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The Hispanic Challenge

By Samuel P. Huntington

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The persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages. Unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture, forming instead their own political and linguistic enclaves—from Los Angeles to Miami—and rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream. The United States ignores this challenge at its peril.

America was created by 17th- and 18th-century settlers who were overwhelmingly white, British, and Protestant. Their values, institutions, and culture provided the foundation for and shaped the development of the United States in the following centuries. They initially defined America in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, and religion. Then, in the 18th century, they also had to define America ideologically to justify independence from their home country, which was also white, British, and Protestant. Thomas Jefferson set forth this “creed,” as Nobel Prize-winning economist Gunnar Myrdal called it, in the Declaration of Independence, and ever since, its principles have been reiterated by statesmen and espoused by the public as an essential component of U.S. identity.

By the latter years of the 19th century, however, the ethnic component had been broadened to include Germans, Irish, and Scandinavians, and the United States' religious identity was being redefined more broadly from Protestant to Christian. With World War II and the assimilation of large numbers of southern and eastern European immigrants and their offspring into U.S. society, ethnicity virtually disappeared as a defining component of national identity. So did race, following the achievements of the civil rights movement and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Americans now see and endorse their country as multiethnic and multiracial. As a result, American identity is now defined in terms of culture and creed.

Most Americans see the creed as the crucial element of their national identity. The creed, however, was the product of the distinct Anglo-Protestant culture of the founding settlers. Key elements of that culture include the English language; Christianity; religious commitment; English concepts of the rule of law, including the responsibility of rulers and the rights of individuals; and dissenting Protestant values of individualism, the work ethic, and the belief that humans have the ability and the duty to try to create a heaven on earth, a “city on a hill.” Historically, millions of immigrants were attracted to the United States because of this culture and the economic opportunities and political liberties it made possible.

Contributions from immigrant cultures modified and enriched the Anglo-Protestant culture of the founding settlers. The essentials of that founding culture remained the bedrock of U.S. identity, however, at least until the last decades of the 20th century. Would the United States be the country that it has been and that it largely remains today if it had been settled in the 17th and 18th centuries not by British Protestants but by French, Spanish, or Portuguese Catholics? The answer is clearly no. It would not be the United States; it

would be Quebec, Mexico, or Brazil.

In the final decades of the 20th century, however, the United States' Anglo-Protestant culture and the creed that it produced came under assault by the popularity in intellectual and political circles of the doctrines of multiculturalism and diversity; the rise of group identities based on race, ethnicity, and gender over national identity; the impact of transnational cultural diasporas; the expanding number of immigrants with dual nationalities and dual loyalties; and the growing salience for U.S. intellectual, business, and political elites of cosmopolitan and transnational identities. The United States' national identity, like that of other nation-states, is challenged by the forces of globalization as well as the needs that globalization produces among people for smaller and more meaningful “blood and belief” identities.

In this new era, the single most immediate and most serious challenge to America's traditional identity comes from the immense and continuing immigration from Latin America, especially from Mexico, and the fertility rates of these immigrants compared to black and white American natives. Americans like to boast of their past success in assimilating millions of immigrants into their society, culture, and politics. But Americans have tended to generalize about immigrants without distinguishing among them and have focused on the economic costs and benefits of immigration, ignoring its social and cultural consequences. As a result, they have overlooked the unique characteristics and problems posed by contemporary Hispanic immigration. The extent and nature of this immigration differ fundamentally from those of previous immigration, and the assimilation successes of the past are unlikely to be duplicated with the contemporary flood of immigrants from Latin America. This reality poses a fundamental question: Will the United States remain a country with a single national language and a core Anglo-Protestant culture? By ignoring this question, Americans acquiesce to their eventual transformation into two peoples with two cultures (Anglo and Hispanic) and two languages (English and Spanish).

The impact of Mexican immigration on the United States becomes evident when one imagines what would happen if Mexican immigration abruptly stopped. The annual flow of legal immigrants would drop by about 175,000, closer to the level recommended by the 1990s Commission on Immigration Reform chaired by former U.S. Congresswoman Barbara Jordan. Illegal entries would diminish dramatically. The wages of low-income U.S. citizens would improve. Debates over the use of Spanish and whether English should be made the official language of state and national governments would subside. Bilingual education and the controversies it spawns would virtually disappear, as would controversies over welfare and other benefits for immigrants. The debate over whether immigrants pose an economic burden on state and federal governments would be decisively resolved in the negative. The average education and skills of the immigrants continuing to arrive would reach their highest levels in U.S. history. The inflow of immigrants would again become highly diverse, creating increased incentives for all immigrants to learn English and absorb U.S. culture. And most important of all, the possibility of a de facto split between a predominantly Spanish-speaking United States and an English-speaking United States would disappear, and with it, a major potential threat to the country's cultural and political integrity.

A World of difference

Contemporary Mexican and, more broadly, Latin American immigration is without precedent in U.S. history. The experience and lessons of past immigration have little relevance to understanding its dynamics and consequences. Mexican immigration differs from past immigration and most other contemporary immigration due to a combination of six factors: contiguity, scale, illegality, regional concentration, persistence, and historical presence.

Contiguity | Americans' idea of immigration is often symbolized by the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, and, more recently perhaps, New York's John F. Kennedy Airport. In other words, immigrants arrive in the United States after crossing several thousand miles of ocean. U.S. attitudes toward immigrants and U.S. immigration policies are shaped by such images. These assumptions and policies, however, have little or no relevance for

Mexican immigration. The United States is now confronted by a massive influx of people from a poor, contiguous country with more than one third the population of the United States. They come across a 2,000-mile border historically marked simply by a line in the ground and a shallow river.

This situation is unique for the United States and the world. No other First World country has such an extensive land frontier with a Third World country. The significance of the long Mexican-U.S. border is enhanced by the economic differences between the two countries. “The income gap between the United States and Mexico,” Stanford University historian David Kennedy has pointed out, “is the largest between any two contiguous countries in the world.” Contiguity enables Mexican immigrants to remain in intimate contact with their families, friends, and home localities in Mexico as no other immigrants have been able to do.

