
Fit to Be Good Cooks and Good Mechanics

Racialization in Schools

Through *policies* which are explicitly or implicitly racial, state institutions organize and enforce the racial politics of everyday life.

—Michael Omi and Howard Winant,
Racial Formation in the United States

School systems are simultaneously racialized and racializing. Educational institutions possess tremendous capacity to reproduce the power structure and racial hierarchy of society. Family, as another social institution, mediates the racializing effects of the educational system. The family is a critical site of racial identity development as it is a locale where intergenerational biography-based teaching occurs and strategies of action and resistance are formed. Within both schools and families, students respond to racializing messages and renegotiate their racial self-understanding. School experiences are conditioned by historical context, gender, and parental influences as parents use their own schooling experience as fodder for the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and ideologies to their children.

This chapter asks, What influence do educational systems have on immigrants' and citizens' racial identity formation? What role do families play in amplifying or mitigating the process of racialization? From a long-term perspective, what are the cumulative effects of racialization across family generations? This chapter examines how second- and third-generation Mexican Americans experience their social identity within the educational system and how parents' experiences with their own schooling shape their parenting styles.

First-Realization-of-Race Stories Crosscut Generations

Schools are a chief locale of socialization outside of the family and, as such, are places where much teaching and learning about social life and national culture takes place. The two generations educated in the United States apprehend the importance of race for the first time at school. Children first realize race in school and then come to identify with it, along a number of major axes of difference such as phenotype, formal name, language, and food. Recognizing skin-color variations often consolidates a conception of race, as with second-generation Rafael Treviño: “Somebody pointed out to me [in elementary school in the 1950s] that I was a little darker than they were. . . . I went home and I was washing my hands and I was trying to wash the darkness out. It was just a split moment, just realizing, ‘Hey, this isn’t gonna come off.’” Realizing the disadvantage that skin color carries (Pager and Quillian 2005) led some respondents to try to “cleanse” themselves of this liability by earnestly washing or using skin-bleaching agents. Third-generation Daniel Zagada speaks simply of being in a racially heterogeneous setting and of how “seeing” different skin colors and physical features is tantamount to seeing race: “I went to a school that was very diverse so we had lots of blacks and Filipino, white, Asians. So pretty early on, you can’t miss that. I mean, you see it.”

A person’s first and last name is also an axis of difference that distinguishes groups according to Spanish and non-Spanish origin. Timothy, whose given name is “Timoteo,” tells me how his grade school teacher anglicized his name to make it easier to pronounce and linguistically increased his Americanness (Murguía and Forman 2003). In this case, Timothy’s teacher muted his foreignness as she used her school-sanctioned authority to acculturate him:

TIMOTHY: My name is “Timoteo.” When I was in fourth grade my teacher, Miss Green—she was from England—she changed my name to “Timothy.” And I’ve always had it since. Except for my family, to my family I’m “Timoteo.”

JMV: How is it your fourth grade teacher renamed you?

TIMOTHY: You know, people thought teachers were pretty smart, they knew what they were doing. [Laughs.]

Timothy noted that “everybody got their names changed” in the forties and fifties. To have one’s name anglicized by a school authority whom you are taught to respect inculcates the sense that one’s new name is better, imputing deficiency to one’s original name. Moreover, a teacher changing—or cor-

recting—students’ names serves to transport them figuratively from their family’s country of origin and into the United States via the road of cultural acceptability. Language marks cultural crossings, so for teachers to rename students is for them to erase a native culture and superimpose a U.S.-centered national culture.¹

Part of the acculturation process of migrants to the United States, especially across generations, involves the acquisition of English. The educational system is pivotal in teaching English to immigrants and their families. Schools not only teach classes in language and other substantive areas, but they also teach cultural, national, and racial lessons. Albert Schultz, a child of immigrants, remarks, “When I was in school I couldn’t speak English. My first language was Spanish and I remember practicing ‘Pledge Allegiance to the Flag.’ [Those were] probably the first words in English that I learned how to speak.” Other interviewees recalled being punished for speaking Spanish, being warned not to speak Spanish in order to avoid having their mouths taped shut, and, most disturbingly, being placed in a class for the mentally retarded. Nearly all of my second-generation interviewees complained that schools decried Spanish speaking as a deficiency rather than a linguistic advantage. In the 1990s, the tide slowly turned such that some of these same second-generation interviewees found that Spanish speaking abilities were finally seen as a benefit in the work force. That said, some schools steered third-generation interviewees away from Spanish, including Tony Lopez, who refers to the mid-1970s:

[In] probably kindergarten or first grade, I remember a teacher telling me not to talk Spanish. “We don’t speak Spanish here, we speak American.” “American” as opposed to “English.” When I was in grade school—and it wasn’t that long ago—it was not proper to speak Spanish. So, I didn’t speak Spanish in school. Whereas now it is so widely accepted and promoted. I do a lot of things for the Spanish community. It is very much promoted now. “Oh, do you speak Spanish? Good, we want that. We want people to speak their native tongues.” Whereas when I was in kindergarten I was told by a teacher, “We speak American here.”

Cultural teaching comes in the form of language requirements enforced in the classroom. Being American means speaking American . . . that is, English.

Much like language, food does a lot of culture work. Cuisine serves as a cultural marker and is similarly difficult to hide in a school environment that

is filled with policing eyes and ears. American identity, in this case, is measured by the contents of one's lunch bag. As Rafael Treviño quipped, "The American Dream was an Anglo family, a white Anglo family. We knew [we were] eating burritos and somebody else was [having] peanut butter sandwiches. There's a difference and you understand that." Noting that Mexican food has recently become fashionable (Davis 2000), he continues, "Now burritos and taquitos and enchiladas, everybody loves them. When I was a kid, you couldn't show 'em. They would make fun of you." Pressure to conform and desire to fit in is what makes some of this school-age surveillance so poignant.

