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Young Mexican Americans, Blacks, and Whites in Recent Years: Schooling and Teen Motherhood as Indicators of Strengths and Risks

by

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The Jerome Levy Institute of Bard College

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A dominant concern regarding the contemporary immigration to the United States involves the children, and later descendants, of the immigrants: will they manage to improve upon the conditions of their parents, and repeat the pattern of earlier waves of immigration, namely a slow but steady ascent over several generations. Discussion of the past most usefully concerns the last great wave of immigration, roughly 1890-1920 during which southern, central and eastern Europeans from ethnic stocks that had been little known in the United States before that time, immigrated to a modern, industrial, society in great number. Today there is little difference in socioeconomic position between the descendants of that immigration and the descendants of much earlier arrivals to the United States (Lieberson and Waters). Concern about the offspring of today's immigrants has been expressed most influentially in the theory of segmented assimilation suggested by A. Portes and his colleagues (Portes and Zhou, Portes and Rumbaut). They expect that the offspring of middle-class immigrants will probably assimilate fairly easily, but they warn of the possibility that the children of immigrants entering American society at the bottom will have more trouble than did the children of immigrants who entered at the bottom in past eras. Today's offspring will have more trouble because i) they are non-white and American society is a long way from ignoring such differences; ii) the nature of the economy has changed so that industrial-economy jobs requiring minimal skill (but still an improvement over the parents' jobs) do not exist in great number as they did in the past; iii) extended education (necessary for today's better jobs) is out of the reach of immigrant families that enter at the bottom; and finally iv) an alienated, inner-city, non-white, youth culture will appeal to these new lower-class second-generation youth who encounter blocked mobility.

I and my colleague, Roger Waldinger have questioned this formulation of segmented assimilation noting i) that race divisions are socially constructed and tended to work against the immigrant stocks of 1890-1920 too; ii) that low-skill work is not as scarce as claimed; iii) educational attainment may be adequate for notable upward mobility; iii) concerns about youth culture are hardly new to today's inner city minorities and in any case depend on the first three concerns for their force (Perlmann and Waldinger, 1996, 1997; Waldinger and Perlmann).

In terms of this issue, the Mexican immigration has a special place. The Mexicans comprise the largest immigrant group by far, and they are the prime example of a migrant group entering American society at the bottom, rather than with high educational credentials and other economic advantages. One crucial issue, therefore, is the educational attainment of later-generation Mexican-Americans. We have, of course, some evidence on how members of later generations of Mexican-Americans fared in the past. But the past is not the present; the earlier history of the Mexican immigration is not the present-day experience. There are some reasons to worry that present-day conditions may actually be harder for immigrant offspring - besides those already noted, the size and long-term nature of the present immigration wave continues to generate competition for those who came earlier. And there are surely reasons to think that some things have changed for the better: first and foremost in terms of the civil rights of Mexican Americans and also the fact that the immigration is no longer as heavily rural and agricultural in destination, nor limited to the Southwest of the country.

In this paper I examine a number of indicators that shed some light, on these issues, by focusing on the second generation just now reaching adulthood. These indicators include 1) educational progress, 2) young motherhood and marital status, and 3) poverty status and employment status. There are various ways these characteristics could be measured; however, with the preliminary data before us, the outcome measures chosen should be adequate to a first cut. Also, I do not conduct a multivariate analysis of these outcomes; one might well be interested in what such an analysis would tell us about the contribution of various background factors to the eventual outcomes. One reason I do not undertake the analysis is that the data are too skimpy (as well as too preliminary): national samples of a few hundred in the crucial groups. However, there is also a good methodological reason why we need not conduct such a multivariate analysis even if we could responsibly do so. The larger substantive issue already described does not in fact require the answers to such questions. The question is whether the outcomes feared for the second generation of Mexicans are observable, or whether they are not to be found; to put it differently, the theory of segmented assimilation predicts that certain outcomes will occur; and these predictions are not about outcomes in which 'other factors are held constant'; so it is enough to show that these outcomes occur to support the theory and it is enough to show that they do not occur to refute the theory. We cannot, to repeat, expect definitive support or refutation given the CPS data; but we can ask which way the preliminary data seem to point - without engaging in a full analysis of the contribution of background factors in producing the outcomes that are observed.

The source for the information is a survey conducted monthly by the United States Census Bureau and known as the Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS files I use here cover the years 1994-2000, and thus they provide information on the United States population that is more recent than the 1990 Census. While national samples from the 2000 Census can be expected by 2003, even those samples will not supercede the data used here, because the 2000 census (like the two that preceded it) has failed to ask about parental birthplaces, and so it is not possible to classify ethnic groups in terms of their generational standing as precisely as in the CPS dataset used here.⁽¹⁾

I constructed the ethnic and generational definitions for the Mexican American sample members in the following way. First generation members were born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States (at an age greater than 10). 'The 1.5 generation' includes those who immigrated to the United States but at age 10 or younger, that is: at an age young enough to have probably profited from schooling in the United States. The second generation proper (listed as '2nd gen' in the tables) are U.S.-born individuals reported to have two parents born in Mexico. The second generation of mixed origin (listed as '2ndM gen' in the tables) are U.S.-born individuals with one parent who was born in Mexico and another parent who was not born in Mexico. This other parent might be U.S.-born of Mexican origins or U.S.-born of other origins or foreign-born from another country (including, of course, other countries in Latin America). The distinction I am making between the two types of second-generation members is the one students of ethnic demography often make between native-born of foreign parentage and native-born of mixed parentage.⁽²⁾ My point here is not to study the mixed population, but to isolate a sample of the second generation that actually includes the group most of us think of as second-generation Mexican-American: the native-born child with two Mexican-immigrant parents. I stress in passing, however, that the mixed parentage group deserves attention: it comprises about three-eighths of all second-generation Mexican Americans in the cohort (see the N columns in Table 1).

