

**Ethnic Identity among the Mexican Origin Population: 1965-2000**

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## **Ethnic Identity among the Mexican Origin Population in the Mid-1960s**

### **Abstract**

The Mexican origin population varies widely in its choice of ethnic labels. These include terms such as Mexican, Mexicano, Mexican American, and Chicano or even more broad labels such as Spanish American or Latin American. This paper examines choice of ethnic labels among the Mexican origin population in Los Angeles in the mid-1960s (utilizing data from a 1965-66 representative survey of Mexican origin persons in Los Angeles County) and the late 1990s (with data from a follow-up survey of the same individuals in 1988-2001). In this paper, we focus on the 1960s data but we plan to replicate the analysis with the 90s data and compare both time periods. We have recently completed the data collection and are about to begin the analysis of the second wave.

With the 60s data, we find that nearly half of the population identified as Mexican(o) even though more than two-thirds was U.S. born. We observe strong immigrant/generational differences indicating that identification with Mexican(o) declines monotonically with more years and generations in the U.S. while identification with Mexican-American and American increases. Furthermore, these effects are strong net of other factors (i.e., demographic and socio-economic). While this relationship is consistent with classic straight-line assimilation theory, the persistence of a preference for the label Mexican(o) among more than one-quarter of the third generation also supports more current theories about assimilation. We will complete a similar analysis with the follow-up survey of the same individuals as well as a longitudinal analysis that examines correlates of changing identity. In the second wave, we have many more questions about ethnic and racial identity, enabling us to greatly enrich the analysis based on the first wave.

## **Ethnic Identity among the Mexican Origin Population in the Mid-1960s**

Despite the uniform categorization of the Mexican origin population in official statistics and in everyday conversations, the experiences of Mexican origin people in the U.S. are quite diverse. For example, they range from recent immigrants from Mexico to the descendants of families with land grants from the seventeenth century, from poor residents of segregated barrios to middle class residents of white suburbs, and from Spanish speaking with no knowledge of English to English speaking with no knowledge of Spanish. Similarly, the labels with which Mexican origin persons identify their ethnicity are also known to vary. They include terms such as Mexican, Mexicano, Mexican American, and Chicano. In some cases, terms such as Spanish American or American reveal little or no attachment to Mexican origin; while terms such as Latino or Hispanic reveal a primary attachment to a larger group of descendants of the Spanish speaking Americas.

Identification with one or another of these labels may characterize distinct subpopulations with distinct mind sets. They may reveal orientations about their family's past (Mexican, Mexican American, Spanish American), an assertion of a new identity (Chicano, Hispanic), a statement about primary identification with a nation rather than an ethnicity (American and possibly Mexican), or something else. Clearly, each of these terms may reflect different types of identity orientations, characterizing diverse subgroups of the Mexican origin population. Each subgroup may share collective sentiments or consciousness that distinguishes it from other subgroups. Also, these identities may reflect important demographic distinctions including time of residence in the U.S., region of birth in the U.S. or language use. However, boundaries between these subgroups are not definite because individuals may claim identities that vary depending on a particular social situation. For example, the same person may classify

themselves as Spanish on official forms, as Mexican American to an employer, and as Chicano to close friends. Nonetheless, responses to the same questionnaire in the same time period for all respondents controls somewhat for situational effects. We expect that the attitudes and characteristics of individuals in each subgroup might tell us something about what each of these labels imply because they reflect ways in which particular individuals choose to present themselves.

Alvarez (1971) describes the distinct socialization experiences of diverse generations in the developing Mexican origin population. He distinguishes (1) Mexicans, who immigrated to the U.S. in search of material dreams but remained committed to Mexico, from (2) Mexican Americans, who were committed to the U.S. and questioned the ethnic attachment of their parents. Finally, he notes the (3) Chicano generation, which emerged in the politically active late 1960s, which rejected the acculturating tendencies of their parents and tried to reclaim their ancestral heritage. This heuristic scheme, although overly rigid in reality, is useful because it (1) reveals variation by generational and historical period, (2) indicates a relation with consciousness and attitudes and (3) demonstrates the common usage of labels for describing generational subgroups.

Since then, survey data has revealed that the ethnic labels Mexican origin persons choose are varied. Also, their use is complex with each one crosscutting generation and other demographic variables. Garcia (1981), using a 1976 national survey of the population which asked preferred ethnic label from among only five choices, found that 51 percent of Mexican origin persons chose Mexican American compared to 21 percent choosing Spanish, 4 percent choosing Chicano, and a combined 25 percent choosing Mexican or Mexicano.<sup>1</sup> Hurtado and

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<sup>1</sup> For some reason, persons born in New Mexico was more likely to be in the sample which might

Arce (1987) found that Mexican/Mexicano was the preferred ethnic label among respondents in a national survey of Mexican-origin people in 1979. The term Mexican American or Chicano was the second most popular term, depending on the context used. When asked what name is generally used around here to refer to people of Mexican descent, 32 percent reported Chicano compared to 14 percent reporting Mexican American and 38 percent reporting Mexican(o). When asked what name do you use in your family when referring to persons of Mexican descent, 16 percent chose Mexican American compared to 10 percent choosing Chicano and 57 percent choosing Mexican(o).