Scale | The causes of Mexican, as well as other, immigration are found in the demographic, economic, and political dynamics of the sending country and the economic, political, and social attractions of the United States. Contiguity, however, obviously encourages immigration. Mexican immigration increased steadily after 1965. About 640,000 Mexicans legally migrated to the United States in the 1970s; 1,656,000 in the 1980s; and 2,249,000 in the 1990s. In those three decades, Mexicans accounted for 14 percent, 23 percent, and 25 percent of total legal immigration. These percentages do not equal the rates of immigrants who came from Ireland between 1820 and 1860, or from Germany in the 1850s and 1860s. Yet they are high compared to the highly dispersed sources of immigrants before World War I, and compared to other contemporary immigrants. To them one must also add the huge numbers of Mexicans who each year enter the United States illegally. Since the 1960s, the numbers of foreign-born people in the United States have expanded immensely, with Asians and Latin Americans replacing Europeans and Canadians, and diversity of source dramatically giving way to the dominance of one source: Mexico. Mexican immigrants constituted 27.6 percent of the total foreign-born U.S. population in 2000. The next largest contingents, Chinese and Filipinos, amounted to only 4.9 percent and 4.3 percent of the foreign-born population.

SIDEBAR: From Diversity to Dominance

In the 1990s, Mexicans composed more than half of the new Latin American immigrants to the United States and, by 2000, Hispanics totaled about one half of all migrants entering the continental United States. Hispanics composed 12 percent of the total U.S. population in 2000. This group increased by almost 10 percent from 2000 to 2002 and has now become larger than blacks. It is estimated Hispanics may constitute up to 25 percent of the U.S. population by 2050. These changes are driven not just by immigration but also by fertility. In 2002, fertility rates in the United States were estimated at 1.8 for non-Hispanic whites, 2.1 for blacks, and 3.0 for Hispanics. “This is the characteristic shape of developing countries,” The Economist commented in 2002. “As the bulge of Latinos enters peak child-bearing age in a decade or two, the Latino share of America's population will soar.”

In the mid-19th century, English speakers from the British Isles dominated immigration into the United States. The pre-World War I immigration was highly diversified linguistically, including many speakers of Italian, Polish, Russian, Yiddish, English, German, Swedish, and other languages. But now, for the first time in U.S. history, half of those entering the United States speak a single non-English language.

Illegality | Illegal entry into the United States is overwhelmingly a post-1965 and Mexican phenomenon. For almost a century after the adoption of the U.S. Constitution, no national laws restricted or prohibited immigration, and only a few states imposed modest limits. During the following 90 years, illegal immigration was minimal and easily controlled. The 1965 immigration law, the increased availability of transportation, and the intensified forces promoting Mexican emigration drastically changed this situation. Apprehensions by the U.S. Border Patrol rose from 1.6 million in the 1960s to 8.3 million in the 1970s, 11.9 million in the 1980s, and 14.7 million in the 1990s. Estimates of the Mexicans who successfully enter illegally each year range from 105,000 (according to a binational Mexican-American commission) to 350,000 during the 1990s (according to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service).

The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act contained provisions to legalize the status of existing illegal immigrants and to reduce future illegal immigration through employer sanctions and other means. The former goal was achieved: Some 3.1 million illegal immigrants, about 90 percent of them from Mexico, became legal “green card” residents of the United States. But the latter goal remains elusive. Estimates of the total number of illegal immigrants in the United States rose from 4 million in 1995 to 6 million in 1998, to 7 million in 2000, and to between 8 and 10 million by 2003. Mexicans accounted for 58 percent of the total illegal population in the United States in 1990; by 2000, an estimated 4.8 million illegal Mexicans made up 69 percent of that population. In 2000, illegal Mexicans in the United States were 25 times as numerous as the next largest contingent, from El Salvador.

Regional Concentration | The U.S. Founding Fathers considered the dispersion of immigrants essential to their assimilation. That has been the pattern historically and continues to be the pattern for most contemporary non-Hispanic immigrants. Hispanics, however, have tended to concentrate regionally: Mexicans in Southern California, Cubans in Miami, Dominicans and Puerto Ricans (the last of whom are not technically immigrants) in New York. The more concentrated immigrants become, the slower and less complete is their assimilation.

In the 1990s, the proportions of Hispanics continued to grow in these regions of heaviest concentration. At the same time, Mexicans and other Hispanics were also establishing beachheads elsewhere. While the absolute numbers are often small, the states with the largest percentage increases in Hispanic population between 1990 and 2000 were, in decreasing order: North Carolina (449 percent increase), Arkansas, Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina, Nevada, and Alabama (222 percent). Hispanics have also established concentrations in individual cities and towns throughout the United States. For example, in 2003, more than 40 percent of the population of Hartford, Connecticut, was Hispanic (primarily Puerto Rican), outnumbering the city's 38 percent black population. “Hartford,” the city's first Hispanic mayor proclaimed, “has become a Latin city, so to speak. It's a sign of things to come,” with Spanish increasingly used as the language of commerce and government.

The biggest concentrations of Hispanics, however, are in the Southwest, particularly California. In 2000, nearly two thirds of Mexican immigrants lived in the West, and nearly half in California. To be sure, the Los Angeles area has immigrants from many countries, including Korea and Vietnam. The sources of California's foreign-born population, however, differ sharply from those of the rest of the country, with those from a single country, Mexico, exceeding totals for all of the immigrants from Europe and Asia. In Los Angeles, Hispanics—overwhelmingly Mexican—far outnumber other groups. In 2000, 64 percent of the Hispanics in Los Angeles were of Mexican origin, and 46.5 percent of Los Angeles residents were Hispanic, while 29.7 percent were non-Hispanic whites. By 2010, it is estimated that Hispanics will make up more than half of the Los Angeles population.

Most immigrant groups have higher fertility rates than natives, and hence the impact of immigration is felt heavily in schools. The highly diversified immigration into New York, for example, creates the problem of teachers dealing with classes containing students who may speak 20 different languages at home. In contrast, Hispanic children make up substantial majorities of the students in the schools in many Southwestern cities. “No school system in a major U.S. city,” political scientists Katrina Burgess and Abraham Lowenthal said of Los Angeles in their 1993 study of Mexico-California ties, “has ever experienced such a large influx of students from a single foreign country. The schools of Los Angeles are becoming Mexican.” By 2002, more than 70 percent of the students in the Los Angeles Unified School District were Hispanic, predominantly Mexican, with the proportion increasing steadily; 10 percent of schoolchildren were non-Hispanic whites. In 2003, for the first time since the 1850s, a majority of newborn children in California were Hispanic.