Schools highlight the salience of race. School classrooms (Lucas 1999; Oakes 2005; Weis and Fine 2005) and social spaces (Tatum 1997) are often segregated by race. Race, racial scripts, and racial inequality are reproduced in day-to-day life in schools (Lewis 2003). Furthermore, school authorities frequently (if unwittingly) judge and treat racial minorities according to prevalent racial stereotypes and, by impressing them, re-create those stereotypes (Ferguson 2000). In interacting with students according to their understandings of race and class, teachers and administrators maintain discourses and systems of inequality (Morris 2005). For the Mexican-origin population specifically, education has been called the "linchpin" that consolidates and perpetuates intergenerational disadvantage (Telles and Ortiz 2009).

Whether the axis of difference is phenotype, formal name, language, or food, youth in school comprehend the overarching lesson being taught: in order to be socially accepted in peer circles, within the school at large, or in the nation as a whole, one must minimize the cultural and linguistic distance between oneself and the larger American mainstream. Schools, and the actors within them, inform students, in one way or another, that they were not just individuals but *racialized* individuals.

A Common Ideology: Education as Key to the "American Dream"

Schools are a primary site of socialization outside of the family. They are locales where much teaching and learning about social life and national culture take place (Tobin, Wu, and Davidson 1989). Schools across the globe are concerned "that young children be *taught to identify* with something larger than themselves and their families" (204, emphasis added).

Yet, families also have formative power. Axes of social division intersect in families, forcing families to devise strategies of action and teach their children accordingly (Lareau 2003). Families are key in reinforcing particular aspects of

TABLE 6.1
Educational Attainment By Generation

	<i>Jr. High or Less</i>	<i>High School</i>	<i>GED</i>	<i>Some College</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Master's</i>	<i>Doctoral Degree</i>	<i>Total</i>
Gen1	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Gen2	1	2	1	12	6	5	3	30
Gen3	0	5*	1	6***	12*	4*	1*	29
Total	9	7	2	18	18	9	4	67

* Gen3 is the youngest age group, so educational attainment not completed.

** All five Gen3 noted here were currently attending high school, on track to graduate, and envisioning continuing on with higher education at a city college, college, or university.

*** Three of the six Gen3 in this cell were attending college at the time of the interview.

identity, such as race, religion, or gender (Cohen and Eisen 2000). They also mold educational aspirations (although the link between aspirations and outcomes is unclear) (Kao 1998; MacLeod 2004). Families and “fictive kin” can also be a wellspring of survival strategies and interdependent support (Stack 1974). This chapter argues that racial identities are constructed in interaction between two primary socializing institutions: families and schools.

The predominant family ideology about education espoused by the twenty-nine families I interviewed is rooted in the American Dream. Families perceive education as a means to attain this dream (namely, financial gain, upward mobility, and overall success). All of the families interviewed followed a pathway of upward mobility through the three generations. The educational attainment of virtually all families rose in each succeeding generation. Table 6.1 profiles the educational achievement of all three generations in my respondent pool. As will be detailed below, the dominance of the American Dream ideology varies by gender, generation, and class status.

This claim of intergenerational educational progress needs some contextualization. First, recall that this book is based on a relatively small sample of interview respondents with the objective of capturing the complexity and nuance involved in racialized life experience and is not designed to make sweeping generalizations about broad educational trends. Second, the families in my sample had all achieved middle-class status by the third, if not second, generation. This class advantage is not to be understated, as financial resources can be converted into other resources such as living in middle-class neighborhoods with reputable schools and the ability to send children

to private schools, such as Catholic schools, which have a beneficial effect on Mexican American schoolchildren (Telles and Ortiz 2009: 134). In this way, class status may be a precursor to educational advancement.

Studies assessing educational progress (or lack thereof) among Mexican-origin students have found that the Mexican American second generation outpaces the immigrant generation in educational gains but that this achievement flattens in third and later generations (Telles and Ortiz 2009: 133). Another study using nationwide survey data from 2000 found that “second generation [Mexican American] educational attainment exceeded immigrant educational attainment by more than three years, while [the] third or later hardly exceeded [the] second generation at all” (Perlmann 2005: 62). There is agreement that the second generation rapidly overtakes the educational outcomes of the immigrant generation, yet there is some disagreement about whether third and later generations sink or continue to slowly rise relative to the second generation. All in all, we see that my findings regarding education are distinctive in showing continuing education gains with each of the three generations, a result probably influenced by the families’ middle-class status and consistent with status attainment theory, which holds that parents’ education and income are the best predictors of children’s educational outcomes (Telles and Ortiz 2009: 133).

The American Dream equates education with career options and financial rewards. Guillermo Ramirez, a second-generation man from Sacramento, links together all three generations of his family as he discusses how his parents, and in turn he, came to recognize education as a lynchpin of the American Dream. Mexican American families desired to obtain the American Dream not only for their own aggrandizement but also to prove their worth to mainstream culture. As with all of my immigrant-generation respondents, Guillermo’s parents had less than junior high school educations from Mexico. Yet, they saw the value of education:

My parents—I don’t know how it happened—but my parents somehow became aware of the value of education. They were always telling us, “I’ll help you as much as I can.” I had that support. . . . Many times [for] the second generation it was: “You’re old enough to go to work and help the family.” And it wasn’t that [for me]. . . . I don’t think [my parents] finished *primaria* [grade school] . . . in Mexico. . . . My grandmother was very instrumental in me going to law school because she would just tell me, “*Sea abogado*.” [“Be a lawyer.”] I’d say, “What’s *abogado*, mama?” She’d tell me, “Lawyer.”

Guillermo indeed got his law degree and established his own law firm. In addition to being a proponent of education at the community level (he formed an association in the sixties to raise money for scholarships for Mexican American students), he espoused the value of schooling to his two sons. He spoke of the unified vision he and his wife shared: “We’ve always inculcated [that] it was not *whether* they were going to get a college education—they were going to get a college education. . . . People with an education get better jobs, earn more.”

Lance Morelos, a third-generation man, spoke about how his parents worked hard, sacrificed, and selected a residence according to the quality of the school district. Lance spoke about how his parents enacted their family ideology about the importance of education in both word and deeds:

[My dad’s] whole key in life was to get us educations. My mom, since I was in high school, would say, “I don’t care if you get a degree in underwater basket weaving, get a degree.” So we always lived in a very good area, which was predominantly a white area, in the smallest house, because they had the better schools. And they knew that. And so there would be nine of us in a three-bedroom house. For a lot of years until my dad really started to prosper. The goal was “education, education, education.” We all went to Catholic school. My parents were in debt most of their life because of it. [Laughs.] . . . My dad was store manager . . . and he was the only one driving a VW bug when [his coworkers] were all driving Cadillacs and Mercedes.