This paper examines ethnic identity among the Mexican origin population in Los Angeles in the mid 60s. It draws from a 1965-66 representative survey of Mexican origin persons in Los Angeles County. The results of the survey were published in a landmark book *The Mexican American People: The Nation's Second Largest Minority* (Grebler, Moore, and Guzman, 1970). The first two authors of the present article are the principal investigators of a study which will re-survey the surviving original respondents and a sample of their children. Thus, this paper also serves as a baseline for the follow up study that will analyze changing ethnic identity over the thirty-year period. For the larger project, we are particularly interested in issues of changing ethnic identity, socioeconomic status, and gender/family attitudes. In this paper, we examine the terms preferred by the general population on the eve of the Chicano Movement and the demographic characteristic and attitudes associated with them. Did the leaders of Mexican American organizations and the Mexican origin population in general use similar ethnic identifiers? Which sectors of the population were most likely to have opinions reflecting those of the leadership? Were particular labels associated with political and social conservatism as some

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explain the high incidence of preferring the label, Other Spanish.

leaders claimed? The time period is important to understand because it immediately precedes the creation of a social movement that was able to draw on the support of large numbers of Mexican Americans.

## **Background**

A number of changes from the 1950s to the 1960s make this an important time period for understanding ethnic identity among the Mexican origin population. These include changes in participation and political attitudes during a changing political climate, increasing class diversification, and growing cultural nationalism. The period also immediately precedes the blooming of the Chicano movement and the subsequent institution of Civil Rights legislation pertaining to Mexican Americans such as the Voting Rights Act and affirmative action. The Mexican origin population was seen as being either in an assimilationist mode since World War II (Alvarez, 1973) or in the process of organizing and asserting their identity as were blacks in the civil rights movement of the time (Acuña, 1988). These two views are not necessarily inconsistent because the mid 1960s may have represented a transition from assimilation to affirmation, or perhaps there was an important and fairly stable division within the population about the position of Mexican Americans in U.S. society.

## **The 1950's: The Politics of Integration**

Despite their high level of participation in World War II, Mexican American veterans returned to the U.S. to find that pre-war discrimination continued. Public accommodations, schools, and housing remained segregated in many places. This persistent discrimination, coupled with an increasing desire to integrate into the U.S. mainstream, led to the formation of several organizations that aggressively pursued equal participation for Mexican Americans (McLemore and Romo, 1985). Activist Mexican Americans felt that the time had come to reap

their fair share of the benefits in the nation's growing economy—a nation for which many Mexican Americans had died.

The orientation and goals of some Mexican American organizations of the 1950's demonstrate an emphasis on integration (McLemore and Romo, 1985, Muñoz, 1989; Gutiérrez, 1995). Organizations such as the Association of Mexican American Educators (AMAE), Community Service Organization (CSO), and the American G.I. Forum worked with the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC) to promote the interests of Mexican Americans in education, housing, employment, and social services (McLemore and Romo, 1985; Muñoz, 1989). In addition, the CSO and the G.I. Forum prioritized registering people to vote to enable them to participate in the political process (Allsup, 1982; McLemore and Romo, 1985). According to Muñoz, "Collectively, these groups came to represent the new professional sector of an emerging Mexican American middle class with a progressive politics in the liberal capitalist tradition" (1989: 43).

As a result of the G.I. Bill, the number of Mexican Americans enrolled in college increased. While most of the veterans who entered college were concerned with individual success (Navarro, 1995), a few joined Mexican American middle class and professional organizations where they assumed leadership positions (Muñoz, 1989). Having been influenced by the ideology of patriotic Americanism and anti-communism, these veterans tended to emphasize their Americanness (Muñoz, 1989). While they did not deny their Mexican heritage, neither did they promote an identity as peoples of color. Rather, they promoted the idea that Mexican Americans were a white ethnic group, like Italians or Irish (Muñoz, 1989). This often meant ignoring or downplaying their Native American backgrounds and claiming a Spanish or Latin American identity for themselves (Grebler, Moore, and Guzman, 1970). In particular, they

sought to distance themselves from African Americans, whose fledgling civil rights movement they perceived as anti-integrationist and excessively confrontational. Overall, some thought that if they de-emphasized the racism experienced by Mexican Americans, they would be able to deflect anti-Mexican sentiment. As a result of these views, mass protests, confrontation, and forming coalitions with other groups of color were rejected. Instead, organizations such as LULAC and CSO as well as some of the Mexican American veterans involved in these groups perceived the U.S. as a democratic society which allowed Mexican Americans to achieve equality and acceptance through electoral politics (Muñoz, 1989).

Integrationist attitudes were often accompanied by a distancing from Mexico and its people. Soon after the G.I. Forum was established in 1949, it applied pressure to convince Congress to end the Bracero Program and to instill strict new regulations on future immigration from Mexico. The G.I. Forum promoted the idea that the civil rights of Mexican Americans must be enforced and that the Bracero Program and undocumented immigrants negatively affected their future (Gutiérrez, 1995). However, the passage of the McCarran Walter Act in 1952 and INS sweeps during Operation Wetback resulted in a shift in the ideological positions of Mexican American organizations regarding Mexican immigrants. For Mexican American organizations, including LULAC and the G.I. Forum, the government's treatment of Mexican immigrants served as a catalyst for the evolution of a broader based civil rights movement (Gutiérrez, 1995). One explanation for this evolution was the realization that the economic, cultural, and political treatment of Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants varied little (Gutiérrez, 1995).

