
How does the presence of a large Mexican immigrant population influence the ways later-generation Mexican Americans assert and exercise their ethnic identity? More broadly, how do Mexicans as a group fit into the U.S. ethnoracial mosaic? This theoretically innovative and empirically rigorous book gracially navigates the ideological debates about Mexican assimilation and provides new insights on both questions, while simultaneously opening a rare window into the fundamental contradictions that shape the lives of Mexican Americans today.

Given the centrality of the Mexican experience in the national debate about immigration policy and assimilation, Jiménez makes a strong case for how this experience must be taken into account if we are to fully understand the complexity of immigration today. Mexicans as a group constitute a unique case study for two reasons. First, their sheer demographic presence, coupled with a relatively low level of human capital and lack of legal status, has placed them at the front and center of these debates. According to the 2008 American Community Survey, one in ten Americans is of Mexican origin. More specifically, Mexican immigrants account for 30% of the total foreign-born population and more than half the undocumented population in the United States. Second, Mexicans’ status as both a formerly colonized group and an immigrant group points to their relative internal heterogeneity. For example, among the Mexican-origin population, only one-third is foreign born and two-thirds are of native-born stock, with the latter group comprised of individuals of both second and later generations.

In this important book, Jiménez provides the first comprehensive study of ethnic identity for Mexican Americans. The main data come from 123 in-depth interviews with later-generation Mexican Americans in Garden City, Kansas and Santa Maria, California—cities that were chosen to reflect different immigration dynamics. Whereas Mexican immigration into Santa Maria has been continuous since the 1900s, Garden City experienced a hiatus from the 1930s to 1980s. To compare the experience of Mexican Americans with European Americans, Jiménez theoretically sampled only respondents whose family had been in the United States prior to 1940. To fully understand the social context in which his respondents were embedded, Jiménez also relied on insights from informal interviews with community leaders and other

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residents, as well as participant observation of community life in both settings. From capturing public sentiments at a Santa Maria City Council town hall meeting to documenting traffic scenes at the San Diego-Tijuana border crossing, Jiménez conveys the most minutiae of details with keen insight. Combining ethnographic data and personal narratives with survey and Census data, the story Jiménez tells is compelling and, in many ways, surprising.

Previous research on identity and assimilation, which was developed out of the experience of European immigrants who arrived in major gateway northeastern cities, has systematically neglected the experience of Mexicans, whose presence had been confined to the west and southwest. More importantly, the hiatus in immigration from Europe after the 1940s was a significant factor in the creation of the “white ethnics,” as it provided the temporal window for the blurring of interethnic boundaries through residential assimilation and intermarriage. In contrast, immigration from Mexico has shown no signs of abatement over the course of the twentieth century. Whereas ethnic identification has been found to be mostly optional and symbolic among later-generation European Americans (Alba, 1990; Waters, 1990), Jiménez argues that this is not the case for Mexican Americans because immigration from Mexico imbues the Mexican-American ethnic identity with both benefits and burdens.

Continuous Mexican immigration not only contributes to the generational diversity among the Mexican-origin population, but also promotes interactions across generations. On the one hand, immigrant replenishment makes accessible the plethora of ethnic-specific customs, practices, and symbols and allows later-generation Mexican Americans to access them in authentic forms. On the other hand, it increased opportunities for them to form friendships, relationships, and marriages with recently arrived co-ethnics. This, in turn, provides the cultural content that contributes to the salience of an ethnic identity. From the serving of tamales during Christmas to the eating of 12 grapes in the New Year, Jiménez’s respondents creatively weave these symbolic Mexican threads onto the core fabric of their mostly American life.