Lance stressed how getting a degree had unlocked the door to career choice and higher pay:

At [my aerospace engineering job] I got paid more than [others] did just because I had a piece of paper. . . . There were greater opportunities if you had a college degree. They weren’t any smarter than me, I wasn’t any smarter than them, but I had the opportunity and the piece of paper. [Before,] I couldn’t get a job because I didn’t have a piece of paper. . . . Like my mom said, “It doesn’t matter if it’s underwater basket-weaving, ping-pong, P.E., political science, just get a piece of paper.” I saw it, I lived it.

Lance’s degree propelled his occupational and financial upward mobility.

As with middle-class blacks (Pattillo-McCoy 1999: 66), second-generation Mexican American parents in my sample with college degrees raised chil-

dren with the expectation that they will obtain college degrees, which they tend to do. In addition to guidance and financial support, parental goals of educational achievement are also important to children's ambition (Portes and Rumbaut 2001: 219). In this way, a college degree often begets a college degree and in turn opens up occupational and monetary opportunity and points the way to the American Dream.

First Generation: Mexican Immigrant Parents' Parenting Strategies
"Do As the Americans Do"

The American Dream ideology was sometimes accompanied by an assimilationist perspective. Ruben and Adele Mendoza, both second-generation Mexican Americans living in Vacaville, were taught to "do as the Americans do." This meant an increase in their educational aspirations and a decrease in their contact with Mexican relatives and their grasp on Mexican tradition. Ruben explains that his parents "wanted us to get our education here and do as the Americans do. Now I'm sad and kick myself in the rear for not going with them to Mexico and meet lots of uncles and so forth. . . . As far as holding onto the Mexican traditions, I don't think we ever thought about that." Ruben's wife, Adele, concurs with his assessment: "I don't think [traditions] were pushed onto us. I think once we came and were here it was pretty much you live where you are at and follow what is here. [We spoke Spanish at home yet my mom] didn't teach us reading or writing in Spanish, so when we went to school we would learn English and so it was easier for us to pick up." In her youth, the educational expectation for daughters was far less than for sons. Adele remarks, "We didn't have [child labor] laws back then. We were always working the fields as far as I can remember. . . . Back then it was 'girls didn't go to school, college, just get married and then the man does all the work.'"

Immigrant parents sometimes saw more immediate use in having their children work at home or in jobs rather than in schools. Since class informs race, it is important to examine how lower-class status in immigrant families' beginnings condition their educational aspirations. In poorer families (as all but one family was at the first generation), there is a tension between work and school, with work obligations impeding school success (Zhou et al. 2008). Discouraging education in favor of work "detoured" some youth from obtaining a college degree, foreclosing high-paying career options. Recall Tamara Rosenberg from chapter 2, who was deemed "the black sheep" for bucking family expectations and earning a college degree.

While the ideology of education as a tool for socioeconomic upward mobility is salient for immigrants and their families, it was not evenly endorsed across genders. Immigrant parents did not necessarily express enthusiasm for their daughters' education because of gender ideologies of the time and lingering attachments to a traditional gendered division of labor. Interestingly, as discussed later, school systems in the 1950s-1960s were more supportive of second-generation Mexican American girls than boys. In this way, the institutions of family and school provided diametrically opposed supports and pressures for the Mexican American second generation based on gender.

“Get a Job; School Is Just Recess”

The emphasis on education as a way to attain the American Dream varied not only by gender but also by class position. Families with substantially lower class origins did not subscribe wholesale to the notion of education as a pathway to the American Dream, in part due to their lack of knowledge about educational opportunities following high school. The lower a family's class status, the more likely they are to push the next generation out into the job market for immediate remuneration rather than delaying earning income due to schooling. Some parents' experience with labor-market discrimination and restricted occupational opportunity lowered their hopes for their children. Albert Schultz, a second-generation man who recalls his first English words as those in the “Pledge Allegiance to the Flag,” spoke of how culture conditioned his parents' expectations: “One of the traditions they had at that time was that all Mexicans should be *zapateros* [shoesmiths] or *carpinteros* [carpenters] or *mecánicos* [mechanics] for automobiles, so it was hard for them to understand why I was going to college. For them, going to school was just recess.” Second-generation individuals were intermediate between the immigrants who had grade school educations and the third generation, for whom college degrees became the norm. Sometimes the second generation pushed for educational credentials that were outside of their parents' ability to financially support or emotionally understand. Ruby Castillo, who speaks of her own biography as well as that of her son, Dillon, captures her family's three-generation educational trajectory:

Education was not a big part of our family. Mom had third-, fourth-grade education and dad had the same. . . . So in the family [education] was

never really pushed, stressed, but I felt that I needed to pursue a higher education so I pushed myself. . . . Get an education. I saw that as a pathway to get out of poverty. . . . In my kids' generation, unfortunately, they don't know any struggles. I had to struggle if I wanted to get ahead, I had to take it upon myself to get educated and to get out and to work to buy my own clothes, etc., etc. And I say that unfortunately, because I don't see their inner passion. And for example, the son at University of California, Santa Barbara, [is] so used to having everything . . . taken care of from food, roof over the head, etc., to knowing that somehow we will be paying for [his] education. Where I felt I had to pay for my own education or find the money. So when I saw his [application] essay, there was nothing about a struggle. [It was], "I want to be God, I want to be president," that type of essay.

While Ruby had to seek out educational opportunities and funding sources, part of the downside of achieving comfortable middle-class standing may be her children's loss of some character-building passion and zest. While a consequence of her children's more coddled lifestyle may be the undesirable attribute of entitlement, her college degree granted her knowledge to coach her children through the college process and financially assist them.