Persistence | Previous waves of immigrants eventually subsided, the proportions coming from individual countries fluctuated greatly, and, after 1924, immigration was reduced to a trickle. In contrast, the current

wave shows no sign of ebbing and the conditions creating the large Mexican component of that wave are likely to endure, absent a major war or recession. In the long term, Mexican immigration could decline when the economic well-being of Mexico approximates that of the United States. As of 2002, however, U.S. gross domestic product per capita was about four times that of Mexico (in purchasing power parity terms). If that difference were cut in half, the economic incentives for migration might also drop substantially. To reach that ratio in any meaningful future, however, would require extremely rapid economic growth in Mexico, at a rate greatly exceeding that of the United States. Yet, even such dramatic economic development would not necessarily reduce the impulse to emigrate. During the 19th century, when Europe was rapidly industrializing and per capita incomes were rising, 50 million Europeans emigrated to the Americas, Asia, and Africa.

Historical Presence | No other immigrant group in U.S. history has asserted or could assert a historical claim to U.S. territory. Mexicans and Mexican Americans can and do make that claim. Almost all of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah was part of Mexico until Mexico lost them as a result of the Texan War of Independence in 1835-1836 and the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848. Mexico is the only country that the United States has invaded, occupied its capital—placing the Marines in the “halls of Montezuma”—and then annexed half its territory. Mexicans do not forget these events. Quite understandably, they feel that they have special rights in these territories. “Unlike other immigrants,” Boston College political scientist Peter Skerry notes, “Mexicans arrive here from a neighboring nation that has suffered military defeat at the hands of the United States; and they settle predominantly in a region that was once part of their homeland.... Mexican Americans enjoy a sense of being on their own turf that is not shared by other immigrants.”

At times, scholars have suggested that the Southwest could become the United States' Quebec. Both regions include Catholic people and were conquered by Anglo-Protestant peoples, but otherwise they have little in common. Quebec is 3,000 miles from France, and each year several hundred thousand Frenchmen do not attempt to enter Quebec legally or illegally. History shows that serious potential for conflict exists when people in one country begin referring to territory in a neighboring country in proprietary terms and to assert special rights and claims to that territory.

Spanglish as a Second Language

In the past, immigrants originated overseas and often overcame severe obstacles and hardships to reach the United States. They came from many different countries, spoke different languages, and came legally. Their flow fluctuated over time, with significant reductions occurring as a result of the Civil War, World War I, and the restrictive legislation of 1924. They dispersed into many enclaves in rural areas and major cities throughout the Northeast and Midwest. They had no historical claim to any U.S. territory.

On all these dimensions, Mexican immigration is fundamentally different. These differences combine to make the assimilation of Mexicans into U.S. culture and society much more difficult than it was for previous immigrants. Particularly striking in contrast to previous immigrants is the failure of third- and fourth-generation people of Mexican origin to approximate U.S. norms in education, economic status, and intermarriage rates.

The size, persistence, and concentration of Hispanic immigration tends to perpetuate the use of Spanish through successive generations. The evidence on English acquisition and Spanish retention among immigrants is limited and ambiguous. In 2000, however, more than 28 million people in the United States spoke Spanish at home (10.5 percent of all people over age five), and almost 13.8 million of these spoke English worse than “very well,” a 66 percent increase since 1990. According to a U.S. Census Bureau report, in 1990 about 95 percent of Mexican-born immigrants spoke Spanish at home; 73.6 percent of these did not speak English very well; and 43 percent of the Mexican foreign-born were “linguistically isolated.” An earlier study in Los Angeles found different results for the U.S.-born second generation. Just 11.6 percent spoke only Spanish or more Spanish

SIDEBAR: Failure to Assimilate

than English, 25.6 percent spoke both languages equally, 32.7 percent more English than Spanish, and 30.1 percent only English. In the same study, more than 90 percent of the U.S.-born people of Mexican origin spoke English fluently. Nonetheless, in 1999, some 753,505 presumably second-generation students in Southern California schools who spoke Spanish at home were not proficient in English.

English language use and fluency for first- and second-generation Mexicans thus seem to follow the pattern common to past immigrants. Two questions remain, however. First, have changes occurred over time in the acquisition of English and the retention of Spanish by second-generation Mexican immigrants? One might suppose that, with the rapid expansion of the Mexican immigrant community, people of Mexican origin would have less incentive to become fluent in and to use English in 2000 than they had in 1970.

SIDEBAR: Early Warnings

Second, will the third generation follow the classic pattern with fluency in English and little or no knowledge of Spanish, or will it retain the second generation's fluency in both languages? Second-generation immigrants often look down on and reject their ancestral language and are embarrassed by their parents' inability to communicate in English. Presumably, whether second-generation Mexicans share this attitude will help shape the extent to which the third generation retains any knowledge of Spanish. If the second generation does not reject Spanish outright, the third generation is also likely to be bilingual, and fluency in both languages is likely to become institutionalized in the Mexican-American community.

Spanish retention is also bolstered by the overwhelming majorities (between 66 percent and 85 percent) of Mexican immigrants and Hispanics who emphasize the need for their children to be fluent in Spanish. These attitudes contrast with those of other immigrant groups. The New Jersey-based Educational Testing Service finds “a cultural difference between the Asian and Hispanic parents with respect to having their children maintain their native language.” In part, this difference undoubtedly stems from the size of Hispanic communities, which creates incentives for fluency in the ancestral language. Although second- and third-generation Mexican Americans and other Hispanics acquire competence in English, they also appear to deviate from the usual pattern by maintaining their competence in Spanish. Second- or third-generation Mexican Americans who were brought up speaking only English have learned Spanish as adults and are encouraging their children to become fluent in it. Spanish-language competence, University of New Mexico professor F. Chris Garcia has stated, is “the one thing every Hispanic takes pride in, wants to protect and promote.”