### **The 1960's: Growing Cultural Nationalism**

The 1960's brought with it a number of shifts in political participation among Mexican Americans. These changes included a movement away from a politics of integration. As the

1950's came to an end and as the Black Civil Rights Movement gained national attention, many Mexican Americans began to feel that the organizations of the 1950's were not pressing hard enough to acquire civil right for Mexicans (McLemore and Romo, 1985). As a result, Mexican American organizations altered their political tactics away from the assimilationism of the 1950's. Some leaders argued for more aggressive organizing tactics, a stronger assertion of Mexican identity, and organizing as an interest group (Gutiérrez, 1995). Two examples of this shift were the founding of the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) in California and the Political Association of Spanish Speaking People (PASSO) in Texas and Arizona (McLemore and Romo, 1985; Gutiérrez, 1995). These groups sought to empower Mexican Americans by financially contributing to the election of Mexican American candidates, organizing against gerrymandering and poll taxes, and pressuring the Democratic and Republican parties to include Mexican Americans in leadership positions (Gutiérrez, 1995).

The activities of the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) provide an example of the emerging political activities. At their first convention in 1960, the participants, mostly middle class professionals, spoke in both English and Spanish, with some cultural nationalists refusing to speak in English. Furthermore, they raised the issue of terminology. A few people, though the minority, preferred using the terms "Latin American," "Hispanic," or "Spanish-speaking." Bert Corona, an important MAPA leader, felt these terms obscured a Mexican identity (Garcia, 1994). Corona supported the term "Mexican American," with an emphasis on "Mexican" because he felt Mexicans should assert themselves rather than using terms that made them more acceptable to Anglos (Garcia, 1994). During this time period, even the use of a hyphen within the term "Mexican American" was debated (Moore, 1997).

Another issue raised at the 1960 MAPA convention was about forming coalitions. Some members of MAPA fought for a resolution that would have committed MAPA to create coalitions with other “nonwhite minorities” such as African Americans, Asian Americans and Native Americans. However, the issue became controversial largely because many participants were not prepared to identify as “nonwhite” and the resolution was therefore dropped; although it was later adopted (Garcia, 1994).

By 1963, many Mexican American leaders began favoring the strategy of direct confrontation, as used by the Black Civil Rights Movement. As a result, a number of newer, more militant Mexican American organizations formed. These included: the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), the United Mexican American Students (UMAS), and the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) (McLemore and Romo, 1985)

By 1966, Mexican American high school and college students began demonstrating their dissatisfaction with discrimination and inferior education. One of the most important drives of this second stage of increasing political activism was the adoption and promotion among young Mexican Americans of a new, *Chicano* identity (Gutiérrez, 1995). This new leadership became increasingly culturally nationalist and disparaging of non-Mexican identifiers such as Latin American or Spanish-speaking. However, like much history that relies on the well-documented accounts of leaders, the discussion knows little about the opinions of their constituencies.

### **Present Study**

Considering the evolution of preferred labels among the leadership of the Mexican origin population up to the mid-1960s, we expect considerable variation in the ethnic labels that used among the general population of Mexican origin people. The paper examines choice of ethnic labels among the Mexican origin population in Los Angeles utilizing data from a 1965-66

representative survey of Mexican origin persons in Los Angeles County. We examine immigrant/generational differences in preferred ethnic labels used as well differences by demographic and socio-economic factors. We examine these differences, first in a bivariate fashion and then in a multivariate analysis. Moreover, we address the question of whether particular labels associated with political and social conservatism attitudes (e.g., attitudes toward other racial groups and toward immigration).

### **Data**

Data for this paper are from the Los Angeles portion of the Mexican American Study Project survey, directed by Leo Grebler in 1965 and 1966. 949 persons were interviewed in Los Angeles. The study also was conducted in San Antonio although we limit our analysis in this paper to Los Angeles. The survey is a stratified random sample that is representative of the Mexican origin population in Los Angeles County at the time. (For more details, see Grebler, Moore and Guzman, 1970: Appendix H.)

The primary variable is preferred ethnic label. Respondents were asked “As we [interviewers for the Mexican American study project] go around talking to people in this community, we find that some people prefer to call themselves: Spanish speaking, Latin Americans, Mexicans, Mexican Americans or by other terms. How do you prefer to be identified?” The respondent could choose other labels, in which case they were to specify the term. Thus, the question was semi-open-ended because it provided four possible replies but allowed respondents to provide another response if they desired.

## Findings

### Ethnic Labels

Table 1 shows the distribution of the preferred ethnic label among respondents. Almost half of the sample preferred the term Mexican or Mexicano. The second most common term was Mexican American, used by one-quarter of the sample. Nearly ten percent of the sample used American, and a similar percentage used either Hispano, Spanish or Spanish Speaking. Finally, 5 percent preferred the term Latin American and only 2.5 percent preferred other terms, which included Indian, mestizo, Chicano, raza, Aztec and Texan. None of these terms was ever used by more than 2 persons.

The labels Mexican(o) and American represent opposite ends of the integration spectrum. The fact that Mexican was the most commonly used label suggests some rejection of the hybridity associated with a label like Mexican American. On the other hand, the label American is used less often than Mexican American suggesting that complete assimilation into American society is uncommon. The rare usage of Chicano may be explained by the timing of the survey, which came at the very beginning of the Chicano movement although some surveys have also demonstrated that popular use of the term has been rare since then (Garcia, 1981).