"Girls Don't Need to Get an Education"

The Mexican immigrants in my sample arrived in the United States with little grade school education; some of the women wanted more education but were prohibited by their patriarchal husbands. This was the case with Ramona Vargas, an immigrant whose husband first came with the Bracero Program² in 1944 and who eventually got legal papers through her husband's employment. She worked in a packing house, canneries, and then for ten years in housekeeping in a hospital. Her husband worked in the fields as well as in hospital maintenance. I asked how she adjusted after her move from Mexico to the United States, and she complained about the educational cap that her husband enforced and the occupational and income ceiling this imposed:

I didn't know anything when I came here. Nothing. . . . He never agreed for me to go to school. I wanted to go to school to learn but he didn't agree with that. So, okay. We were going to get the lowest-paying jobs around because we had no education, so no good jobs.

I later explicitly asked about how she felt her gender affected the way in which she could navigate her life. She was unequivocal in her response:

I wish I would be a man instead of a woman. [Laughs.] . . . I couldn't do things on my own, I couldn't make my own decision or anything like that. . . . It [gender] makes a lot of difference in life, because to me I wanted to go to school and have a little bit of education. I went to school in Mexico but not enough to get a good job here. I wanted to be a dressmaker and I wanted to go take classes at the junior college. I couldn't do that because my husband didn't want me to. To go to school? Nope. So I just worked and come home and raise kids and that's about it. I didn't learn anything and now I regret that because I could have found a job part-time like a receptionist or something where you sit and don't have to be moving so much or lifting heavy things. To file in hospitals or something, to learn to be a nurse or something. . . . But I couldn't do it. But I started to go to those classes for sewing and I made three things. I made a skirt, I made an apron, and I made a dress. That's it. Then I had to stop. Because I was having a lot of problems at home.

Ramona's husband's patriarchal ideals stunted her educational aspirations and thereby capped her occupational mobility as well as limited her sense of satisfaction and self-realization. Left to her own devices, Ramona would have pursued more education. Interestingly, her job objectives (and even the three items she made in sewing class) still fall into the gender-coded labor category of "pink collar" jobs, most likely a reflection of her time. While not all husbands in the first generation were as patriarchal as Ramona's mate, husbands sought to demonstrate their masculinity by being the primary (if not only) breadwinner for the family. This gendered ideology affected not just the education of wives but that of daughters as well. This tendency for men to prove masculine value by economically providing for the family is most prevalent in the first generation. These immigrant men imported cultural ideals from Mexico and were conditioned by the norms of the early to middle 1900s when traditional gender roles and separate spheres were dominant in both Mexico and the United States. As Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) points out, it takes families years—if not a whole generation—to adjust to the more egalitarian gender roles in the United States. Plus, at the time of the first generation's arrival in the 1940s and 1950s, the United States boasted its own version of traditional gender scripts.

Second-Generation Mexican Americans: The Bridge Generation

Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), held that racial segregation in public schools violates the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of equal protection of the laws. This decision overruled the 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that upheld state-imposed racial segregation based on the separate-but-equal doctrine (that separate facilities for blacks and whites was permissible under the Fourteenth Amendment so long as they were equal). The *Brown* decision concluded that separate is inherently unequal.

Desperately unequal school buildings typify the pre-1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* era. Some of the second-generation respondents who are now in their early to middle sixties were school age in the 1950s, around the time of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Perhaps contrary to popular belief, Jim Crow-style racism reached beyond blacks in the South and affected the Mexican Americans in the Southwest as well (Montejano 1987). Timothy Ponce describes these separate and unequal conditions in the late 1950s and early 1960s:

There was a Mexican high school and there was the other one. We always knew that. It was just different being in a different place. It wasn't all Mexican, but that's where all the Mexicans went. We lived in the barrio in the north side [of San Jose] and . . . of course, for the new areas south of the city, there was a new high school for them. That was a pretty fancy high school and then we went to the old one. . . . That's just the way things are. . . . There wasn't much you could do, it just happened all the time. I always wondered, "What the hell's going on?"

Timothy sensed that this disparity was unjust and that he was denied opportunities available to others. He notes that he "never went to a college prep program" even though he was a "pretty smart kid." His response to these unequal school conditions was to persevere, although his response was rare among his peers, many of whom dropped out of school altogether. Timothy eventually earned his master's degree and became a junior high school principal.

Marcel Ruiz, living in Goleta, California, three hundred miles south of Timothy Ponce and three years his senior, experienced a similar separate and unequal school setting. Marcel found that "all the Mexicans" were in one smaller building and "the white daughters of the landowners would be in the big building." Marcel's narrative suggests the psychological repercussions of educational segregation. Marcel discusses his experience with a kindergarten

and first grade English immersion program, after which he was integrated into the big school:

JMV: How did that integration work?

MARCEL: Well, I don't think it worked very well because . . . when I got to the big school I felt that I was always behind. I . . . wasn't quite up to the rest of the white, um, classmates so there was a lot of struggle in learning in the transition . . . When we got through the . . . integration, uh, I . . . began to feel again that low self-esteem that . . . I wasn't very smart. . . . They gave us some I.Q. test . . . and I didn't even understand the questions so I must [have] scored very low. So they would put us in bonehead reading class and mostly the Latinos are in the bonehead reading class and . . . we always seemed to be a little behind and I didn't do very well in school as I recall.

Marcel struggled with thinking he had a low I.Q. because he was tested before being English proficient, leading him to conclude that he was not smart. As it turns out, Marcel, at sixty-five years old, is a well-established fashion designer who reported the highest household income of all my respondents, at four hundred thousand dollars or above.

There is a gender difference in this rule of unequal distribution of school staff attention and encouragement. Tamara Rosenberg reported institutional support from her high school. She is an exception to the argument above that second-generation Mexican Americans fell outside school counselors' net of guidance and care. In Tamara's case, a school counselor informed her of her college potential and helped to fill the knowledge gap she lacked:

I was incredibly lucky, because I had never thought of going to college and it wasn't a vocabulary that was in our family. It was the high school counselor who called me. And I really thought that I was in trouble, because I had gotten kicked out of [two high schools previously]. I had an attitude. And so when I got called in, I really thought it was because I was in trouble. And then the counselor just called [me in] individually and asked [me], "What plans do you have for when you graduate?" And it was—"I don't know, I hadn't thought about it." And the counselor said, "Well, what kind of interests do you have? What do you think you might want to do? Have you ever thought of college?" And I said, "No." And I said, "Well, I can interior design." And she said, "Well, what about being an architect?" "Yeah, I guess so. Maybe." She pulled me out of all of my classes and put me in the college track. She said, "You know, it won't hurt you—if you don't go,

you don't go. But if you want to, then at least you have that choice." I got on that track because of this woman just doing her job.