The dataset allows us to construct a category for those who were the descendants of earlier Mexican immigrants; specifically, this category includes a

U.S.-born individual who reports two U.S.-born parents but also reports himself or herself to be Mexican on a separate question that asks "what is your origin or descent?"⁽³⁾ This origin question is very much like the decennial census ancestry question, and is subject to the same major critiques: it is much more likely than the country-of-birth question to elicit subjective data (for example simplifying origins by excluding some of them), and it does not specify the generational standing of the respondent: the grandchild of an immigrant, for example, or the descendant of a Mexican family that had been living in the Southwest for centuries when the United States wrested the land from Mexico in the 1840s. Probably most respondents are closer to the former situation than to the latter, but we don't know. I use this classification despite the ambiguities because it is often used as the basis for discussions about long-term descendants of Mexican origin.

Finally, I compare all these groups to two others: one is the native whites of native parentage (NWNP) who are defined here as the U. S. born of two U.S. born parents who report no non-white or Hispanic origins. The other non-Mexican group for whom I present comparative data are American blacks, defined here as U.S. born of two U.S. born parents, who report themselves as black and without Hispanic origin. These two groups, those from long-term non-Hispanic white families and those from long-term non-Hispanic black families, define the two polar groups that we should be thinking about when we ask how the Mexican-Americans are faring; this is especially true if we take seriously the segmented assimilation theory that in essence suggests the descendants of labor migrants (most notably the Mexicans) are in danger of assimilating into black America, or into some similarly situated socioeconomic status.

We could also ask about trajectories in different parts of the country, and different urban settings. For the modest points I want to make in this paper, it is sufficient to limit the discussion to two geographic locales: the nation as a whole, and the central cities of metropolitan areas.⁽⁴⁾ The second geographic measure should give us a sense of whether or not the national pattern is being affected (for example) by blacks or Mexican-Americans in rural areas, and whether inner-city comparisons in barrios and ghettos would differ drastically from the comparisons here .

EDUCATION

I focus here on two measures of educational attainment. The first is graduation from high school. While some five-sixths of American youngsters today reach this educational level, the proportion varies considerably across relevant groups. It is also the highest educational level we can assess when studying those just reaching adulthood today. The second measure of educational attainment that I study is the mean educational attainment in the group, this time in a slightly older group, 25-34 years of age, who can be expected to have largely completed their schooling.

I examine the trend in high school graduation among those of age 19-24 in 1994-2000 - that is, those born as early as 1970 and as late as 1981, and reaching age 15 between 1985 and 1996. So these are indeed children of families whose immigration experience is solidly in the period of the present-day immigration, and not of the long earlier history of U.S.-Mexican border crossings. On the other hand, the present-day immigration is itself an evolving reality; the immigrant parents came relatively early in this immigration period (that is, by 1981).

I examine the second educational attainment measure, mean years of schooling, for the very next oldest cohort (25-34 years of age). If we want a sensible guess about the eventual completed educational attainments of those Mexican-Americans of age 19-24 (whose high school graduation rates we study), then the actual completed educational attainments for the group 25-34 is a good basis on which to make that guess. Note, however, that these somewhat older individuals were born in 1960-1975, putting their birth at and before the beginning of the period on which we want information.

Finally, by way of comparison at the early generation, I also present evidence on the educational attainment of Mexican-Americans who are at about the ages of this cohort's parents: a group some 25-30 years older than the 25-34, namely those 50-64 years of age. This information will be crucial in assessing the changing educational status of generations across time.

The great educational handicap of the immigrant generation, and the great educational gain of the native-born, is clear in all the tables. Among Mexican-born young Americans, 33% of the men and 34% of the women graduated from high school (those 19-24 years of age). By contrast, among the men 62% of the 1.5 generation graduated, 69% of the second generation of unmixed parentage, and 74% of the second generation of mixed origin; among the young women the rates are very similar (Table 1). The figures in the central city are a little bit lower, but not much (not least because, as the Ns show, a significant fraction of the entire group is in fact to be found in the central cities); the generational difference is clear there too.

However, the second-generation Mexicans have not caught up to the NWNP (89% male, 91% female high school graduates) - and, of greater significance, they have also not quite caught up to the black population (76% male and 80% female graduates). Recall that I referred to black educational attainment as the lower benchmark, asking whether the Mexicans were closer to the that benchmark or to the NWNP one; clearly, the answer is that the educational attainment of the Mexican second generation is much closer to the latter - and indeed has not reached that lower benchmark level. These are outcomes, then, that require attention in the coming period. On the other hand, we should also remember here that the second generation of European- immigrant groups a century ago also did not fare as well as northern-born blacks did in several age cohorts, (Lieberson); yet their own children or grandchildren nevertheless reached parity with native whites of native parentage. The same may happen now with Mexican Americans. Such progress may be no more satisfying than it was a century ago; my point is simply that the figures, while important, do not demonstrate conclusively that the reality now is headed in a different direction than before.

