people's attitude affect me. Like the neighbors across the street were rather cool for a long time, and it could possibly have been because they didn't like Mexicans. I really don't know. . . . But I'm the

> type that if I see them out there, I'm gonna holler across the street, "Hello! How are you?" Just force them to say hello, force them to be nice.

Signaling their American nationality is part of a larger effort by these Mexican Americans to fend off potential run-ins with nativism. Middle-class Mexican Americans often use symbols of their class status (recall that Pedro showed the INS official his American Express credit card) to send the message that they are in fact *American-born* people of Mexican descent. Among the symbols that they deploy in personal interactions are home ownership, certain consumer items, vacation destinations, and occupational status. By invoking markers of their class status, Mexican Americans attempt to send a clear signal that they are not the poor, unauthorized immigrants, but members of the national "club."

Such preemptive strategies are not always an option, particularly when Mexican Americans confront intergroup boundaries in interactions with friends or peers. In such cases, respondents correct those who articulate nativist sentiments. Respondents frequently "stand up" for Mexican immigrants in such situations (recall Ryan Bradley's confrontation with his peers). They point out that they are "Mexican too" as a way to communicate that nativist comments are unwelcome and in order to prevent future instances. Invoking a sense of common identity with Mexican immigrants is also a means by which Mexican Americans communicate the gross inaccuracies of the stereotypes embedded in nativist expressions. By citing themselves as "Mexicans too," respondents point out that attaching ethnicity to discontent about immigration lumps in Mexican Americans, who, as they attempt to point out, share many similarities with non-Mexicans. The respondents who are most likely to invoke this strategy are also those who are the most upwardly mobile. Their elevated class status allows them to fend off the potential stigma that may come with voicing a defense of their foreign-born coethnics.

Respondents often avoid situations in which they are likely to confront intragroup boundaries. In concrete terms, they steer clear of local establishments and public spaces popular with Mexican immigrants, shy away from Mexican immigrant and second-generation peer groups, and stay away from public spaces in which Spanish is the dominant language. Faith Obregón's avoidance of intragroup boundaries is evident in how she explains why she avoids spending time in front of the school auditorium, a popular haunt for Spanish-speaking students:

> I'd feel really uncomfortable hanging out by [the auditorium] where all the Mexicans are. I'd feel like they look at me like, "You shouldn't be here because you don't know Spanish and you're not like us." I'd feel really uncomfortable there.

In such settings, Mexican immigrants and some members of the second generation often remind Mexican Americans that they do not possess the key criterion for proving their Mexican ethnic authenticity: the ability to speak Spanish.

But Mexican Americans cannot always avoid or anticipate intragroup boundaries. When they are inevitably challenged about their ethnic authenticity, they frequently counter any implied assumptions about what it means to be a "real" Mexican. Rafael Solis, a 30-year-old, third- and second-generation pastor in Garden City, has faced many such situations. He explained his response to intragroup boundaries as follows:

> I would just ask them, "Why? Prove it," or, "What makes you more [Mexican] than me? Both my parents are Mexican. My parents are Mexican. You tell me how I'm not . . . how you're more [Mexican] than I am or I'm not a Mexican!" I would want them to explain to me why.

The defensive posture that respondents assume communicates that their identity as people of Mexican descent depends not on their ability to live up to commonly imposed expectations, like speaking Spanish, but on ancestry from Mexico more generally.

Others employ a less confrontational strategy: attempting to educate those who impose intragroup boundaries by explaining the factors that have contributed to their cultural assimilation. They assert that their family has been in the United States for multiple generations and that negative attitudes about Spanish language use during their childhood meant that there was a significant social sanction against using the language. I directly observed an instance of such an exchange between Donald Mercado and a young Mexican immigrant, who questioned Donald in an indicting tone about how Mexican Americans can claim to be of Mexican origin without speaking Spanish. The young immigrant suggested that Mexican Americans choose not to speak Spanish because they are ashamed of their ethnic roots. Donald countered that his own family has been in the United States for several generations and that discrimination and mostly negative attitudes toward bilingualism during his youth cast Spanish language use in a negative light and made learning it highly undesirable. The immigrant indicated his understanding and the conversation proceeded cordially.

Mexican Americans' responses to their encounters with ethnic boundaries do not eliminate the squeeze they experience from the two opposing identity construction projects evident in the inter- and intragroup boundaries they encounter. Larger demographic and sociopolitical forces make their elimination virtually impossible. Nonetheless, Mexican Americans' responses help to dull the edges of these boundaries.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article illustrates the role of immigrant replenishment in the formation of ethnic and racial identity and its effects on the ethnic boundaries that distinguish groups and sometimes run through groups. Heretofore, the duration of an immigrant wave has played at most a marginal role in theories of assimilation and ethnic identity formation. While others have stated that immigrant replenishment matters for assimilation, this article demonstrates *how* it matters in shaping the salience of group boundaries.