Note that the terms Mexican and Mexicano are together employed by nearly half the sample. However, the usage of one or the other term may be quite distinct in intent. According to Hurtado and Arce (1987), whereas Mexicano is often used in a neutral way to refer to one's ethnicity, the term Mexican often has a derogatory connotation and might be used in an assertive way. Unfortunately, we were unable to separate the use of the terms Mexican and Mexicano. We suspect that the two terms might be used under different conditions, especially depending on the language of the interview (which we investigate below). The relatively common usage of the

term American, despite its absence as an explicit response category, is surprising. This suggests that a significant minority of Mexican origin persons have distanced themselves from membership in an ethnic group.

### **Ethnic Labels by Subgroups**

Given the heterogeneity of the Mexican population, one might expect that preferred ethnic label would vary by subgroup. Table 2 indicates how various segments of the Mexican origin population identified. The first two rows present identification by gender and indicate that females (51 percent) were more likely than males (44 percent) to identify as Mexican(o) and males (14 percent) were nearly twice as likely as females (7 percent) to identify as American. Men and women do not differ with respect to their identification as American, Hispano/Spanish/Spanish speaking, or Latin American. The choice of an other category was almost an entirely male phenomenon. Five percent of males chose other categories compared to 1 percent of females.

We also observe large differences in preferred ethnic label by age. Older respondents (age 60 or older) are more likely to identify as Mexican(o) and less likely to identify as Mexican American, American, Latin American or Other. This is probably because older respondents are more likely to be immigrants in contrast to younger respondents. Interestingly, the youngest respondents (age 18 to 29) are also more likely to prefer the label Mexican(o) in comparison to the age categories in the middle. This may also be due to a significant number of immigrants among the youngest respondents (since immigrants tend to be a young population). We will be able to examine whether age effects are independent of immigration status in the multivariate analysis below.

One might expect that birthplace would significantly affect preference for an ethnic label—in particular we expect that persons from New Mexico will refer to their Spanish or Hispano heritage. Fully 22 percent of persons born in New Mexico, Colorado and Arizona and 15 percent of persons born in Texas call themselves either Hispano, Spanish or Spanish Speaking, more so than any other birthplace group. Thus, this data supports the idea that the term is associated with particular regions within the U.S.

We also expect that persons from Mexico are most likely to call themselves Mexican(o). Indeed, fully three quarters (76 percent) of persons born in Mexico call themselves Mexican(o). Although a lower percentage of those born in U.S. states identifies as Mexican(o), still a significant number does so. This ranges from fully 38 percent of those born in California to 29 percent of the New Mexico/Colorado/Arizona born population. At the other extreme, only 2 percent of Mexican born residents call themselves American compared to fully 17 percent of those born outside of the Southwest. This latter figure suggests that those born in places with few Mexican origin persons are least likely to identify with Mexico and most likely to identify with the mainstream U.S. Finally, Californians were the most likely to choose Mexican American (36 percent) compared to only 15 percent of the Mexican born.

According to assimilation theory (Gordon, 1964), immigrants will identify more with the host culture the longer they have been in the U.S. and their descendants will identify still more the further in generational time that they are separated from their immigrant ancestors. At the same time, identification with the original country also decreases. Kao and Tienda (1995) refer to this as straight line assimilation theory because it predicts that acquisition of host society traits and loss of ethnic traits occurs linearly and consistently. Critics have argued that assimilation is often not in a straight line. For example, the grandchildren of immigrants often try to recover

what the children of immigrants tried to forget. Others argue that ethnic identification may be sustained or even strengthened for groups like the Mexican origin as they come to face rejection in the host society.

To test the hypothesis put forth by assimilation theory, we disaggregated the Mexican origin population by generation/place of birth: (1) recent arrivals from Mexico (less than 10 years in the U.S.), (2) not so recent arrivals (10-20 years), (3) long term immigrants (more than 20 years), (4) U.S. born children of immigrants (second generation) and (5) U.S. born children of U.S. born parents (third generation). Additionally, for a significant number of the U.S. born population, we do not know their generational status, so these respondents are included on Table 2 and later tables as a separate category.<sup>2</sup> Our data support the straight line assimilation perspective in that the identification with Mexico decreases steadily as generations move away from their immigrant status. The first column shows that identification with Mexican(o) monotonically decreases from 88 percent of recent arrivals to 28 percent for the third generation and we also observe that the identification with other labels connected to life in the U.S. increase (e.g., identification with American monotonically increases from 0 for recent immigrants to 16 percent for the third generation). On the other hand, our data are somewhat at odds with assimilation theory in that strong identification with being Mexican(o) persists. For instance, a substantial number continues to identify as Mexican(o) in the third generation and only a relatively small minority ever identifies as American among any generational group (e.g., 16 percent of the third generation). Also consistent with the persistence of ethnicity is the

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<sup>2</sup> The reason that we can not identify generation for these respondents is that respondents were not asked directly about parents' place of birth but rather where parents were educated. And we use this as a proxy for parents' place of birth to calculate generational status. For respondents whose parents have no education, we can not classify as generation two or three. This means that the group for whom generation is unknown differ somewhat from the other two generational

significant percentage who identifies with the label Mexican American among the U.S. born (e.g., about 35 percent of generation 2 and 3) or other hybrid labels like Latin-American.

Respondents for whom we do not know their generation tend to fall between generation two and three with respect to their preferred labels. This is as expected since this category includes both second and third generation respondents. However, in comparison to generation two and three, those with an unknown generational status are less likely to identify as Mexican American. This may be due to differences in the socio-economic background of these respondents as compared to those for whom we know generational status (see footnote 2). The multivariate analysis presented below will allow to examine the ethnic labels of this generational group controlling for differences in their socio-economic status.