What, then, can we learn about the present and future if we examine the educational attainment of the young third-and-later-generation Mexican Americans? Some 75-77% of these young adults have graduated (a rate about equal to that among blacks). However the striking feature about these third-and-later-generation young adults is that the educational improvement among these individuals compared to the second-generation members is small (especially by comparison to the huge improvement of the second generation over the first): 69% vs. 77% among second vs. later-generation men and 74% vs. 77% among comparable women.

We see the same trends in Table 2, in mean years of schooling completed: very low levels in the first generation, great improvement in the second (although still below black as well as NWNP means) and less improvement from the second to the third-and-later generation. In particular, between second and later generations, we find among men 12.54 years vs. 12.55 years of schooling completed among men and an actual deterioration, at least in the sample data, among women, 12.63 to 12.49 years.

What are we to make of this minimal improvement between second and third generation outcomes? I think we should make nothing at all of these outcomes, because they are based on the wrong comparisons. Because they compare young adults born in the same years, by definition they cannot be understood to involve comparisons of a generation of children and a generation of their parents. And because historical development matters, we cannot say that the third-and-later generation of today is like the third generation that will emerge as the children of today's second generation. The evidence for these assertions is found in the same sample, by focusing on the older group of Mexican-Americans which I mentioned earlier, those 50-64 in 1994-2000. The immigrants of that age group comprise the generation of the parents of today's second generation.⁽⁵⁾ We notice immediately the differences: those immigrants arrived with much less schooling than do the immigrants of today. Similarly, the second generation members of that age cohort (children of parents who had arrived still earlier) attained less education than the second generation does today--10.29 years of schooling vs. 12.54 for the men and 9.67 vs. 12.63 for the women (Tables 2 and 3). Blacks also improved in this period, so that the relative position of Mexicans and blacks is small by comparison. But the mean for the entire cohort, and for NWNP in particular, was quite similar across the 30 years: a negligible gain of .06 years among the men and a gain of .70 years among women. In this context, the considerable improvements across cohorts in the educational levels of the first and second generations of Mexican-Americans is very meaningful.⁽⁶⁾

If we were to predict the educational attainment of the second generation of today from the attainment of the second generation completing school a generation ago, or the attainment of the third generation of today from the attainment of the third generation completing school a generation ago, we would underestimate by 1.5 to 3.0 years of schooling in each of the four relevant predictions (men and women, second and third generations--compare the means in Tables 2 and 3). That being the case, there is every reason to believe that if we predict the educational attainment of the third generation of the next generation from the attainment of the third generation of today, we make the same mistake. And finally, the claim that the attainment of the second and third generation of young Mexican Americans today is a reasonable proxy for the attainment of the second generation of today and the third generation of tomorrow also makes the same mistake.

Thus far, then, I have pointed out the empirical evidence for doubting this proxy; the explanation for the underestimates is not hard to find either. It rests on the notion of the relative advantages available to people from families of origin that are situated differently in the class structure. The second generation of Mexican Americans in the last generation averaged 10.29 years of schooling for men and 9.67 for women; today the second generation averages 12.54 years for men and 12.63 years for women. If there is a staple finding of stratification research it is that socioeconomic attainments will generally be related to educational attainments (I refer here to zero-order relationships - not to the 'net effects of schooling'). Suppose we are presented with two hypothetical families, A and B, and are told only that in family B the parents have received 1.5 to 3 years of schooling more than in family A; and suppose that we are then asked to predict in which of two families the offspring will have higher educational attainments. That is our situation in comparing the second generation of Mexican Americans of a generation ago and today. We should not predict comparable educational attainments for the children of these two second-generation groups.

If the educational gain between second and third generations will be as large over the next 30 years as it was over the past 30 years, we might expect that the third-and-later generation of Mexican -Americans in thirty years time will exceed the educational attainments of the present second-generation by about two years of schooling in the case of men and three years in the case of women (compare second generation men and women in Tables 2 and 3 respectively). I doubt that this level of advance will be realized - because educational attainments have an absolute ceiling and they also have a pattern of usual finishing points beyond which few continue. For third-generation Mexican-American means to increase in the next generation by as much two or three years, relative to NWNP, would have them attaining levels of schooling that would pass the NWNP means by nearly as much as the NWNP mean now exceeds the second-generation Mexican-American mean. That estimate seems far too optimistic. The point of this exercise is not to make an accurate prediction, but to warn against one method of making an inaccurate one. Still, if the factors discussed up to this point will determine the outcome, it would seem that there is reason to expect the third generation to exceed the second in attainments by more than the comparison of generations in one cohort would suggest.