Whereas immigrant replenishment supplies the building blocks of ethnic identity, post-1965 multiculturalism policies provide the mortar that cements these raw ethnic materials into daily “ethnic” practices. The prevalence of multiculturalism as an ideology not only reduces the cost and burden of a nonwhite ethnic identity, but also increases its benefit and desirability. Whereas Jiménez’s older cohort of respondents recounted coming-of-age experiences that were dominated by “English-only” and “American-first” parenting principles, respondents in the middle and younger cohorts significantly benefited from the broader cultural shift, which created an environment in which not only being “bicultural” is acceptable, but also being “bilingual” can provide tangible rewards. From watching Spanish-language television to attending Spanish mass, opportunities are abundant for Jiménez’s respondents to actively engage with their ethnic culture and practices.
One other implication of immigrant replenishment is the sharpening of both inter- and intragroup boundaries for Mexican Americans. On the one hand, the presence of Mexican immigrants has served to sharpen the ethnic boundary between Mexicans and non-Mexicans. If assimilation is a process that is marked by the decline of ethnic distinctions, then replenishment not only slows down, but also potentially contributes to the reversal of this process. Paradoxically, many of Jiménez’s respondents find themselves facing the very same bright boundary that they once thought to have crossed or blurred. On the other hand, Mexican Americans carry the burden of negotiating the intragroup boundary in their daily interaction with Mexican co-ethics. Put differently, Mexican Americans find themselves caught between a rock and a hard place. In interactions with non-Mexicans, they are often negatively stereotyped until they prove that they are the “good” Mexicans by speaking nonaccented English. In interactions with fellow Mexican immigrants, they are often faced with skepticism about their cultural authenticity until they prove that they are the “real” Mexicans by speaking Spanish. In both instances, language is often the first litmus test and how they manage to negotiate these competing boundaries shapes what it means to be Mexican American today.

Overall, the chapters in this book are well-supported with solid evidence and build tightly on each other. The book begins with a concise history of Mexican immigration over the last century and a half, along with an overview of the two fieldwork sites, to set the broader context. The first substantive chapter explores both cultural and structural dimensions of Mexican assimilation, including socioeconomic attainment, residential assimilation, civic life, social cliques, and intermarriage, as well as ethnic identity, language use, and observance of ethnic customs in daily life. Though more representative data and measures would be needed to fully assess their progress across generations, the interview quotations and narratives provide important insights into the mechanisms underlying the process of assimilation. The next two chapters present the book’s main argument about the importance of immigrant replenishment and examine its impact on the formation of both inter- and intragroup boundaries. The last two substantive chapters explore Mexican Americans’ fundamental ambivalence toward Mexican immigration, as well as how these views shape their daily interactions with their co-ethnics. Jiménez brilliantly captures the internal contradictions that many Mexican Americans feel toward their immigrant co-ethnics, while effectively highlighting how the former routinely reach out toward the latter to provide assistance in their daily encounters.

*Replenished Ethnicity* is as much about the contemporary Mexican-American experience as it is about how their sheer presence and replenishment are reshaping the meaning of assimilation. The book is well-written and engaging throughout, free of academic jargon and filled with compelling details about the nuanced ways the presence of a large Mexican immigrant population shapes what it means to be an individual of Mexican descent in the U.S.
context. This book not only adds a much-needed voice to the academic debate on whether ethnic identity is optional and symbolic for the offspring of non-European immigrant groups, but also fills an important gap in our understanding of the Mexican-American experience. In addition, it effectively argues that Mexican Americans are neither an aggrieved minority group nor an assimilating ethnic group, as both categorizations fail to capture Mexican Americans’ unique situation. Instead, the Mexican-origin population forms a permanent immigrant group whose experience is fundamentally shaped by the ongoing immigration from Mexico. This book will join the rank of Richard Alba’s *Italian American: Into the Twilight of Ethnicity* and Mary Waters’s *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* as landmark sociological studies of ethnic identity. Creatively engaging with the most important scholarly and policy debates, it is a must-read for both immigration scholars and policymakers who seek to understand the complex nexus of identity, immigration, and assimilation in U.S. society today.

REFERENCES


The Unfinished Revolution

Eviatar Zerubavel1


Greatly anticipated for several years by her fans, *The Unfinished Revolution* is the third part of Kathleen Gerson’s classic trilogy about the changing relations between work, family, and gender in the contemporary United States. Whereas *Hard Choices* and *No Man’s Land* told this story from the standpoints of the female and then male members of the generation that pioneered the revolutions in those three domains in U.S. society, *The Unfinished Revolution* complements them by adding the third piece of the intriguing puzzle, namely, the reflections of the direct products of that generation on the choices made by their parents when they themselves were growing up. Based on life history interviews with 120 young adults (60 women and 60 men) between the

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