We also were concerned that the language of interview might influence the choice of the preferred label largely because terms may have distinct connotations in the two languages. Indeed, persons interviewed in English were much more likely than those interviewed in Spanish to choose Mexican American, American, and Hispanic/Spanish/Spanish Speaking while Spanish interviewees were much more likely to choose Mexicano. This may have much to do with the fact that persons interviewed in Spanish were more likely to be recent immigrants. However, it may also be that bilingual speakers interviewed in Spanish may be more likely to respond as Mexicano than Mexican if they were to interview in English.

Centuries of miscegenation between indigenous persons and Spanish colonizers in Mexico have resulted in a population that is racially diverse ranging from dark and Indian looking persons to light skin European looking persons. In Mexico, a racial hierarchy exists with light skin persons at the top and dark persons at the bottom (Knight, 1992). Recent evidence also

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groups in socio-economic background.

shows similar status divisions among the U.S. Mexican origin population based on skin color or phenotype (Telles and Murguia, 1992; Murguia and Telles, 1996). In Table 2, we examine whether skin color is related to one's preferred ethnic label. One clear pattern that darker respondents are more likely to identify as Mexican(o). Only 42 percent of light skin persons identify as Mexican compared to 52 percent of dark persons with medium color persons intermediate (49 percent). Conversely, light skin persons are most likely to identify as American (12 percent) while medium color persons are least likely (8 percent) but dark persons are intermediate (10 persons). It may be that dark skin color reinforces Mexicanness since one's physical appearance or race is often strong cues of ethnicity for others (whether Mexican origin or not). On the other hand, it may be that the descendants of earlier cohorts of immigrants, who are more likely to have come from northern regions of Mexico with a higher proportion of Spanish, may be of lighter skin color than persons born in Mexico from more recent immigrant cohorts.

We also expected the density of Mexican origin concentration in one's neighborhood to affect preferred ethnic labels. According to one theory, residing outside of the barrio and non-Mexican areas means that local institutions and neighbors are more Anglo (in this case) and thus ethnicity becomes less important. Also, such a move may reflect a person's increasing disposition to assimilate as well. However, Portes and Bach (1985) have argued that moving into a neighborhood where one is among other groups could heighten competition with other ethnic groups and increase one's self consciousness about their ethnicity. The evidence is not strong either way although it provides some support for assimilation. The percent identifying as Mexican(o) is 44 percent in neighborhoods with few Mexican origin persons compared to about 50 percent in both medium and high density neighborhoods. Those identifying as American is

greatest in low density neighborhoods (13 percent) and lower in medium and high density neighborhoods (7 percent and 9 percent, respectively). The percentage of persons identifying as Mexican American is similar in all three types of neighborhood. Because strong patterns do not emerge, we do not find support for either theories of spatial assimilation or ethnic competition.

The ethnicity of the interviewer may affect ethnic labels. Hurtado and Arce (1987) find that the distribution of preferred labels varied greatly when interviewers prefaced the question about preferred labels that refer to a context as in “within your family” or “when speaking to Anglos”. More ethnic terms were chosen when respondents were cued to consider their family context while terms associated with American or more euphemistic terms like Spanish Speaking or Latin American were more likely to be chosen when respondents were cued to consider outsiders like Anglos. Our data may be consistent with this finding if we consider the ethnicity of the interviewer as a part of the context that may influence preferred ethnic label. We observe that the term Mexican(o) was chosen only slightly more often when the interviewer was Latino than otherwise. And that Mexican American, American, and Latin American were more often chosen when the interviewer was non-Latino. We should note, however, that it may be that the ethnicity of the interviewer is related to the immigrant and language status of the respondents (Latino interviewers being more likely to speak Spanish). If so then ethnic label preferences may be much more a result of immigrant and language status than ethnicity of the interviewer—fortunately the multivariate analysis presented below will allow us to examine the influence of the interviewer’s ethnicity independent of its relationship to other factors.

Finally, family income might be related to ethnic identification because those with higher incomes may see themselves as having “made it” in the U.S. and thus are more likely to identify as American and less so as Mexican. The data suggest exactly this. Identifying as Mexican

decreases monotonically and identifying as American increases monotonically with higher income. Fully 56 percent of persons in low income families identify as Mexican compared to 42 percent of those in families with high incomes and only 5 percent of low income identified as American compared to 14 percent of the high income. On the other hand, income may be strongly correlated with time in the U.S. so that time in the U.S. is the more likely cause of the different use of labels—again the multivariate analysis will allow us to gauge to the strength of this relationship independent of other factors.

### **Multivariate Analysis Predicting Preferred Ethnic Label**

While we observe a number of strong relationships between preferred ethnic labels and the independent variables presented on Table 2, we suspect that some of these are due to interrelationship among the independent variables. We expect that immigrant/generational status will be particularly important and some of the other differences observed on Table 2 are a result of being related to immigrant/generational status. Since the bivariate results presented in Table 2 do not allow us to control for interrelationships among the independent variables, we utilized multivariate analysis to do so. The dependent variable, preferred ethnic label, is categorical, therefore we employ a multinomial regression to examine the effect of demographic, ethnic, and socio-economic background on ethnic labels. The odds ratios from this analysis are presented in Table 3. The multivariate analyses support our expect that immigrant/generational status is strongly related to preferred ethnic labels. Also we observe significant effects of language of interview; age, and gender independent of immigrant/generational status..