Thus, there are exceptions to the claim that the educations of second-generation Mexican Americans were universally marked by overt Jim Crow discrimination and outright school-sanctioned neglect and disempowerment. This gender variation shows how overt discrimination was unevenly employed even while it remained the dominant protocol of the era.

The Parenting Strategies of the Second Generation

The second generation employs three main parenting styles, all of which partially reflect parents' own experience at home and school in their youth. Middle-class parents display a "concerted cultivation" logic of child rearing (Lareau 2003). In "concerted cultivation," parents actively "develop" their children, often by utilizing parent-child conversations. To the extent that a majority of my respondent families are middle-class by the third generation, the three parenting styles elaborated here fall within the rubric of "concerted cultivation" (Lareau 2003). The first parenting style is one of "wholehearted encouragement." By adulthood, most second-generation Mexican Americans I interviewed had risen to middle-class status or above and were in a position to encourage their children (the third generation) in education. Second-generation Mexican Americans who achieved middle-class status as a consequence of educational degrees were vocal in encouraging their children to see education as a key to success. The second parenting style regarding education is "healthy skepticism." While generally supportive of educational goals for their children, a number of second-generation Mexican Americans, on the basis of their own experiences, felt skeptical about the payoff of the school system. Second-generation Mexican Americans whose progress was stymied by the discriminatory inner workings of the educational system were supportive of their children's education but were watchful and involved in order to ensure fair treatment of their children. The third parenting style is "pointed encouragement," which was developed in reaction to the gender difference in childrearing practices wherein parents encouraged boys' education more than that of girls.

Wholehearted Encouragement

Milo Contreras, who served in the U.S. Army and earned a law degree after being injured in combat, instilled in his daughter Renata that education is a tool for mobility. Injured in service, Milo received a stipend for school

expenses from the G.I. Bill, as well as “rehabilitation,’ which is something like worker’s compensation . . . where they retrain you back into the workforce.” The Veteran’s Administration paid for his retraining as a lawyer, since he could no longer perform the duties of his old job. Now a successful lawyer who earned his way into the middle class after a youth of poverty, Milo considers his family’s progression, from his parents to his children:

MIL0: The second generation looks for education. I think the first generation could see the value of it and was very encouraging as far as obtaining an education. . . . [For most of my siblings] . . . there has always been some progression to a better economic situation than agricultural work, which is the bottom of the scale.

JMV: For your children, what kind of trajectory do you think they’re on?

MIL0: I hope they become professionals just because that offers a lot of independence. And mobility. . . . With a profession you call your own shots.

Education is a key to upward mobility. Milo’s family went from agricultural labor in the first generation to a law degree in the next generation to at least a bachelor’s degree in the third generation. Milo’s daughter, Renata, learned the importance of education from her father. Milo self-consciously impressed his daughter with this value through stories of his hard-won education. Renata remarks, “The importance of education . . . came from both parents but more from my dad, just ‘cause he’d been through having nothing and putting himself through school and law school. He always really, really valued [education] and thought that can bring you so many opportunities, more than anything else.” Education propelled Milo out of the agricultural fields, out of wartime operations, and into a profession where he earns a middle-class living and is his own boss.

Healthy Skepticism

A number of second-generation Mexican Americans who encountered obstacles to achieving educational goals were skeptical of the payoff of the school system for their children. While they were generally supportive of educational goals for their children, a dose of pragmatism deriving from experience kept some parents from unqualified encouragement of a system that had treated them unequally a generation earlier.

Marcus Lopez, at fifty-seven years old, experienced the overt segregation of the 1950s and early 1960s and this seeped into his children’s perspec-

tives on school. Marcus's high school counselor actively discouraged him from honors classes and steered him into remedial and vocational classes solely because of his Mexican descent. As school authorities, counselors and administrators embodied the institutional power that enforced the overt racial/ethnic segregation. Marcus reviews his high school years:

My old [high school] counselor . . . told me I'd be nothing, that I should take nothing but shop class because that was all I was good for. That was all my people were good for: to be mechanics or cooks. . . . That was one of my worst experiences because I was doing well in school and I wanted to get into honors classes. But when I went to see my counselor to ask him why I couldn't get harder classes, or more classes besides three periods of study hall and a shop class, I was told *by my counselor*: "Take shop classes because your kind of people are good cooks and good mechanics."

Marcus did not finish high school but served in the U.S. Marine Corps, during which time he completed his GED and took some college courses. After completion of his military service, he visited his former high school and confronted that same school counselor:

I looked him straight in the eye and I said, "I want my diploma and I want it dated 1964." . . . He just looked at me and he says, "Well, I hope you learned to be a mechanic when you were in the service." [I said,] "No, I was an instructor. I *taught* guerilla warfare. And hopefully I helped some of the guys come back from Vietnam."

Marcus's reaction to his high school counselor's disdain and racism was to achieve exactly *what he had been told he couldn't*. He succeeded both *in spite of* and *because of* the counselor's negative expectation. He took pleasure in showing off his status as a U.S. military instructor to precisely the person who was both a practical and symbolic obstacle. He petitioned the school board for a diploma, which he won. On a wider scale, his racially centered hardships spurred him to agitate for social change by becoming active in the Brown Berets, a militant Chicano group born in the 1960s.

Low expectations of Mexican Americans' achievement are often disastrously successful at squelching ambition. In a fraction of cases, however, these sub-par expectations can be converted into a motivating force. While Marcus's is a success story against a system that was set against him, the material, psychological, and emotional hardship he endured in order to suc-

ceed should not be minimized. It is a substantial burden for minorities to straddle the line between being sensitive to “additive forms of discrimination” (both individual and group histories) and being paranoid as they assess present situations and calculate responses (Feagin 1991).