As I said at the outset, the present levels of second-generation Mexican-American attainment indicated in Tables 1 and 2 are surely a source for concern and scrutiny; whether they are worse than would have been expected from labor migration experiences of the past is far less clear. However, claims that a comparison of these attainments and the attainments of the present-day third generation tell us about a future problem, a stalling of third-generation progress, so to speak, should be rejected. The larger question remains open: there may be other reasons why progress may stall. The theories of segmented assimilation suggest these: that the parents of tomorrow, first and second generation Mexican-Americans in this case, will have more difficulty helping their children move up the educational ladder because the changes noted at the outset have made it harder for them to do so--changes in the nature of the economy and in the educational credentials it requires for success.

YOUNG MOTHERHOOD AND MARITAL STATUS

The proportions of children born out of wedlock, and the proportion being raised by women without a spouse present, are high by historical standards in both white and black America, but they are far higher among blacks. Poverty surely contributes to a propensity to break up a marriage, and is correlated too with unwed motherhood. However, since our interest is on the future material well-being of the groups, the influences that operate in the other direction are at more important. Whatever members of the upper-middle class can allow themselves, among the less-well-off, young women raising children alone are less likely than other young women to finish high school or attend college, less able to arrange for, and pay for, daycare (permitting schooling or work) and quite simply likely to be living on much less than couples pooling resources (in an era in which both members of a young couple are likely to work). So the prevalence of teen motherhood, and of young adult women raising children alone, is an important measure of potential economic hardship for the women involved as well as for their children.

The CPS does not ask women whether they have children; but two items do report, for each individual, whether or not a parent and a spouse are present in the household and if so on what line of the form each is found. Starting with the children, then, it is possible to label the parents, and determine whether a parent is alone or is living with a spouse. The great advantage of this way of identifying the relevant population is that it is not limited to those women who head "female-headed households."⁽⁷⁾ The advantage is important because young women may be taken in by others--a parent of their own, some other relative, an older acquaintance. And indeed, just such patterns predominate among the young mothers. Among women 15-24 who are married, nearly all are listed as the spouse of the household head; they and their spouse, then, head their households. On the other hand, among mothers with no spouse present, 46% do not head their own household (Table 4); and among the teenage unmarried mothers (age 15-19), the proportion is a full 70%. If we limit the analysis to "female headed households" we miss these women.⁽⁸⁾

Of the groups we are scrutinizing, only the adult immigrants (Mexicans, 1st gen. in Table 5) have an appreciable proportion of teen mothers in marriages with a spouse present. Other groups do not marry so early, and the pregnancies that do occur among them are overwhelmingly to girls without a spouse present (see also Table 4, second panel). Among blacks, the proportion of such teen pregnancies is nearly 4 times what it is among NWNP (11% vs. 3%). Among second-generation Mexican young women, the 6% prevalence of such births is more like that of the NWNP, if judged in absolute numbers, and midway between the two other groups if judged in ratio terms. It is in the next older group, however, that the distinctive features of the black pattern show up most strongly, and the Mexican pattern differs from that black pattern. Among most groups (all but two), the proportion of women in their early twenties who are raising a child without a spouse is either smaller than the proportion of mothers raising a child with a spouse, or else the two proportions are very similar--specifically within 5 percentage points of each other. We should pause long enough to note that 'very similar' implies that something like half the mothers are raising a child without a spouse present--a considerable change from even fairly recent times. Nevertheless, our interest here is not in the universal changes over time, but in the ethnic differences in contemporary patterns. And here the great exception are blacks, among whom 43% of women 20-24 are raising a child, 39% with no spouse present, 4% with a spouse present. Rather than a ratio near 1:1 then, the black ratio for these two situations is nearly 10:1. In this context, the second-generation Mexican rates do not lie near the black rates, nor even in any sense midway between blacks and whites; while the ratio of these rates are 10:11 among NWNP, they are 12:16 among the Mexican second generation women. Only in the Mexican third generation of today can there be said to even be a trend towards the black pattern, with 23% of the mothers raising a child without a spouse, and 16% with a spouse. However, the cautions already expressed in connection with education concerning third-generation vs. second-generation patterns hold here as well: the third generation of an earlier trajectory cannot be seen as a good predictor of tomorrow's third generation.

Table 6 examines the same behavior as Table 5, but is limited to those living in central cities of metropolitan areas. As in the case of schooling, the geographic limitation does not alter the ethnic differences as much as one might have expected. Generally, the central-city mothers are somewhat more likely to be without a spouse; these geographic differences are clearest in the older group (20-24). Recall that the central city is an imperfect measure of barrios and ghettos; a central city dweller may be living on New York's upper east side as well as a few miles away in Harlem.

In sum, the patterns of young single motherhood can be contrasted to the educational patterns. In the educational domain, patterns are hardly clear cut, but

there is reason to be concerned about the prediction that the Mexican second generation will have trouble using schooling the way the children of the NWNP use it, and may be closer to, or below the levels of, black educational attainment. In patterns of child-bearing and family formation, the Mexican-American patterns are less divergent from the NWNP patterns, and less similar to patterns of black America. The young women in their teens tend to support this conclusion in a weak way; the women in their early twenties support it clearly. The patterns of the Mexican third-generation of earlier arrivals gives us pause for concern, although even among this group the balance between the two groups of mothers is much less extreme than in black America.