A persuasive case can be made that, in a shrinking world, all Americans should know at least one important foreign language—Chinese, Japanese, Hindi, Russian, Arabic, Urdu, French, German, or Spanish—so as to understand a foreign culture and communicate with its people. It is quite different to argue that Americans should know a non-English language in order to communicate with their fellow citizens. Yet that is what the Spanish-language advocates have in mind. Strengthened by the growth of Hispanic numbers and influence, Hispanic leaders are actively seeking to transform the United States into a bilingual society. “English is not enough,” argues Osvaldo Soto, president of the Spanish American League Against Discrimination. “We don't want a monolingual society.” Similarly, Duke University literature professor (and Chilean immigrant) Ariel Dorfman asks, “Will this country speak two languages or merely one?” And his answer, of course, is that it should speak two.

Hispanic organizations play a central role in inducing the U.S. Congress to authorize cultural maintenance programs in bilingual education; as a result, children are slow to join mainstream classes. The continuing huge inflow of migrants makes it increasingly possible for Spanish speakers in New York, Miami, and Los Angeles to live normal lives without knowing English. Sixty-five percent of the children in bilingual education in New York are Spanish speakers and hence have little incentive or need to use English in school.

Dual-language programs, which go one step beyond bilingual education, have become increasingly popular. In these programs, students are taught in both English and Spanish on an alternating basis with a view to

making English-speakers fluent in Spanish and Spanish-speakers fluent in English, thus making Spanish the equal of English and transforming the United States into a two-language country. Then U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley explicitly endorsed these programs in his March 2000 speech, “Excelencia para Todos—Excellence for all.” Civil rights organizations, church leaders (particularly Catholic ones), and many politicians (Republican as well as Democrat) support the impetus toward bilingualism.

Perhaps equally important, business groups seeking to corner the Hispanic market support bilingualism as well. Indeed, the orientation of U.S. businesses to Hispanic customers means they increasingly need bilingual employees; therefore, bilingualism is affecting earnings. Bilingual police officers and firefighters in southwestern cities such as Phoenix and Las Vegas are paid more than those who only speak English. In Miami, one study found, families that spoke only Spanish had average incomes of \$18,000; English-only families had average incomes of \$32,000; and bilingual families averaged more than \$50,000. For the first time in U.S. history, increasing numbers of Americans (particularly black Americans) will not be able to receive the jobs or the pay they would otherwise receive because they can speak to their fellow citizens only in English.

In the debates over language policy, the late California Republican Senator S.I. Hayakawa once highlighted the unique role of Hispanics in opposing English. “Why is it that no Filipinos, no Koreans object to making English the official language? No Japanese have done so. And certainly not the Vietnamese, who are so damn happy to be here. They're learning English as fast as they can and winning spelling bees all across the country. But the Hispanics alone have maintained there is a problem. There [has been] considerable movement to make Spanish the second official language.”

If the spread of Spanish as the United States' second language continues, it could, in due course, have significant consequences in politics and government. In many states, those aspiring to political office might have to be fluent in both languages. Bilingual candidates for president and elected federal positions would have an advantage over English-only speakers. If dual-language education becomes prevalent in elementary and secondary schools, teachers will increasingly be expected to be bilingual. Government documents and forms could routinely be published in both languages. The use of both languages could become acceptable in congressional hearings and debates and in the general conduct of government business. Because most of those whose first language is Spanish will also probably have some fluency in English, English speakers lacking fluency in Spanish are likely to be and feel at a disadvantage in the competition for jobs, promotions, and contracts.

In 1917, former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt said: “We must have but one flag. We must also have but one language. That must be the language of the Declaration of Independence, of Washington's Farewell address, of Lincoln's Gettysburg speech and second inaugural.” By contrast, in June 2000, U.S.

SIDEBAR: The Threat of White Nativism?

president Bill Clinton said, “I hope very much that I'm the last president in American history who can't speak Spanish.” And in May 2001, President Bush celebrated Mexico's Cinco de Mayo national holiday by inaugurating the practice of broadcasting the weekly presidential radio address to the American people in both English and Spanish. In September 2003, one of the first debates among the Democratic Party's presidential candidates also took place in both English and Spanish. Despite the opposition of large majorities of Americans, Spanish is joining the language of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, the Roosevelts, and the Kennedys as the language of the United States. If this trend continues, the cultural division between Hispanics and Anglos could replace the racial division between blacks and whites as the most serious cleavage in U.S. society.

Blood Is Thicker Than Borders

Massive Hispanic immigration affects the United States in two significant ways: Important portions of the country become predominantly Hispanic in language and culture, and the nation as a whole becomes

bilingual and bicultural. The most important area where Hispanization is proceeding rapidly is, of course, the Southwest. As historian Kennedy argues, Mexican Americans in the Southwest will soon have “sufficient coherence and critical mass in a defined region so that, if they choose, they can preserve their distinctive culture indefinitely. They could also eventually undertake to do what no previous immigrant group could have dreamed of doing: challenge the existing cultural, political, legal, commercial, and educational systems to change fundamentally not only the language but also the very institutions in which they do business.”

Anecdotal evidence of such challenges abounds. In 1994, Mexican Americans vigorously demonstrated against California's Proposition 187—which limited welfare benefits to children of illegal immigrants—by marching through the streets of Los Angeles waving scores of Mexican flags and carrying U.S. flags upside down. In 1998, at a Mexico-United States soccer match in Los Angeles, Mexican Americans booed the U.S. national anthem and assaulted U.S. players. Such dramatic rejections of the United States and assertions of Mexican identity are not limited to an extremist minority in the Mexican-American community. Many Mexican immigrants and their offspring simply do not appear to identify primarily with the United States.

Empirical evidence confirms such appearances. A 1992 study of children of immigrants in Southern California and South Florida posed the following question: “How do you identify, that is, what do you call yourself?” None of the children born in Mexico answered “American,” compared with 1.9 percent to 9.3 percent of those born elsewhere in Latin America or the Caribbean. The largest percentage of Mexican-born children (41.2 percent) identified themselves as “Hispanic,” and the second largest (36.2 percent) chose “Mexican.” Among Mexican-American children born in the United States, less than 4 percent responded “American,” compared to 28.5 percent to 50 percent of those born in the United States with parents from elsewhere in Latin America. Whether born in Mexico or in the United States, Mexican children overwhelmingly did not choose “American” as their primary identification.