Marcus shared his story with his children and warned of the pitfalls of the school system while also upholding the value of education. My interview with Marcus was book-ended by platitudes about education. Marcus told me that when he was counseling his high-school-age son about career and education plans after high school graduation, he put it flatly: “You can work at McDonald’s, but why not *own* McDonald’s?” Marcus believes that “education is power, pure power.” Marcus achieved his GED while in the U.S. Marine Corps and also received his high school degree upon petition. Marcus put aside his skepticism about the meritocracy of the school system as he instructed his children about the value of education. Above all, Marcus claims, “Mostly what I taught [my children] is that you have to work hard, it’s not free. It’s not served to you.” This ethic of working hard is born from experience: one must combat stereotypes, prove oneself, and transcend barriers through determination. As a consequence, Marcus drove his children hard to succeed.

Tony, Marcus’s son, learned the lessons his father taught him. Tony did not just learn the didactic principles his father self-consciously tried to pass on but also the lessons that were transmitted through his tales of difficulties and blocked opportunities in high school. Tony dropped out of high school in tenth grade, barely able to read or write, in part because of the skepticism he picked up from his father about the unfairness of the system. However, Tony heard not only his father’s complaints about education but also the value of determination and hard work. Tony joined the military at age twenty without a high school diploma. Through working hard on the job he achieved rank quickly and earned his GED, like his father.

Second-generation parents were regularly confronted with negative stereotypes in school. They naturally suspected that their offspring would be up against similar unflattering preconceived notions. Fully aware of the stereotypes they encountered, these parents were very realistic in the goals of social decorum, good grades, and propriety they established for their children. Two illustrations from the second-generation cohort make this point, including Tina Acevedo, who offers instruction to her children: “Hold your head up high, be on honor roll. Show people what you’re made of. The stereotype that we’re all dropping out of school or not showing up, that doesn’t fit this family. That’s not tolerated. We have a standard that we follow.” In the same vein, Tyler Mendoza refers to his parents’ motivation for him to rebut society’s low expectations:

My parents always pushed school, school, school, school. So I had to do better in school. . . . C's were not that good, you get A's and B's. C's meant that you could do better. So, they always pushed from day one that I had to do better in school. I knew I had to try harder. . . . I had to try harder and prove that I wasn't one of those dumb lazy Mexicans or the ones that are going to drop out and get somebody pregnant. . . .

This realistic encouragement for school reflects a sizeable portion of the second generation's orientation toward the school system and their children. Taking their own lived experience into account, they are diffident about offering "wholehearted encouragement." Yet, they desire the best for their children and are aware that an education unlocks doors of opportunity. Also wanting to shield their offspring from social slights, they proffer pragmatic advice or biographical narratives that both caution and fortify their children.

Pointed Encouragement

In immigrant families supportive of education, male children were often offered the opportunity and resources for school in preference to female children. In part as a consequence of lack of encouragement in their youth, second-generation mothers developed a strategy of "pointed encouragement" when parenting their own children. Yolanda Segura recalls how her father ridiculed her desire to go to college:

I never finished my college education and part of that was because of opportunity and environment. . . . When I started to go to college right after high school, my dad sort of ridiculed it and was you know, "What do you need that for? . . . You don't need that." And not having good study habits or really not knowing how to survive in college and not having the right people to guide me was what deterred me the most.

In particular, Yolanda remembers how her experience was influenced both by race and gender. She connects the way her parents digested societal assumptions about Mexican immigrants and their families and how this influenced her gendered upbringing as a "Mexican girl":

There was always the people out there that just made assumptions about your skin color and your country; . . . that we weren't smart enough. . . . Certainly some of those [assumptions] were internalized by my parents

bringing us up because there was this sense of you had to be humble and . . . being a Mexican girl . . . that you had your place in life.

Yolanda grew up in a traditional home and also describes her marital home as “very traditional”; she is the full-time mother of three girls, and her husband, a high-level executive of a large public relations firm, is the sole income earner. She wanted an education, though she never finished her college degree, and her husband, with two master’s degrees and an upward occupational trajectory, further convinced her of the value of education. Fueled by her husband’s conviction as well as her own, she was committed to encouraging her three female children in their academic lives.

Remembering how her father discouraged her educational dreams, Yolanda crafted a parenting style reflecting the way she *would have liked to be* supported. Yolanda refers to her experience with her parents as she draws a distinction between that parent-child relationship and the relationship she is trying to foster with her children:

Back to my own kids is that I didn’t want them to feel that way [ridiculed, unsupported] at all. . . . From Day One I always told them “when you finish college” as opposed to “when you finish high school.” Whereas in my own family it was “when you finish high school.”

Yolanda is active in the Parent-Teacher Association at her children’s schools and helps to organize extracurricular events like talent shows, yet another way she demonstrates her commitment to her children’s educational agenda. Yolanda’s hope is that, by changing the treatment of her children from the way she was treated as a child, she can modify her daughters’ experience and improve their educational outcomes.³

Experiences outside of school also influence parental ideologies concerning education. For example, Beatrice Madrigal instructed her daughter, Reyna, to get a college education in order to earn economic independence. Beatrice did not base this instruction on her own educational experience, but on the connection she draws between her limited education and her difficulty supporting herself after her divorce from her husband. What came across most clearly in Beatrice’s interview was not her sense of race or ethnicity but her sense of strength as a woman. Beatrice separated from her husband when she learned he had another family outside the marriage. As Reyna watched her mother learn to be strong, independent, and assertive, Reyna said that she learned by example and took those lessons to heart.

REYNA: [My mom] . . . taught us to be responsible people. . . . When she broke up with my father—I might have been like twelve—she started teaching us how to be really independent and not to rely on anyone. And to take care of yourself and . . . I think that is why I went off to college.

JMV: Really?

REYNA: Yeah, because she was a stay-at-home and when my dad left she had to go to work because my dad didn't give her any help or support. . . . That is what she has taught us: "Well, you need to work to take care of yourself. You have needs and you support yourself." And then she had said, "You should go out to college." And, you know, she started talking about "so you don't have to rely on a man," and then she had started talking about what had happened to her.