POVERTY AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS

The poverty status measure asks whether the young adult, 20-24 years of age, lives in a family defined by the CPS as being in poverty. If we were to look only at immigrants and second generation members, we would tend to interpret the results with guarded optimism. Thus 29% of immigrant and 17% of the second-generation Mexican men are in poverty, 42% and 23% of the women.⁽⁹⁾ By definition, the young immigrants came to the United States past the age of ten, and if many of them came in late adolescence, or in their early twenties, as is very likely, they have not had so very long to improve their condition in this country; the fact that the next generation is somewhat better off, then, is not telling us much. Another comparison would be between the second generation and the proportion of NWNP; the poverty rates among the latter are about two-thirds as high as among the former--"only" two thirds as high or "fully" two thirds as high depending on one's perspective. If we take the NWNP as an indication of what we can expect of a group well-settled in this society, then it does seem to me that the second generation's position has moved reasonably close to that standard. Among the black comparison group, the figures are decidedly grimmer, with the Mexican men falling roughly midway between blacks and whites, and the Mexican women closer to the NWNP levels of poverty.⁽¹⁰⁾

The fact that a higher proportion of the black young women are raising a child surely helps determine the gender difference.

The poverty rates do not suggest that second-generation Mexican development parallels that of blacks, and probably do not suggest radically slower economic improvement than would characterized the second generation in the early years of the twentieth century. However, whether, in changed economic conditions, such a comparison is an adequate reason for confidence in future progress is another matter; I will return to this issue in the conclusion.

A roughly parallel conclusion also emerges from the male employment data. Where as 28% of the black and 11% of the NWNP young men are neither at work nor in school, the Mexican pattern is much closer to the NWNP, with 14% in that category (see the column "not working, other" in Table 7). Where are the rest? Similar proportions in all three groups are only working part-time (and not at school -- 9-10%); the rest are either at work full-time (whether at school or not) or only in school (not working full-time, but possibly working part-time). Among blacks and NWNP the proportion at school is higher than among the Mexican second generation: 27% and 23% vs. 15%; the proportion at work is correspondingly lower among NWNP (62% for the Mexican second generation, 54% for the NWNP); it is more than correspondingly lower for the blacks (39%) - and thus the higher proportion neither at work nor at school. Thus, once again, the Mexican male pattern probably resembles the older immigrant pattern, with the second generation well-into the labor force, but (as a consequence) a smaller proportion among them than among the older ethnic groups are gaining the advantage of extended schooling.

Among the young women, the key differences in this ethnic pattern are related first of all to childbearing. Fewer women in every group are in the labor force; only among the first generation and among the 1.5 group do we find that an appreciable part of that gender difference is in the "other" category. Relatively few of the NWNP are mothers who are neither working nor in school; higher (and comparable) proportions of later-generation Mexicans and blacks are found in this category.⁽¹¹⁾ Immigrant women are especially concentrated in these domestic roles: 58% neither at work or at school, about evenly divided between mothers and others. Possibly the second-generation women are more heavily involved than the men in schooling; the result of all these patterns is that the proportions of women working full-time does not vary much across the ethnic groups (other than among the first generation): in the other six groups, the percentage floats only between 36 and 45.

Table 8 concentrates on only three groups: the Mexican second generation, the NWNP and the NBkNP; however, it provides a fuller breakdown of work and schooling, and especially of levels of schooling. The CPS question about schooling allows us to ask whether the respondents who are in school are in "high school" or in "college or university."⁽¹²⁾ We might be concerned that many of the Mexican ethnics or blacks in their early twenties who are still enrolled in school are finishing up high school, whereas Panglosians are assuming them to be in college. This concern is unfounded, however: in no group are more than 3% of either sex in high school, and the proportion in college (or--in every case where "college" is specified--graduate study) is in each case at least 6 or 7 times as great as the proportion in high school. This more refined analysis of the educational data suggests a more favorable comparison of advanced schooling among second-generation Mexican-American males than does Table 7: 14% in college (and not working full-time), 7% working full-time and in college (or college grads)-- thus 21% either college grads working full time or currently in college. The comparable proportions for black males are 19%, and 6%--25% college grads working full time or in college. Thus, the likelihood that the proportion of college grads among these Mexican-American males will about equal those of blacks of the same age appears high, while at the same time 55% of the former and only 33% of the latter are working full-time. Among the women too, the college-going figures are quite similar: Mexicans, 29% in college or college grads working full time, blacks, 30%. For NWNP males the college-going proportions are notably higher: males 39%, and females 43%. Also, note in all three groups, and especially among Mexicans and blacks the gender difference: more women reaching college.

MISSING BLACK MEN

Our explorations thus far have concerned those who were canvassed in the CPS canvasses. However, a grim pattern is observed when we look at the male-to-female ratio among the counted in each group (Table 9, column c). Among the native-born ethnic groups studied here except the blacks, that ratio is very near 1.0--between .96 and 1.02 despite some fairly small samples. Among the young-adult blacks, the male-to-female ratio is .82. This figure, it should be understood, already reflects the CPS statisticians' efforts to weight the raw data by age, sex, race, as well as by other factors. The even-lower ratio of .71 in the raw sample counts is shown in column e of Table 9. However, it should be understood that the CPS weighting efforts are based on the last decennial census, updated for population change--but not corrected for any undercount in that census. So the ratio of .82 does not represent the Census Bureau's best guess of what the data would look like corrected for undercount. Surely some of this male-female ratio, then is indeed due to the differential undercount of black men relative to black women. Other reasons for an imbalanced ratio, however, cannot be ignored, namely the possibility that young black men have died or have been imprisoned in considerable higher numbers than the young men of the other groups studied here.