First we observe that women are more likely to prefer the label Mexican(o) than any other label (the odds are less than one for every other category). And women are significantly less likely to identify as American and Other than with Mexican(o). With respect to age, we find

that older persons were more likely to choose American and Hispano/Spanish/Spanish Speaking than with Mexican(o). This may reflect the increasing cultural nationalism among the youth of the time.

We observe strong immigrant/generational differences for every label of ethnic preference. Persons born in Mexico were much more likely than U.S. born persons to identify as Mexican(o) and much less likely to identify with any other label. Moreover, we observe differences between the Mexican-born who have been in the U.S. longer (20 years or more) as compared to those who have been for less time. More permanent residents prefer the label of Mexican American as compared to the label Mexican(o). Also they seem to prefer the labels American and Other although these differences are not statistically significantly different from the less permanent residents. The second generation prefers the labels Mexican American, American, and Other significantly more than the label Mexican(o). Moreover, the third generation prefers every label other than Mexican(o) significantly more so than the reference category of Mexican born who have resided in the U.S. less than 20 years. The largest generational differences are evident with respect to the American identity—where the third generation is *20 times more likely* than the more recent immigrants to identify in this manner. U.S. born respondents for whom we do not know whether they are generation two or three, fall midway between the second and third generation as we would expect. Again, the results from the multivariate analysis are consistent with the bivariate tables discussed earlier—preferred ethnic labels progress in a *straight-line* from Mexican to American as respondents have resided in the U.S. longer and for more generations, as would be predicted by assimilation theory. On other the hand, less consistent with assimilation theory is that third generation respondents continue to have a strong identity as Mexican controlling for a host of other factors.

Those interviewed in Spanish were more likely to choose Mexican(o) and less likely to choose Mexican American, American, Hispano/Spanish/Spanish speaking. And this effect is independent of immigrant/generational status since we hold this constant in the multivariate analysis. This suggests that the label consistently used in Spanish is *Mexicano* and that other labels do not translate easily.

The ethnic composition of the neighborhood is also somewhat related to preferred ethnic label. Those residing in more ethnic neighborhoods (45 percent or more Mexican) are more likely to identify as Mexican American and as Latin American in contrast to identifying as Mexican(o).

#### **Attitudes by Preferred Ethnic Labels**

Knowing the characteristics of persons that identify with these labels, we ask whether these subgroups hold distinct sets of attitudes about race or about immigration. Table 4 shows social distance scores from Anglos and from Blacks for each of these subgroups. The social distance scores are based on a scale comprised of four questions about feelings regarding Anglos and Blacks (Negroes was the term used at the time). The specific questions were: (1) Do you think you would ever find it a little distasteful to eat at the same table with an Anglo/Negro, (2) Do you think you would ever find it a little distasteful to dance with an Anglo/Negro, (3) Do you think you would ever find it a little distasteful to go to a party and find that most of the people were Anglo/Negro, (4) Do you think you would ever find it a little distasteful to have an Anglo/Negro person marry someone in your family? Responses were scored 1 for distasteful and 0 for not distasteful. The scores were added so that each respondent could score from 0, for those persons with no apparent racist feelings about the group, to 4, for the most racist feelings about the group.

Table 4 presents the mean score on racial attitudes by preferred ethnic label. Clearly, feelings about blacks were much more negative (distasteful) than for Anglos for each of the subgroups. While attitudes toward blacks were around the middle of the scale (near 2 on a scale from 0 to 4), the attitudes toward Anglos were close to the non-racist end of the scale (or 0). There was some variation by ethnic label regarding feelings about Anglos but not for blacks. The Mexican(o) subgroup showed the greatest social distance from Anglos (.46) and the Other category showed the least (.08). The other four categories all expressed similarly very low levels (.17 to .20) of social distance from Anglos. For social distance from blacks, all groups (except the Other category) had similarly high levels (1.85 to 1.92). While the Other category expressed the least social distance from blacks (1.29), they still expressed more social distance from blacks than any group expressed from Anglo. Thus, all subgroups were quite accepting of Anglos but, like the Anglos they related to, they were prejudiced against blacks. The concerns about coalition building in the early 1960s by Mexican American leaders about identification as white Americans and not as blacks reflected a strong sentiment in the Mexican American population overall.

Interestingly social distance from Anglos appears to be positively related to social distance from blacks. So that the group—those identifying as Mexican(o)—expressing the greatest social distance from Anglos also expresses the greatest distance from black. And vice versa, the group with the least social distance from Anglo—the Other category—also expresses the least social distance from blacks. This suggests that respondents may not view themselves as somewhere in the middle with Anglos and blacks on opposite ends. Rather they might view themselves as more or less similar or different from both groups. In other words, those who identify as Mexican(o) may view themselves as “outsiders” to U.S. society and more distant to

both Anglos and blacks. The Other category, which appears more assimilated, may view themselves as more a part of U.S. society and more similar to Anglos and blacks. This is supported by the fact that attitudes towards Anglos and blacks are positively correlated with each other (as presented in the last column in Table 4).

Table 5 presents the extent to which preferred ethnic labels are related to attitudes regarding providing free entry for Mexicans into the U.S. (table presents the percent that agree with the statement that Mexicans should be given free entry into the U.S.). Interestingly, the group with the most affirmative responses was the Hispano/Spanish/Spanish Speaking group in which 66 percent agreed. The Mexican(o) subgroup had a similar level of agreement (65 percent). All of the other groups were about evenly split (49 to 55 percent) regarding their opinions about free entry. Interestingly, more than half (52 percent) of the American group agreed with having free entry. This appears to contradict our 1990s' sensibilities that more American identified persons would have stronger feelings about closing the borders. However, in the 1965 context, anti-immigrants attitudes may not have been as prevalent in the general population<sup>3</sup> and thus not linked to a particular identity.