Demographically, socially, and culturally, the *reconquista* (re-conquest) of the Southwest United States by Mexican immigrants is well underway. A meaningful move to reunite these territories with Mexico seems unlikely, but Prof. Charles Truxillo of the University of New Mexico predicts that by 2080 the southwestern states of the United States and the northern states of Mexico will form La República del Norte (The Republic of the North). Various writers have referred to the southwestern United States plus northern Mexico as “MexAmerica” or “Amexica” or “Mexifornia.” “We are all Mexicans in this valley,” a former county commissioner of El Paso, Texas, declared in 2001.

This trend could consolidate the Mexican-dominant areas of the United States into an autonomous, culturally and linguistically distinct, and economically self-reliant bloc within the United States. “We may be building toward the one thing that will choke the melting pot,” warns former National Intelligence Council Vice Chairman Graham Fuller, “an ethnic area and grouping so concentrated that it will not wish, or need, to undergo assimilation into the mainstream of American multi-ethnic English-speaking life.”

A prototype of such a region already exists—in Miami.

Bienvenido a Miami

Miami is the most Hispanic large city in the 50 U.S. states. Over the course of 30 years, Spanish speakers—overwhelmingly Cuban—established their dominance in virtually every aspect of the city's life, fundamentally changing its ethnic composition, culture, politics, and language. The Hispanization of Miami is without precedent in the history of U.S. cities.

The economic growth of Miami, led by the early Cuban immigrants, made the city a magnet for migrants from other Latin American and Caribbean countries. By 2000, two thirds of Miami's people were Hispanic, and more than half were Cuban or of Cuban descent. In 2000, 75.2 percent of adult Miamians spoke a language other than English at home, compared to 55.7 percent of the residents of Los Angeles and 47.6

percent of New Yorkers. (Of Miami residents speaking a non-English language at home, 87.2 percent spoke Spanish.) In 2000, 59.5 percent of Miami residents were foreign-born, compared to 40.9 percent in Los Angeles, 36.8 percent in San Francisco, and 35.9 percent in New York. In 2000, only 31.1 percent of adult Miami residents said they spoke English very well, compared to 39.0 percent in Los Angeles, 42.5 percent in San Francisco, and 46.5 percent in New York.

The Cuban takeover had major consequences for Miami. The elite and entrepreneurial class fleeing the regime of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro in the 1960s started dramatic economic development in South Florida. Unable to send money home, they invested in Miami. Personal income growth in Miami averaged 11.5 percent a year in the 1970s and 7.7 percent a year in the 1980s. Payrolls in Miami-Dade County tripled between 1970 and 1995. The Cuban economic drive made Miami an international economic dynamo, with expanding international trade and investment. The Cubans promoted international tourism, which, by the 1990s, exceeded domestic tourism and made Miami a leading center of the cruise ship industry. Major U.S. corporations in manufacturing, communications, and consumer products moved their Latin American headquarters to Miami from other U.S. and Latin American cities. A vigorous Spanish artistic and entertainment community emerged. Today, the Cubans can legitimately claim that, in the words of Prof. Damian Fernández of Florida International University, “We built modern Miami,” and made its economy larger than those of many Latin American countries.

A key part of this development was the expansion of Miami's economic ties with Latin America. Brazilians, Argentines, Chileans, Colombians, and Venezuelans flooded into Miami, bringing their money with them. By 1993, some \$25.6 billion in international trade, mostly involving Latin America, moved through the city. Throughout the hemisphere, Latin Americans concerned with investment, trade, culture, entertainment, holidays, and drug smuggling increasingly turned to Miami.

Such eminence transformed Miami into a Cuban-led, Hispanic city. The Cubans did not, in the traditional pattern, create an enclave immigrant neighborhood. Instead, they created an enclave city with its own culture and economy, in which assimilation and Americanization were unnecessary and in some measure undesired. By 2000, Spanish was not just the language spoken in most homes, it was also the principal language of commerce, business, and politics. The media and communications industry became increasingly Hispanic. In 1998, a Spanish-language television station became the number-one station watched by Miami residents—the first time a foreign-language station achieved that rating in a major U.S. city. “They're outsiders,” one successful Hispanic said of non-Hispanics. “Here we are members of the power structure,” another boasted.

“In Miami there is no pressure to be American,” one Cuban-born sociologist observed. “People can make a living perfectly well in an enclave that speaks Spanish.” By 1999, the heads of Miami's largest bank, largest real estate development company, and largest law firm were all Cuban-born or of Cuban descent. The Cubans also established their dominance in politics. By 1999, the mayor of Miami and the mayor, police chief, and state attorney of Miami-Dade County, plus two thirds of Miami's U.S. Congressional delegation and nearly one half of its state legislators, were of Cuban origin. In the wake of the Elián González affair in 2000, the non-Hispanic city manager and police chief in Miami City were replaced by Cubans.

The Cuban and Hispanic dominance of Miami left Anglos (as well as blacks) as outside minorities that could often be ignored. Unable to communicate with government bureaucrats and discriminated against by store clerks, the Anglos came to realize, as one of them put it, “My God, this is what it's like to be the minority.” The Anglos had three choices. They could accept their subordinate and outsider position. They could attempt to adopt the manners, customs, and language of the Hispanics and assimilate into the Hispanic community—“acculturation in reverse,” as the scholars Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick labeled it. Or they could leave Miami, and between 1983 and 1993, about 140,000 did just that, their exodus reflected in a popular bumper sticker: “Will the last American to leave Miami, please bring the flag.”

Contempt of culture

Is Miami the future for Los Angeles and the southwest United States? In the end, the results could be similar: the creation of a large, distinct, Spanish-speaking community with economic and political resources sufficient to sustain its Hispanic identity apart from the national identity of other Americans and also able to influence U.S. politics, government, and society. However, the processes by which this result might come about differ. The Hispanization of Miami has been rapid, explicit, and economically driven. The Hispanization of the Southwest has been slower, unrelenting, and politically driven.