If we are interested in the extent to which a group's young people are successfully entering the mainstream, the missing young black men are surely of concern; even if they are simply undercounted--not imprisoned or the victims of high mortality--they are less likely to have attended college or to exhibit strong labor force attachment, and more likely to be living in poverty than are those young black males who have been enumerated. Those that are undercounted are not the ones closest to the mainstream, after all.

And so figures in the preceding tables for educational attainment, labor force participation and poverty may be correct for the enumerated young people, but the tables are likely to overstate the progress of blacks generally if we take into account the fact that notably fewer members of young black men than other young men have been counted in these categories, and the reasons why the others have not been counted. And in terms of the comparisons before us, there is no evidence so far that appreciable numbers of young native-born Mexican-American men are missing from the enumeration.

CONCLUSION

In terms of the large question posed at the outset, these CPS figures seem to reveal two emerging trends. First, Mexican second-generation may be compromised to some extent by the high proportion entering the labor force--mostly in the case of men. This pattern may well reflect traditional immigrant processes that meant in the past slow but eventual upward mobility for the group - albeit not very clearly so for at least one more generation. Second, in several key ways, the Mexican second generation clearly does not exhibit dysfunctional social patterns (dysfunctional for social mobility and socio-economic well-being) to the same extent as blacks of the same birth cohort, most importantly, in terms of labor force participation, and young, single-parent motherhood.

Although it speaks of second-generation decline, the segmented assimilation theory is actually thin on timing: can we expect the failure of the old patterns to occur in the course of a generation, or not to be visible for two or three generations? The point is crucial, because of the first pattern I mentioned: the issue of Mexican-American schooling and work. It would be reassuring to be sure that this trade-off of education and work meant that those choosing work would still be able to advance substantially enough over the lot of their parents, and that it would enable *their own* children (the third generation) to choose an extended education. If we knew these things, we could be more confident then that the old-style immigrant pattern the Mexicans seem to be following would not betray them or their children--or rather, not betray them any more than the choice betrayed struggling second-generation families of the past. However, we do not know these hopes about the future to be facts, and indeed, one of the points of those who argue for the segmented assimilation notion is precisely that the economy probably *does not* provide the same chances of propelling upward the less-educated second-generation members. It is true that the pessimistic view of the future has not been linked to a careful delineation of the availability of jobs and who gets them, but it is just as true that the critiques of the pessimistic view have not made that linkage either. It would be helpful, first to study evidence available in the historical record about how the generations of the past did in fact move forward. Second, we need a clearer analysis of just how fully the present and future economy will sustain sub-populations--Mexican and others--in which less than a third of the native-born reach college. We will not have good answers to this second question for a long time to come.

We might only note, as much in concern as in reassurance, that the proportion attending college does not vary as greatly across the groups as one might suspect. Thus among the second generation Mexican men of age 20-24, 78% have not graduated college and were not enrolled at the time of the survey; among the comparable NWNP the same is true for 59% of the group (Table 8, summing all college-related cells). This is an important ethnic difference, to be sure; but it also suggests that the concerns about education and the new economy are either considerably exaggerated, or else they apply also to a majority of the privileged group.

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NOTES

1. The CPS files for March 1994 -2000 are included, linked by Waldinger and his associates at UCLA for our joint project on second generations past and present, and for other purposes.
2. The dataset actually allows me to ascertain the country of birth for the non-Mexican-born parent in the 2ndM gen. group; however I have not used that information here, partly because if the parent had been born in the U.S. I could not determine whether or not he or she was of Mexican 'origins.' On the meaning of origins, see text below.
3. In one of the more astonishing twists of American bureaucrat efforts to deal with shifting ethnic concerns this question is asked by presenting a respondent with a flash-card listing many Hispanic and non-Hispanic origins; then the non-Hispanic origins are coded only as "other."
4. Specifically, the central cities of census MSAs (metropolitan statistical areas).
5. Although of course some may have come past child-bearing age and some parents may have returned to Mexico.
6. A further complication arises because educational attainments that characterized Americans generally in the cohorts 50-64 and 25-30 years of age were different. Nevertheless, they were not greatly different, and so I have simply compared absolute years of schooling, ignoring changing means and distributions of schooling. In making comparisons across cohorts when greater temporal changes are involved, one might compute the difference in educational attainment between each relevant ethnic group and a comparison group - for example, the difference NWNP - blacks and NWNP - Mexicans in two age cohorts. Also, each ethnic difference could be divided by the standard deviation of educational attainment for everyone in that cohort. The following shows that in such a comparison, based on Tables 2-3, the same conclusions about catch-up over time emerge.