## **Conclusions**

We find that the Mexican origin population in Los Angeles in the mid 1960s identified with various terms. Nearly half preferred the terms Mexican or Mexicano, about one quarter used the term Mexican American, and 10 percent called themselves American. The remaining 15 percent used terms including Hispano, Spanish, Spanish-speaking and Latin American. Not surprisingly, the term Chicano was almost never used in 1965 and 1966. The use of several

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<sup>3</sup> Since the 1960s was a decade of a growing economy, attitudes toward immigration were, at minimum neutral, and most probably quite positive (anti-immigrant sentiment tends to be connected to economic downturns). Also, the civil rights movement, urban unrest, and the

labels and the meaning of these reflects, in part, the tension between integrationists, on the one hand, and ethnic nationalist leaders, on the other, of the 1950s and early 1960s.

Our findings support assimilation theory regarding patterns in ethnic identity by time since immigration. Recent immigrants are very likely to call themselves Mexican(o) and the percentage decreases as immigrants reside in the U.S. longer. For children of immigrants, about 40 percent call themselves Mexican(o) and by the third generation, only 28 percent do. On the other hand, assimilationists may not expect an identity as Mexican(o) continues so strongly into the third generation.

That some third generation Mexican origin persons continue to identify as Mexican(o) may suggest either the persistence of identification with Mexico or more of a reactive identity. A persistent identification with Mexico would suggest that identity with the home country of their grandparents is far more important than identification with the U.S. This would be contradict assimilation theory. According to assimilation theory, changes in identity accompany changes in socialization and behavior, where by the third generation, ethnics are likely to be very immersed in the host economy and culture and relatively little of the original culture remains.

Since it is unlikely that third generation Mexican Americans are not English dominant and immersed in American education and other institutions that promote integration, an alternative explanation for identification as Mexican(o) is likely. Thus, we believe that the concept of reactive ethnicity is more appropriate. Identification as Mexican(o) may represent a rejection of American culture and an acceptance of things that are Mexican at the level of attitudes and sentiments, even if the person has “Americanized” behaviorally. Our findings are consistent with this explanation given the attitudes toward immigration. Identification with

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Vietnam War probably served to draw political attention away from immigration issues.

Mexican(o) seems to reveal an affinity with Mexico or with other persons of Mexican origin and consistent with a more political ideology.

### **The 1998-2001 Survey: Preliminary Observations**

We have recently completed the second wave of the Mexican American longitudinal survey in Los Angeles and are in the process of cleaning the data so that we can begin our analysis. We are nearing completion of the San Antonio portion of the survey but this study focuses on Los Angeles. We sought to re-interview persons that were 50 years old and under in the 60s survey because of the selectivity that would result in a sample in which the numerical minority would have survived. We found 80 percent of the original sample and we interviewed 75 percent (?) of those found or a close relative. Thus, we interviewed 55 percent (?) of the original sample that was 50 years or under in 1965-66. (Wilma, work on this.) Finally, we interviewed a sample of the children of the original respondents with a slightly different survey interest but the analysis of this segment of the survey will not be included in this paper.

The second wave roughly mirrors the first wave on most variables except for home owning in the original sample (?). While we found 98 percent of homeowners, we found only ?? percent of renters. Fortunately, we can make such estimates because we have the data for the original survey, which was representative of Mexicans in Los Angeles County. Moreover, this data will permit us to control for sampling bias in the second wave.

Inasmuch as possible, the second wave includes similar questions on ethnic identity as the first. This includes the question on the preferred ethnic label. However, we have included numerous additional questions including what ethnic identity they feel closest to, how they

present themselves to others and the salience that such an identity has for them. This is followed up with several related questions, for example, in which situations they feel they are “American” or “Mexican”, how do they answer the census question on race and how others perceive them.

Finally, several other attitudinal and behavioral questions are asked about their ethnicity. Attitudes include the importance of Spanish language and Mexican traditions and friendships for the respondents and their children. Behaviors include ability to speak Spanish and marital endogamy.

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Table 1. Distribution of Preferred Ethnic Labels: Mexican Origin Population in Los Angeles County, 1965-66.

<b>Preferred Label</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>
Mexican, Mexicano	47.8	453
Mexican American	25.8	244
American	9.8	93
Hispano, Spanish, Spanish Speaking	9.1	86
Latin American	5.0	47
Other <sup>a</sup>	2.5	24
Total	100	947

<sup>a</sup>Includes categories such as Indian, mestizo, Chicano, raza, Aztec, and Texan

Source: Mexican American Study Project Survey Data

Table 2. Preferred Label By Demographic, Ethnic, and Socioeconomic Background: Mexican Origin Population in Los Angeles County, 1965-66 (Percentages sum across rows).