The Cuban influx into Florida was intermittent and responded to the policies of the Cuban government. Mexican immigration, on the other hand, is continuous, includes a large illegal component, and shows no signs of tapering. The Hispanic (that is, largely Mexican) population of Southern California far exceeds in number but has yet to reach the proportions of the Hispanic population of Miami—though it is increasing rapidly.

The early Cuban immigrants in South Florida were largely middle and upper class. Subsequent immigrants were more lower class. In the Southwest, overwhelming numbers of Mexican immigrants have been poor, unskilled, and poorly educated, and their children are likely to face similar conditions. The pressures toward Hispanization in the Southwest thus come from below, whereas those in South Florida came from above. In the long run, however, numbers are power, particularly in a multicultural society, a political democracy, and a consumer economy.

Another major difference concerns the relations of Cubans and Mexicans with their countries of origin. The Cuban community has been united in its hostility to the Castro regime and in its efforts to punish and overthrow that regime. The Cuban government has responded in kind. The Mexican community in the United States has been more ambivalent and nuanced in its attitudes toward the Mexican government. Since the 1980s, however, the Mexican government has sought to expand the numbers, wealth, and political power of the Mexican community in the U.S. Southwest and to integrate that population with Mexico. “The Mexican nation extends beyond the territory enclosed by its borders,” Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo said in the 1990s. His successor, Vicente Fox, called Mexican emigrants “heroes” and describes himself as president of 123 million Mexicans, 100 million in Mexico and 23 million in the United States.

As their numbers increase, Mexican Americans feel increasingly comfortable with their own culture and often contemptuous of American culture. They demand recognition of their culture and the historic Mexican identity of the U.S. Southwest. They call attention to and celebrate their Hispanic and Mexican past, as in the 1998 ceremonies and festivities in Madrid, New Mexico, attended by the vice president of Spain, honoring the establishment 400 years earlier of the first European settlement in the Southwest, almost a decade before Jamestown. As the New York Times reported in September 1999, Hispanic growth has been able to “help ‘Latinize’ many Hispanic people who are finding it easier to affirm their heritage.... [T]hey find strength in numbers, as younger generations grow up with more ethnic pride and as a Latin influence starts permeating fields such as entertainment, advertising, and politics.” One index foretells the future: In 1998, “José” replaced “Michael” as the most popular name for newborn boys in both California and Texas.

Irreconcilable Differences

The persistence of Mexican immigration into the United States reduces the incentives for cultural assimilation. Mexican Americans no longer think of themselves as members of a small minority who must accommodate the dominant group and adopt its culture. As their numbers increase, they become more committed to their own ethnic identity and culture. Sustained numerical expansion promotes cultural consolidation and leads Mexican Americans not to minimize but to glory in the differences between their culture and U.S. culture. As the president of the National Council of La Raza said in 1995: “The biggest problem we have is a cultural clash, a clash between our values and the values in American society.” He then went on to spell out the superiority of Hispanic values to American values. In similar fashion, Lionel Sosa, a

successful Mexican-American businessman in Texas, in 1998 hailed the emerging Hispanic middle-class professionals who look like Anglos, but whose “values remain quite different from an Anglo's.”

To be sure, as Harvard University political scientist Jorge I. Domínguez has pointed out, Mexican Americans are more favorably disposed toward democracy than are Mexicans. Nonetheless, “ferocious differences” exist between U.S. and Mexican cultural values, as Jorge Castañeda (who later served as Mexico's foreign minister) observed in 1995.

Castañeda cited differences in social and economic equality, the unpredictability of events, concepts of time epitomized in the *mañana* syndrome, the ability to achieve results quickly, and attitudes toward history, expressed in the “cliché that Mexicans are obsessed with history, Americans with the future.” Sosa identifies several Hispanic traits (very different from Anglo-Protestant ones) that “hold us Latinos back”: mistrust of people outside the family; lack of initiative, self-reliance, and ambition; little use for education; and acceptance of poverty as a virtue necessary for entrance into heaven. Author Robert Kaplan quotes Alex Villa, a third-generation Mexican American in Tucson, Arizona, as saying that he knows almost no one in the Mexican community of South Tucson who believes in “education and hard work” as the way to material prosperity and is thus willing to “buy into America.” Profound cultural differences clearly separate Mexicans and Americans, and the high level of immigration from Mexico sustains and reinforces the prevalence of Mexican values among Mexican Americans.

Continuation of this large immigration (without improved assimilation) could divide the United States into a country of two languages and two cultures. A few stable, prosperous democracies—such as Canada and Belgium—fit this pattern. The differences in culture within these countries, however, do not approximate those between the United States and Mexico, and even in these countries language differences persist. Not many Anglo-Canadians are equally fluent in English and French, and the Canadian government has had to impose penalties to get its top civil servants to achieve dual fluency. Much the same lack of dual competence is true of Walloons and Flemings in Belgium. The transformation of the United States into a country like these would not necessarily be the end of the world; it would, however, be the end of the America we have known for more than three centuries. Americans should not let that change happen unless they are convinced that this new nation would be a better one.

Such a transformation would not only revolutionize the United States, but it would also have serious consequences for Hispanics, who will be in the United States but not of it. Sosa ends his book, *The Americano Dream*, with encouragement for aspiring Hispanic entrepreneurs. “The Americano dream?” he asks. “It exists, it is realistic, and it is there for all of us to share.” Sosa is wrong. There is no Americano dream. There is only the American dream created by an Anglo-Protestant society. Mexican Americans will share in that dream and in that society only if they dream in English.

Samuel P. Huntington is chairman of the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies and cofounder of FOREIGN POLICY. Copyright © 2004 by Samuel P. Huntington. From the forthcoming book Who Are We by Samuel P. Huntington to be published by Simon & Schuster, Inc. N.Y. Printed by permission.