Mean years schooling	Old cohort	Young cohort
NWNP	13.40	13.54
Mexican 2 nd generation	10.29	12.54
Difference (raw)	3.11	1.00
Difference/st. dev. for entire cohort	3.11/3.51= .89	1.00/2.78= .36

7. If the parent is a mother, it is possible to determine whether a father is present; if the parent is a father, it is possible to determine whether the mother is present, and to identify her by the line number provided on the husband's line under the spouse question. The information is imperfect, since a father might be a step father, or a couple may share resources without being married. The latter limitation could be surmounted through further analysis of household composition. The method also fails to detect women who have had children being cared for by others in another household.

8. Table 4 also shows that nearly all of the teen mothers living without a spouse at the time of the survey had never married. Among the next older group, the figure is still very high (80%); recall that some in this age group in fact had their first child as a teen.

9. The same is the case for the other groups of Mexican Americans: lower poverty rates than among the immigrants.

10. The difference in proportions in poverty are:

	Men	Women
Mexican-NWNP	7	7
NB1kNP-NWNP	11	2
and the ratio of the odds of each group's being in poverty are:		
	Men	Women
Mexican-NWNP	1.84	1.57
NB1kNP-NWNP	2.39	3.22.

11. There is an anomalously low figure for the second generation Mexican mothers, but given the small numbers and the fact that the pattern does not show up any of the other three later-generation Mexican groups, it is best to tentatively ascribe it to sampling variability.

12. The question is not explicit about other post-secondary options.

Table 1.
Percentage High School Graduates among 19-24 Year-olds, 1994-2000: Selected Groups

	United States: All Localities				Central Cities of MSAs			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Mexicans								
1st gen	33	1113	34	853	32	516	37	375
1.5 gen	62	256	60	259	57	100	59	105
2nd gen	69	418	74	470	68	129	68	186
2ndM gen	74	261	76	249	72	76	75	105
3rd+gen	77	735	77	772	77	225	75	269
NWNP	89	11358	91	12250	89	1954	91	2243
NBB1ksNP	76	1624	80	2151	74	783	78	1070

SOURCE: A dataset including the March files of the Current Population Survey, 1994-2000.

NOTES: 1) In all tables, frequencies (and means) are weighted to reflect correct proportions of each sampling unit in the population; Ns (and standard deviations) are unweighted.

2) Ethnicity coding is based on the CPS birthplace, parental birthplaces, and 'origins' questions (the origins question is a variant of the U.S. decennial census 'ancestry' question).

NWNP=U.S.-born to two U.S.-born parents, no hispanic or non-white 'origins' reported.

NBB1ksNP=U.S.-born blacks of two U.S.-born parents, no hispanic 'origins' reported.

1st gen=first generation: Mexican-born; arrived in U.S. at age 11 or older.

1.5 gen=the '1.5 generation': arrived in U.S. at age 10 or younger

2nd gen=second generation, of unmixed parentage: U.S.-born of two Mexican-born parents

2ndMgen=second generation, of mixed parentage: U.S.-born to one Mexican immigrant and one non-Mexican-immigrant parent

3rd+gen=third or later generation: U.S.-born to two U.S.-born parents; reported of Mexican 'origin'

Table 2.
Mean and Standard Deviations for Years of Schooling Completed, 25-34 Year-Olds, 1994-2000: Selected Groups

	United States: All Localities				Central Cities of MSAs			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
All in age group	13.12	2.78	13.31	2.68	-	-	-	-
Mexicans								
1st gen	8.98	3.53	9.34	3.7	9.04	3.49	9.27	3.65
1.5 gen	11.52	2.71	11.61	2.74	11.59	2.78	11.46	2.98
2nd gen	12.54	2.45	12.63	2.17	12.7	2.56	12.51	2.17
2ndM gen	12.65	2.08	12.78	2.18	12.65	2.37	13.21	2.4
3rd+gen	12.55	2.05	12.49	1.95	12.73	2.12	12.47	2.24
NWNP	13.54	2.26	13.7	2.18	14.09	2.37	14.24	2.35
NBBIsNP	12.74	1.74	12.84	1.91	12.69	1.79	12.8	1.99
NOTES: See Table 1.								

Table 3.
Mean and Standard Deviations for Years of Schooling Completed, 50-64 Year-Olds, 1994-2000: Selected Groups

	United States: All Localities			
	Male		Female	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
All in age group	13.06	3.51	12.61	3.11
Mexicans				
1st gen	6.8	4.44	6.58	4.24
1.5 gen	11.54	4.41	10.02	4.56
2nd gen	10.29	3.98	9.67	4.03
2ndM gen	11.81	3.62	11.04	3.67
3rd+gen	11.07	3.75	10.63	3.7
NWNP	13.4	3.06	13	2.49
NBBIsNP	11.68	3.27	12.15	2.73
NOTES: See Table 1.				

Table 4. Young Mothers Without a Spouse Present

A. The Proportion Who Are Not Household Heads

Age	% Not Head	N
15-19	70	784
20-24	39	2519
15-24	46	3303

B. The Proportion Who Have Never Married

Age	% Never Married	N
15-19	94	784
20-24	80	2519
15-24	83	3303

NOTES: See Table 1.