Characteristic:	Preferred Label					
	Mexican(o)	Mex-Amer	American	Hisp/Span	Latin-Am.	Other
<b>Sex</b>						
Female	50.9	26.3	7.0	9.4	5.4	.9
Male	43.7	25.1	13.5	8.6	4.4	4.7
<b>Age</b>						
<30	51.1	27.4	5.8	9.4	4.9	1.3
30-44	44.4	28.7	11.1	7.9	5.1	2.8
45-59	44.3	21.7	13.8	10.8	5.4	3.9
≥60	64.0	16.9	4.5	10.1	3.4	1.1
<b>Birthplace</b>						
Mexico	76.1	14.6	2.2	3.5	2.5	1.0
Calif.	37.2	35.7	14.7	6.0	3.6	2.7
Texas	30.4	27.5	12.7	14.7	7.8	6.9
Ariz/Co/NM	28.7	25.9	11.5	21.8	9.2	2.9
Other U.S.	37.5	25.0	16.7	8.3	12.5	0.0
<b>Time in US/Generation</b>						
Mex Born, <10 years	88.1	6.4	0.0	.9	4.6	0.0
Mex Born, 10-19 years	77.5	12.7	2.8	7.0	0.0	0.0
Mex Born, ≥20 years	66.2	22.6	3.8	3.8	2.3	1.5
US Born, Mex Parents	38.0	36.6	8.8	8.3	3.9	4.4
US Born, US Parents	27.6	34.0	16.0	13.4	6.3	2.6
US Born, Gen Unknown	37.7	20.4	16.2	13.2	9.0	3.6
<b>Language of Interview</b>						
Spanish	69.8	15.9	4.1	3.6	4.8	1.8
English	28.7	34.4	14.8	13.8	5.1	3.2
<b>Skin Color</b>						
Light	42.1	28.2	12.4	9.4	4.9	3.0
Medium	49.1	27.3	7.9	9.1	4.7	2.0
Dark	51.5	21.2	10.2	8.8	5.5	2.9
<b>Mex Density Neighborhd</b>						
Low (<15%)	43.8	24.6	13.0	11.5	3.3	3.8
Medium (15-44%)	49.6	26.6	6.7	9.6	4.6	2.8
High (≥45%)	50.5	26.3	9.2	6.1	7.0	.9
<b>Ethnicity of Interviewer</b>						
Latino	49.1	23.0	9.6	10.9	4.8	2.6
Non-Latino	45.7	30.2	10.2	6.1	5.3	2.5
<b>Family Income</b>						
Low (\$0-\$3,999)	55.7	20.2	5.3	11.0	5.7	2.2
Medium (\$4,000-\$6,999)	48.6	28.5	8.8	8.5	4.5	1.1
High (≥\$7,000)	42.2	26.6	13.7	8.5	4.9	4.1

Source: Mexican American Study Project Survey Data

Table 3. Odds Ratio from Multinomial Regression of Preferred Label on Demographic, Ethnic, and Socioeconomic Background: Mexican Origin Population in Los Angeles County, 1965-66

Characteristic:	Comparison to Preferred Label of Mexican				
	Mex-Amer	American	Hisp/Span	Latin-Am.	Other
Female	.81	.42**	.83	.90	.15***
Age (Ref: Age <30)					
Age 30-44	1.46+	2.92**	1.48	1.23	2.48
Age 45-59	1.32	4.96***	2.94**	1.67	4.18+
Age ≥60	1.00	3.11	4.30*	1.20	1.51
Time in US/Generation (Ref: Mex Born, <20 years)					
Mex Born, ≥20 years	2.92**	2.22	.53	.78	2.43
US Born, Mex Parents	4.82***	7.06*	1.93	2.54	12.58*
US Born, US Parents	6.11***	19.53***	4.01**	5.77**	9.58*
US Born, Gen. Unknown	3.04**	14.56***	2.90*	5.28**	9.38+
Spanish Interview	.31***	.20***	.15***	.55	.50
Skin Color (Ref: Light)					
Medium	.86	.52*	.82	.77	.43
Dark	.63+	.60	.73	.80	.55
Mex Density in Neighborhood (Ref: Low)					
Medium	1.12	.58+	.90	1.40	.76
High	1.56*	1.39	.83	2.77*	.40
Latino Interviewer	.87	1.11	1.93*	.98	1.08
Family Income (Ref: Low)					
Medium	1.06	1.19	.66	.73	.23*
High	.99	1.60	.62	.94	.68

Source: Mexican American Study Project Survey Data

Table 4. Social Distance Score from Anglos and Blacks by Preferred Ethnic Label: Mexican Origin Population in Los Angeles County, 1965-66.<sup>a</sup>

<b>Preferred Label</b>	<b>Social Distance from Anglos</b>	<b>Social Distance from Blacks</b>	<b>Correlation of Social Distance</b>
Mexican(o)	.46	1.92	.26
Mexican American	.18	1.85	.23
American	.19	1.87	.05
Hispano/Spanish	.20	1.88	.16
Latin American	.17	1.85	.17
Other	.08	1.29	.06

Source: Mexican American Study Project Survey Data

<sup>a</sup>Based on an additive scale of responses to four questions: Do you think you would ever find it a little distasteful to (1) eat at the same table with an Anglo/Negro, (2) dance with an Anglo/Negro, (3) go to a party and find that most of the people were Anglo/Negro, (4) have an Anglo/Negro person marry someone in your family? Responses were scored 1 for distasteful and 0 for not distasteful.

Table 5. Percent Agreeing that Mexicans should be given Free Entry into the U.S.: Mexican Origin Population in Los Angeles County, 1965-66.

<b>Preferred Label</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Mexican(o)	64.5
Mexican American	54.9
American	51.6
Hispano/Spanish/Spanish Speaking	65.1
Latin American	48.9
Other	50.0

Source: Mexican American Study Project Survey Data