So, the lesson that passed between the generations of Madrigal women is not about race or ethnicity but about gender. Lessons of gender, as well as of race, can involve teachings about how education is a pathway toward independence, emotional as well as economic.

Third-Generation Mexican Americans: The Youth

Discrimination is dynamic: forms of discrimination are contextual and refract political, economic, and cultural arrangements. In the post-civil rights era, discrimination became embedded in institutional practices and the fabric of everyday life. "Institutional discrimination" holds civic and social institutions responsible for discriminatory practices that are structured into organizations and reproduce inequality. Modern-day forms of racism and discrimination are qualitatively different than before the civil rights era. While overall racial segregation, in particular between white and Hispanic children, persists in many school districts (Saporito and Sohoni 2006), state-mandated racial segregation has been replaced by covert forms of discrimination. In the educational experiences of third-generation Mexican Americans in the mid-1970s and later, this means that separate school buildings or outright school administration disregard have been replaced by school tracking systems, low expectations for minority performance based on negative stereotypes, and classroom curriculum that devalues non-European American "subjugated knowledges" (Collins 1991).

Third-generation Mexican Americans complained of being (nearly) trapped in tracking systems. Those who escaped were those whose parents rigorously oversaw their schooling and engaged the school administra-

tion when necessary. Regardless of region in California, a sizeable portion of third-generation Mexican American students reported a severe tracking system in place in their schools. Seventeen-year-old Andrew Rosenberg captures the role of race in school tracking systems. Andrew refers to the racialized sorting patterns behind student placement in high school classrooms:

“Oh, he’s Mexican—put him in that class.” It’s really kind of how it is. It’s really bad. I don’t think it’s that intentional. But if you’re Mexican and you walk into a class of all white people, it’s like—oh, this is the GATE [Gifted and Talented Education] class. I don’t belong here. When really a lot of those Mexicans who are in the normal classes should be in the GATE classes. And some of the people who are in GATE classes shouldn’t be at all . . . most of them are just cheating their way through. So a lot of people don’t even deserve to be in it. But I think the counselors feel too afraid to put a white kid in a normal class, because the parents would probably get mad or the kid would be like—what am I doing in this class? So I think a lot of people just automatically get put in these classes. They say—oh, you need to keep a “B” grade or whatever to stay in GATE classes. But a lot of people are failing these classes, but they still get put back in there anyway.

While the practice may not be “intentional,” the school persists in internally segregating the classrooms, giving whites access to advanced classes and systematically denying them to minorities.

Hector Avila was funneled into a racialized tracking system that Andrew Rosenberg was able to avoid. Hector offers an extreme example: he was tracked into an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom when he was already fluent in English and Spanish. Because ESL classrooms focus on acquiring English language skills, Hector’s educational progress was stunted because he was placed in a classroom that was well below his aptitude. I asked if he felt any key events shaped his sense of racial or ethnic identity, to which Hector responded,

I can remember one thing that made me upset. . . . See, I was born in the United States and I spoke perfect English and I also spoke Spanish. So I probably spoke better Spanish when I was younger, but I also spoke very good English, as well. . . . [W]hen I moved to Serra Vista [Arizona]⁴ . . . [the school] automatically put me in ESL. Even though I spoke perfect English. I don’t think my parents, at the time, really paid attention or understood what that was. So, instead of going to regular English class, I got behind in English because they were putting me in ESL. . . . And then the teacher wasn’t smart

enough to say, “Hey, this kid speaks English and Spanish. . . .” They just put me there with these Mexican kids . . . who didn’t speak any English. This . . . was through all of second grade. . . . I struggled a little bit with English classes [later] because I think I got a little behind. Now, I look back at it and I go, “That really pissed me off that they did that. What the hell is their problem?”

As a second grader, Hector didn’t figure out that he had been misplaced in the ESL classroom. He thought, “Wow, I get pulled out of class for an hour to go to this place where there’s all these other Mexican kids and I had fun talking to them. And I spoke to them in Spanish.” Because he was fluent in Spanish and English he would get all the answers to the lessons, leading to boredom. One repercussion of not being challenged in the classroom was that he started to act out and thus got pinpointed as possibly having Attention Deficit Disorder [ADD]:

I became a little bit disruptive in elementary school because I don’t think I was being challenged because I was . . . put in this [ESL] class. . . . They were like, “We think he had ADD because he’s not doing well in English.” But yet in all the other class, like math, it was real easy for me. . . . Then they did some more tests and they were like, “Oh, we’re sorry, we’re wrong.”

Once Hector was correctly placed in appropriate-level classrooms, he did well, earning straight A’s in middle school.

Relationships with school administrators mirror the racialized tracking system: whites and Asians get the majority of positive attention while Latinos and blacks often are not able to foster this same rapport and instead are disregarded or receive negative attention.⁵ Veronica Guzman tells me about how she and her dark-skinned brother have a markedly different relationship with their high school vice principal than does their light-skinned, dark-blond-haired sister:

My sister, she’s light skinned, she looks American, but she’s a Mexican American. The vice principal thought she was white. They [the administration] didn’t know that my brother and sister and I were related. And they would send information for her in English and for my brother they would send it in Spanish. She’s blonde and according to them she’s a *güera* [white woman] and he’s *Mexicano*, Mexican. The vice principal treated her differently because she was a blonde, she was a *güera*. When they found out she was Hispanic, she was a Mexican, it wasn’t the same anymore.

This starkly different treatment for siblings of the same family powerfully reinforced Veronica's sense of racial identity. Veronica's response was to distrust the administration. While she called in her mother to speak to the principal on her behalf, after which relations improved, a lesson she learned from school was the salience of race—or even the appearance of race—in obtaining school resources and support.