The Hispanic Challenge

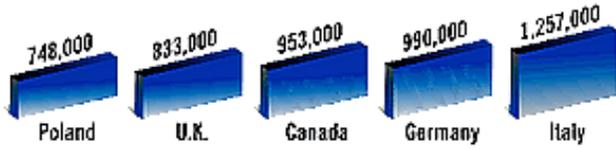
SIDEBAR: From Diversity to Dominance

From Diversity to Dominance

Foreign-Born Population Living in the United States

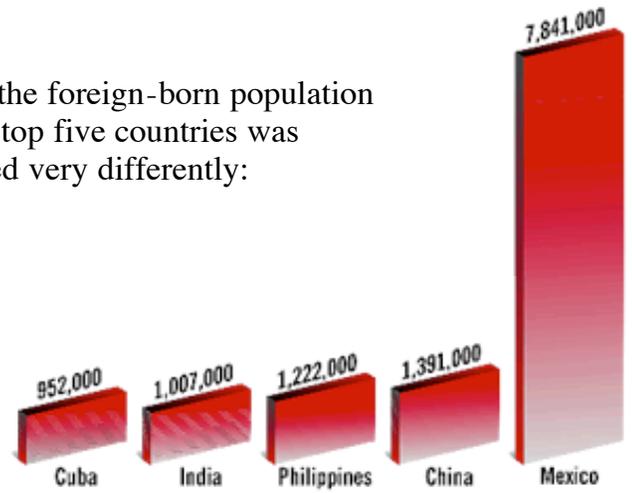
1960

In 1960, the foreign-born population in the United States (from the five principal countries of origin) was relatively diverse:



2000

In 2000, the foreign-born population from the top five countries was distributed very differently:



Source: Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon's "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States 1850-1990" (Population Division Working Paper No. 29, U.S. Census Bureau, February 1999); and "Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2000" (Washington: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series p23-206, 2001).

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SIDEBAR: Failure to Assimilate

Education

The education of people of Mexican origin in the United States lags well behind the U.S. norm. In 2000, 86.6 percent of native-born Americans had graduated from high school. The rates for the foreign-born population in the United States varied from 94.9 percent for Africans, 83.8 percent for Asians, 49.6 percent for Latin Americans overall, and down to 33.8 percent for Mexicans, who ranked lowest.

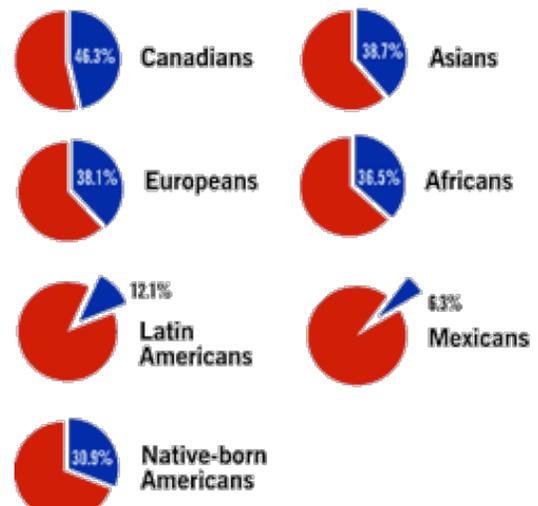
Education of Mexican Americans by Generation (1989-90)

	First	Second	Third	Fourth	All Americans *
No high school degree (%)	69.9	51.5	33.0	41.0	23.5
High school degree	24.7	39.2	58.5	49.4	30.4

Economic Status

Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans lag behind the rest of the nation and other immigrant groups on a variety of economic indicators, including managerial and professional occupations, home ownership, and household income.

Managerial/Professional Positions as a Percentage of Employed Members of Immigrant Groups (2000)



(%)
Post high school degree 5.4 9.3 8.5 9.6 45.1
 (%)

* Except Mexican Americans, 1990

Source: Rodolfo O. De la Garza, Angelo Falcón, P. Chris García's "Mexican Immigrants, Mexican Americans, and American Political Culture," in Barry Edmonston and Jeffrey S. Passell's (eds.) *Immigration and Ethnicity: The Integration of America's Newest Arrivals* (Washington: Urban Institute Press, 1994); and "Census of Population: Persons of Hispanic Origin in the United States," Washington: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990)

Intermarriage

In 1977, 31 percent of all U.S. marriages involving Hispanic crossed ethnic lines, compared to only 25.5 percent in 1994 and 28.3 percent in 2000. As the absolute number of Mexican immigrants increases and their high birthrate produces more children, the opportunities for them to marry each other will increase.

Percentage of Asian and Hispanic Women Married Outside of their Ethnic Group (1994)

	Asian	Hispanic
First Generation (%)	18.6	8.4
Second Generation (%)	29.2	26.4
Third Generation (%)	41.5	33.2

Source: Gregory Rodriguez, "From Newcomers to New Americans: The successful Integration of Immigrants into American Society" (Washington: National Immigration Forum, 1999), citing "Current Population Survey, June 1994" (Washington: U.S. Census Bureau, 1994)

Source: A. Dianne Schmidley, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2000, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2001

Home Ownership and Income of Mexican Americans, by Generation (1989-90)

	First	Second	Third	Fourth	All Americans
Homeowner (%)	30.6	58.6	44.1	40.3	64.1*
Household Income of \$50,000 or more (%)	7.1	10.5	11.2	10.7	24.8**

*1990, Includes Mexican Americans. **1990, Excludes Mexican Americans.

Source: De la Garza et al., 1994; "Current Population Survey, March 1990" (Washington: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990); and "Census of Population: Persons of Hispanic Origin in the United States," 1990

SIDEBAR: Early Warnings

The special social and cultural problems posed by Mexican immigration to the United States have received little public attention or meaningful discussion. But many academic sociologists and other scholars have

warned of them for years.

In 1983, the distinguished sociologist Morris Janowitz pointed to the “strong resistance to acculturation among Spanish-speaking residents” in the United States, and argued that “Mexicans are unique as an immigrant group in the persistent strength of their communal bonds.” As a result, “Mexicans, together with other Spanish-speaking populations, are creating a bifurcation in the social-political structure of the United States that approximates nationality divisions....”