Examining the case of Mexican Americans in Garden City, Kansas, and Santa Maria, California, I find that the ability of individuals to experience ethnicity as a symbolic, optional, and inconsequential aspect of identity is in part a function of immigrant replenishment. Although Mexican Americans exhibit significant signs of structural assimilation, continuous waves of immigration maintain the rigidity of group boundaries in the lives of later-generation Mexican Americans. The interviews and observations I conducted reveal three significant mechanisms by which immigrant replenishment bolsters these boundaries.

First, non-Mexicans' expressions of nativism sharpen intergroup boundaries. Non-Mexicans voice nativism in interpersonal settings and in public forums, couching their sentiments in a language that attributes nativist fears not just to immigrants but to all people of Mexican descent. Respondents internalize this nativism, because it leads them to invoke their own immigrant history, drawing parallels between their ancestors' experiences and those of today's Mexican immigrants. In so doing, they come to identify with the immigrants' plight, as the experience of immigration and integration becomes ever more central to their own ethnic identity.

Second, immigrant replenishment bolsters the salience of race in the lives of respondents. In a context of heavy Mexican immigration, non-Mexicans use racial markers as proxies for a combination of ancestry, nativity, and legal status. In some cases, non-Mexicans mistake respondents for immigrants and even unauthorized foreigners. Mexican Americans with dark skin are especially susceptible to being mistaken for immigrants.

Finally, Mexican immigrant replenishment sharpens intragroup boundaries by informing the criteria for "authentic" expressions of ethnic identity. Mexican immigrants and the young second generation have come to define and police "Mexicanness," which entails, at the very least, speaking Spanish and having non-Anglo tastes. Mexican immigrants and young second-generation individuals call into question respondents' authenticity

1558

when they are not able to openly display the cultural characteristics that might "prove" their ethnicity.

Mexican Americans respond to these intragroup boundaries by attempting to avoid them altogether and by correcting those who impose them. Respondents attempt to avoid intergroup boundaries by emphasizing their American national identity. When interactions with peers and friends reveal intergroup boundaries, respondents correct nativist articulations that animate these boundaries.

Considering the case of white ethnics, who today experience virtually no immigrant replenishment, alongside that of Mexican Americans further casts into relief the importance of immigrant replenishment to the rigidity of ethnic boundaries and to processes of assimilation and ethnic identity formation. To be sure, there are many differences between the Mexican and European experiences. European groups are more phenotypically similar to the Anglo majority. Although many European groups were once classified as racially distinct from the "white" majority (Higham 1963; Roediger 1991, 2005; Ignatiev 1995; Jacobson 1998), their phenotypic similarity to the Anglos eased their assimilation. People of Mexican origin, on the other hand, are phenotypically diverse, and the lighter skin color that some people of Mexican origin possess may allow them to escape the most pernicious forms of nativism, easing their ability to cross intergroup boundaries (Qian and Cobas 2004; Duncan and Trejo 2005). But the majority of Mexican-origin people in the United States have darker features that make them easier to negatively racialize than people of European extraction. Furthermore, there is little doubt that the history of the Mexican-origin population as a colonized group and their racialization for more than 150 years is a nontrivial contributing factor to the Mexican American experience of race and ethnicity.

Another important distinction involves legal status. Nearly all European immigrants who came to the United States a century ago did so with authorization, rendering their legal status a nonissue in the host society's evaluation of their fitness as members of the national club. In contrast, the majority of Mexican immigrants who enter the United States do so without legal documentation, and the majority of all unauthorized immigrants in the United States come from Mexico (Passel 2006). The unauthorized status of so many Mexican immigrants has made the entire Mexican-origin population a target for nativist backlash and the focal point of debates about U.S. immigration policy.

Accounting for these differences, a central factor distinguishing how later-generation Mexican Americans and later-generation white ethnics experience their ethnic identity lies in the extent of immigrant replen-

ishment. The mechanisms that limit Mexican Americans' ability to experience ethnicity symbolically, inconsequentially, and optionally are the very mechanisms that allow for just such an experience of ethnic identity for white ethnics. Both later-generation Mexican Americans and white ethnics exhibit signs of assimilation, as measured by socioeconomic advancement, intermarriage, and residential mobility. But because large-scale European immigration has attenuated, so too have the accompanying forms of nativism familiar to European immigrants in the past and to Mexican immigrants today. Without immigrant replenishment, later-generation descendents of these European immigrants negotiate an American society that no longer sees them as belonging to poor, laboring foreign groups that tear the economic and social fabric of American society. They are instead seen as American ethnics who have overcome the hardships of assimilation to become fully incorporated into the American mainstream.