Table 5. Ethnic and Racial Differences In the Prevalence of Young Mothers (by presence of a spouse), the Entire United States

Age	Group	% Mothers...		% Not	Total	N
		No Spouse Present	Spouse Present	Mothers		
15-19						
	Mexicans					
	1st gen	7	11	82	100%	316
	1.5 gen	9	2	89	100%	267
	2nd gen	6	2	92	100%	606
	2ndM gen	7	1	92	100%	313
	3rd+gen	8	3	88	100%	718
	NWNP	3	1	96	100%	11429
	NBBlsNP	11	0	89	100%	2009
	all groups	5	1	95	100%	19008
20-24						
	Mexicans					
	1st gen	13	32	56	100%	744
	1.5 gen	18	18	64	100%	217
	2nd gen	12	16	72	100%	366
	2ndM gen	21	18	62	100%	209
	3rd+gen	23	16	61	100%	634
	NWNP	10	11	80	100%	10164
	NBBlsNP	39	4	57	100%	1796
	all groups	15	10	75	100%	17476

NOTES: See Table 1.

Table 6. Ethnic and Racial Differences In the Prevalence of Young Mothers (by presence of a spouse), In Central Cities

Age	Group	% Mothers...		% not Mothers	Total	N
		No Spouse Present	Spouse Present			
15-19	Mexicans					
	1st gen	6	11	83	100%	134
	1.5 gen	8	3	89	100%	101
	2nd gen	7	1	93	100%	243
	2ndM gen	9	1	90	100%	96
	3rd+gen	9	1	90	100%	212
	NWNP	4	1	96	100%	1448
	NBBIsNP	11	0	89	100%	938
	all groups	6	1	93	100%	4418
20-24	Mexicans					
	1st gen	15	31	54	100%	328
	1.5 gen	24	14	63	100%	88
	2nd gen	13	14	74	100%	139
	2ndM gen	20	18	63	100%	88
	3rd+gen	28	13	58	100%	221
	NWNP	10	7	82	100%	1929
	NBBIsNP	40	4	56	100%	901
	all groups	19	8	73	100%	5116

NOTES: See Table 1.

Table 7. Work and Poverty Status Among Young Adults, 20-24 Years of Age

Sex	Group	Percentage in Each Work Status					Total: Work Status	Percentage Living in Family With Below Poverty Income	N
		Working Full Time	--- Not Working Full Time ---						
			In school	--- Not in School ---					
				Working Part time	Not working				
					Mother	Other			
Men	Mexicans								
	1st gen	71	4	10	-	15	100	29	988
	1.5 gen	63	13	13	-	12	100	19	220
	2nd gen	62	15	9	-	14	100	17	344
	2ndM gen	46	30	11	-	13	100	16	206
	3rd+gen	55	17	12	-	17	100	16	593
	NWNP	54	27	9	-	11	100	10	9382
	NBBIsNP	39	23	10	-	28	100	21	1281
	all groups	52	26	9	-	13	100	13	16211
Women	Mexicans								
	1st gen	27	5	8	32	28	100	42	744
	1.5 gen	37	14	10	19	21	100	29	217
	2nd gen	45	25	9	9	13	100	23	366
	2ndM gen	35	25	11	18	12	100	23	209
	3rd+gen	36	19	13	16	16	100	29	634
	NWNP	44	28	12	7	8	100	16	10164
	NBBIsNP	36	24	11	18	12	100	38	1796
	all groups	41	28	11	10	10	100	22	17476

NOTES: See Table 1.

Table 8. Detailed Work-School-Motherhood Status for Selected Groups (percent)

Detailed Status Category	2nd gen. Mexican	Men NB1kNP	NWNP	2nd gen. Mexican	Women NB1kNP	NWNP
1 fulltime work						
1a College grad	1	2	7	1	4	10
1b In college	6	4	6	5	4	6
1c In high school	0	0	0	0	0	0
1d Other FT worker	55	33	41	38	28	29
2. In school, not FT work						
2a College grad	0	1	2	1	1	2
2b In college or univ.	14	19	24	22	21	25
2c In high school	1	3	1	3	2	1
3. Not in school, not FT work -- Part time work						
3a. College grad	1	0	1	0	0	2
3b. Other	8	10	8	9	10	10
4. Not in school, not working						
4a. College grad	0	0	1	0	0	1
4b. Not college grad						
4b1. Mother	-	-	-	9	18	7
4b2. Other	14	28	10	13	11	8
All categories	100	100	100	100	100	100
N=	344	1281	9382	366	1796	10164
NOTES: See Table 1.						

Table 9.
The Male-to-Female Ratio in the Age Group 20-24 among Various Ethnic Populations in the CPS

	Weighted			Unweighted		Ratio cols c/e
Group	Proportion		Ratio m/f	N	Ratio	
	Male	Female				
	a	b	c	d	e	f
All groups	0.4983	0.5017	0.99	33687	0.99	1
Mexicans						
1st gen	0.592	0.408	1.45	1732	1.33	0.92
1.5 gen	0.5139	0.4861	1.06	437	1.01	0.95
<i>Native-born Groups:</i>						
2nd gen	0.4954	0.5046	0.98	710	0.94	0.96
2ndM gen	0.4892	0.5108	0.96	415	0.99	1.03
3rd+gen	0.5039	0.4961	1.02	1227	0.94	0.92
NWNP	0.4992	0.5008	1	19546	0.92	0.92
NBBlsNP	0.451	0.549	0.82	3077	0.71	0.87
NOTES: See Table 1.						