Other scholars have reiterated these warnings, emphasizing how the size, persistence, and regional concentration of Mexican immigration obstruct assimilation. In 1997, sociologists Richard Alba and Victor Nee pointed out that the four-decade interruption of large-scale immigration after 1924 “virtually guaranteed that ethnic communities and cultures would be steadily weakened over time.” In contrast, continuation of the current high levels of Latin American immigration “will create a fundamentally different ethnic context from that faced by the descendants of European immigrants, for the new ethnic communities are highly likely to remain large, culturally vibrant, and institutionally rich.” Under current conditions, sociologist Douglas Massey agrees, “the character of ethnicity will be determined relatively more by immigrants and relatively less by later generations, shifting the balance of ethnic identity toward the language, culture, and ways of life of the sending society.”

“A constant influx of new arrivals,” demographers Barry Edmonston and Jeffrey Passel contend, “especially in predominantly immigrant neighborhoods, keeps the language alive among immigrants and their children.” Finally, American Enterprise Institute scholar Mark Falcoff also observes that because “the Spanish-speaking population is being continually replenished by newcomers faster than that population is being assimilated,” the widespread use of Spanish in the United States “is a reality that cannot be changed, even over the longer term.”

—*S.P.H.*

The Hispanic Challenge

SIDEBAR: The Threat of White Nativism?

In the 1993 film *Falling Down*, Michael Douglas plays a white former defense company employee reacting to the humiliations that he sees imposed on him by a multicultural society. “From the get-go,” wrote David Gates in *Newsweek*, “the film pits Douglas—the picture of obsolescent rectitude with his white shirt, tie, specs, and astronaut haircut—against a rainbow coalition of Angelenos. It's a cartoon vision of the beleaguered white male in multicultural America.”

A plausible reaction to the demographic changes underway in the United States could be the rise of an anti-Hispanic, anti-black, and anti-immigrant movement composed largely of white, working- and middle-class males, protesting their job losses to immigrants and foreign countries, the perversion of their culture, and the displacement of their language. Such a movement can be labeled “white nativism.”

“Cultured, intelligent, and often possessing impressive degrees from some of America's premier colleges and universities, this new breed of white racial advocate is a far cry from the populist politicians and hooded Klansmen of the Old South,” writes Carol Swain in her 2002 book, *The New White Nationalism in America*. These new white nationalists do not advocate white racial supremacy but believe in racial self-preservation and affirm that culture is a product of race. They contend that the shifting U.S. demographics foretell the

replacement of white culture by black or brown cultures that are intellectually and morally inferior.

Changes in the U.S. racial balance underlie these concerns. Non-Hispanic whites dropped from 75.6 percent of the population in 1990 to 69.1 percent in 2000. In California—as in Hawaii, New Mexico, and the District of Columbia—non-Hispanic whites are now a minority. Demographers predict that, by 2040, non-Hispanic whites could be a minority of all Americans. Moreover, for several decades, interest groups and government elites have promoted racial preferences and affirmative action, which favor blacks and nonwhite immigrants. Meanwhile, pro-globalization policies have shifted jobs outside the United States, aggravated income inequality, and promoted declining real wages for working-class Americans.

Actual and perceived losses in power and status by any social, ethnic, racial, or economic group almost always produce efforts to reverse those losses. In 1961, the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina was 43 percent Serb and 26 percent Muslim. In 1991, it was 31 percent Serb and 44 percent Muslim. The Serbs reacted with ethnic cleansing. In 1990, the population of California was 57 percent non-Hispanic white and 26 percent Hispanic. By 2040, it is predicted to be 31 percent non-Hispanic white and 48 percent Hispanic.

The chance that California whites will react like Bosnian Serbs is about zero. The chance that they will not react at all is also about zero. Indeed, they already have reacted by approving initiatives against benefits for illegal immigrants, affirmative action, and bilingual education, as well as by the movement of whites out of the state. As more Hispanics become citizens and politically active, white groups are likely to look for other ways of protecting themselves.

Industrialization in the late 19th century produced losses for U.S. farmers and led to agrarian protest groups, including the Populist movement, the Grange, the Nonpartisan League, and the American Farm Bureau Federation. Today, white nativists could well ask: If blacks and Hispanics organize and lobby for special privileges, why not whites? If the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Council of La Raza are legitimate organizations, why not a national organization promoting white interests?

White nationalism is “the next logical stage for identity politics in America,” argues Swain, making the United States “increasingly at risk of large-scale racial conflict unprecedented in our nation's history.” The most powerful stimulus to such white nativism will be the cultural and linguistic threats whites see from the expanding power of Hispanics in U.S. society.

—S.P.H.

The Hispanic Challenge

Want to Know More?

For an overview of U.S. immigration, see David Heer's *Immigration in America's Future: Social Science Findings and the Policy Debate* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996). Roger Daniels provides a recent history of U.S. immigration policy in *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003). A sophisticated analysis of the costs and benefits of immigration is George J. Borjas's *Heaven's Door: Immigration Policy and the American Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

On the ability of immigrants to assimilate, consult Milton M. Gordon's *Assimilation in American Life: The*

Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). Richard Alba and Victor Nee analyze developments since the 1960s in *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). See also Barry Edmonston and Jeffrey S. Passel's (eds.) *Immigration and Ethnicity: The Integration of America's Newest Arrivals* (Washington: Urban Institute Press, 1994). Bill Richardson encourages U.S. Hispanics to affect U.S. foreign policy in “[Hispanic American Concerns](#)” (FOREIGN POLICY, Fall 1985).

For an overview of Mexican immigration issues, consult the studies in *Crossings: Mexican Immigration in Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Cambridge: Harvard University's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, 1998), edited by Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco. Very different but equally important aspects of U.S.-Mexican relations are discussed in Abraham F. Lowenthal and Katrina Burgess's (eds.) *The California-Mexico Connection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993) and Jorge I. Domínguez and Rafael Fernández de Castro's *The United States and Mexico* (New York: Routledge, 2001). Excellent explorations of the U.S.-Mexican border include Robert S. Leiken's *The Melting Border: Mexico and Mexican Communities in the United States* (Washington: Center for Equal Opportunity, 2000) and Peter Andreas's *Border Games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000). Doris Meissner offers her perspectives and experiences on immigration and security in the interview “[On the Fence](#)” (FOREIGN POLICY, March/April 2002). Finally, for a superb study of the psychology, sociology, and politics of Mexican Americans, see Peter Skerry's *Mexican Americans: The Ambivalent Minority* (New York: Free Press, 1993).