Race played a central role in the assimilation processes of white ethnics, animating the boundaries between European immigrants and the native-born "white" population (Higham 1963). But the experience of these groups further suggests a link between race and immigration. The salience of race faded with the decline of European immigration, and many of these groups "became white" (Roediger 1991, 2005; Ignatiev 1995; Jacobson 1998). With the cessation of large-scale European immigration, the racial markers that once served as cues for ancestry and nativity grew weaker in their association with the particular groups from which they originated. This weak association between race, ancestry, and nativity contributed to the later generation's status as "white," freeing them from the racialized foreign status with which their immigrant and second-generation ancestors were all too familiar.

The case of white ethnics also illustrates the importance of immigrant replenishment in determining the extent to which ethnicity is an aspect of identity that can be invoked optionally. In contrast to Mexican American ethnicity, European-origin ethnicity has declined in salience to such an extent that white ethnics require nothing more of each other than to claim that their ancestors come from a particular homeland. Seldom would anyone expect an Italian American, a Russian American, or a German American to speak the tongue of her immigrant ancestors or to have tastes that somehow reflect her ethnic origin. Without any replenishment of immigrants, the standards for ethnic authenticity are low, and white ethnics are free to assert their ethnic identity optionally and without challenge—without running into intragroup boundaries. The case of the Mexican-origin population suggests that, had European immigration continued at levels equal to those around the turn of the last century, white ethnics might very well face more stringent criteria for group au-

thenticity, and claims about group membership would require much more than symbolic displays.[28]

Though the findings here are consonant with those from studies of later-generation Mexican Americans in other locales (Ochoa 2004; Macias 2006), the reader should be aware of the limitations of these data. The two cities used for this study are not representative of cities in which Mexican Americans reside nationwide. Nor are the respondents statistically representative of Mexican Americans within these cities or in other parts of the United States. No study using a small number of cities and a relatively small sample can provide a statistically representative portrait of all Mexican Americans. It is possible that Mexican immigrant replenishment may affect Mexican American ethnic identity formation differently under the influence of a number of factors for which my data are unable to account, such as city size and the concentration of people of Mexican origin within a particular locale. Furthermore, research dealing with assimilation in specific locales does not capture the experiences of those who have spent substantial time in the locale under study but who moved prior to the time the research began. It is possible that former residents of Garden City and Santa Maria are part of a pattern of assimilation in these two cities that I was unable to capture. Thus, the empirical claims derived from this article should be examined in other settings and, where possible, using representative samples.

Another potential limitation of my sample relates to the effects of intermarriage on identity. As I report here, Mexican Americans have relatively high rates of intermarriage. I did not, however, interview the offspring of these unions and instead focused only on those who self-identified as being of "unmixed" Mexican origin. Mexican Americans of mixed ancestry (specifically, one "Mexican" parent and one non-Hispanic white parent) may be able to avoid the boundaries I report by "passing" as non-Mexicans (Jiménez 2004; Qian and Cobas 2004). It appears that some Mexican Americans of mixed ethnic ancestry do indeed "exit" the

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[28] Immigrant replenishment may also affect some of the more structural aspects of assimilation, particularly intermarriage and residential location. While the data from this article cannot adequately address this issue, is it likely that replenishment has a strong effect in these areas. The continuing influx of Mexican immigrants increases the pool of potential Mexican-origin marriage partners. Since intermarriage is a function not just of preferences but also of opportunities to meet members of a particular group (Blau 1977), immigrant replenishment may reduce intermarriage rates for people of Mexican descent. Likewise, immigrant replenishment may change the nature of residential assimilation. When immigration is ongoing, moving to the suburbs may not necessarily entail less contact with a coethnic population, particularly as immigrants increasingly forego urban settlement and instead move directly to the suburbs (Alba et al. 1999). These structural aspects of assimilation, influenced by replenishment, may ultimately alter ethnic identity formation and the nature of ethnic boundaries.

Mexican-origin population when responding to surveys, though the majority remain attached to a Mexican label when filling out census forms (Duncan and Trejo 2005; Alba 2006; Alba and Islam 2008). In daily life, processes of ethnic identity formation among Mexican Americans of mixed ancestry are in many ways similar to those I report among unmixed respondents from Garden City and Santa Maria (Jiménez 2004). Still, the findings from this article should be read as applying exclusively to unmixed Mexican Americans.

The theoretical point gleaned from the data collected in Garden City and Santa Maria remains, nonetheless, important to our understanding of ethnic boundaries, assimilation, and racial and ethnic identity formation. Given that the political, economic, and social forces that initiate and perpetuate immigration are well entrenched (Massey 1999), immigrant replenishment from many countries is likely to be a feature of American immigration into the foreseeable future. Ethnic groups may very well display forms of internal diversity resulting from immigrant replenishment similar to those found in the Mexican-origin population. Understanding the dynamic interplay of immigration, assimilation, race, and ethnicity thus requires social scientists no longer to rely only on the "usual suspect" independent variables to explain assimilation. Indeed, as this research suggests, the duration of immigrant flows is a central factor shaping ethnic identity formation and one for which researchers must account in order to more fully understand ethnic and racial change.

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