Classroom curriculum is another way in which the educational institution determines which races and cultures are “legitimate” and deserve scholastic attention. In so doing, schools reconstitute the disequilibria of societal power dynamics. The sociology of culture and education literatures have, since the 1970s, discussed the power politics that operate behind decisions about what kinds of content merit inclusion into disciplinary canons (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron 1979). Classroom curriculum is not neutral but political. National curricula and canonized scholarship represents a “*selective tradition* . . . some group's vision of legitimate knowledge [that] is produced out of the cultural, political, and economic conflicts, tensions, and compromises that organize and disorganize a people” (Apple 1996: 22). Rather than remaining entrenched in white-supremacist, masculinist, and imperialist ideologies of old, schools can positively transform future social and race relations by changing classroom pedagogy and traditional epistemologies. bell hooks calls for “excitement” in the classroom, which is a condition for, as well as a byproduct of, Paulo Freire's “conscientization,” or critical awareness and engagement (Freire 1970; hooks 1994). hooks envisions a feminist and racially conscious classroom wherein students are critical and active and knowledge is stripped of its dominant-class politics.

The multicultural education project of the 1970s developed in response to America's changing demographics and a growing need for schools and curriculum to incorporate students of color. Race is a matter of both social structure and cultural representation (Winant 2000). Since schools make decisions on how racial groups are represented both structurally (faculty and student body composition) and academically (course content and course offerings), they are fertile loci for (re)teaching and (re)learning about race.

Third-generation Mexican Americans voiced dismay over not seeing their experience reflected in official school curricula. My respondents echoed the sentiments of education theorist Henry Giroux, who decries the omissions of “master narratives and hegemonic discourses that make up the official curriculum” and demands integration of “the self-representations of subordinated groups as they might appear in ‘forgotten’ histories, texts, memo-

ries, experiences, and community narratives” (Giroux 1992). Araceli Treviño offers her story of frustration in high school with seeing the history of Latinos and women excised from her world history class:

I remember going to our [world history] text book and . . . going through the section in there where they talk about Mexican Americans and César Chávez and farm workers’ struggle and in that same chapter there was . . . lesbians and gays, [women’s rights,] and Puerto Ricans, different ethnicities in this one chapter. . . . Whatever the minority stuff was, [it] was all [in] this one lump sum chapter. And I was so excited. . . . “Okay, let’s learn!” . . . We get to it and [the teacher] goes, “we’re skipping this chapter. We’re going to the Reagan years.” I was like, “What!” I was so bummed. I was so bummed and I asked him, “Why? Why do we have to skip this chapter?” And he said that the Reagan years are more important. And I said, “To whom?” And we got into a little conversation and I remember going home crying, crying to my parents about how I was so mad that he felt the Reagan years were so important than this one little section. . . . It was maybe three or four pages on Latin America. . . . I remember it being such a huge issue and . . . we had a meeting with the principal. So he ended up teaching that next. And it ended up being in the final but I remember it was such a stir and I was so hurt. I just remember being so hurt about [how] he could say that it wasn’t important. . . . And how [he] could say that is not important considering that there is a lot of Mexican American kids in that school. . . .

In the end, Araceli won her appeal to the high school principal and the teacher apologized for saying that the world history chapter on women, gays and lesbians, and racial minorities was not significant. Araceli actively challenged her teacher and the curriculum arrangement at large because she found that a master narrative that excludes minorities of various kinds was overtaking her own history. The consequences of her observation and resistance empowered her sense of racial and ethnic identity and emboldened her sense of entitlement to “subjugated knowledge” (Collins 1991).

To be included in classroom curriculum is to be deemed legitimate and valuable. Most of my respondents who directly discussed multicultural education were proponents of it. As education systems determine how to handle questions of race in classroom curriculum and pedagogy, and classroom and structural diversity, they are endowing race and racial categories with varying significances and levels of power.

Affirmative Action: Pushing the Door Ajar

Affirmative action policies were drafted in the 1960s and 1970s to improve underrepresented minorities' access to education and employment. Thus far this chapter has detailed the historically coded ways in which the school system has made Mexican Americans keenly aware of their racial identity and status as marginal to the dominant, white society. The Telles and Ortiz (2009: 271) study that includes Mexican Americans of various socioeconomic statuses found that by 2000, third-generation Mexican Americans “were about 30 percent as likely as non-Hispanics to have completed college.” In my smaller sample, however, where middle-class status may bias in favor of school quality and graduation rates, affirmative action policies seem to have benefited the third generation. Affirmative action policies opened doors to education and jobs that might otherwise have remained closed. Some third-generation Mexican Americans enthusiastically “checked the box” while others were reluctant to do so. Considering one’s ethnic claim in a situation with pecuniary consequences was often a struggle, and the responses to this quandary varied widely (Jiménez 2004). For those who claimed minority status, receiving affirmative action benefits only reinforced their identity as ethnic Americans (particularly for those of mixed ethnicity).

Respondents who claimed that they were beneficiaries of affirmative action policies asserted that these policies “opened the door” to higher education. They were all quick to declare that they were indeed qualified for admission. In their view, affirmative action encouraged admissions committees to consider their applications more holistically, taking their (sometimes multiple) disadvantages more seriously than they would do without such a policy in place. As Cristina Talavera expresses, “Affirmative action . . . opened the door. While I had good grades, I was also working in high school. . . . It just really opened the door so that I could show what I had to show.” Cristina, like many college-bound minority students of the late 1990s and the new millennium, felt a backlash after the passage of California’s Proposition 209 in November 1996, effectively halting affirmative action policies in public institutions, including the University of California. Cristina notes, “When I went to go apply for law school—which was the first year that it was revoked—I felt it really worked against me. I mean, I could sit there and scream in my essay all I wanted . . . but at the same time I felt like the door wasn’t even open for anyone to hear me speak.” No one can say whether Cristina would have gotten into law school under affirmative action, but it has been well publicized that the University of California’s law school admissions

of minority students plummeted after the passage of Proposition 209. Far from making the issue of race disappear, in Cristina's case at least, the repeal of affirmative action heightened her sense of ethnic disadvantage.

Tony Lopez, working for a sheriff's department as a community liaison, made the point in chapter 3 that given the influx of Latinos from Mexico and other Latin American countries, his ethnic background and bilingual abilities were in demand. He remarked that his "race has kicked open doors [and that he] gets things done." Akin to Cristina Talavera's notion of "show[ing] what I had to show" once inside, Tony's "willing[ness] to work hard" legitimates his occupational placement. By saying that he works hard, Tony sends the message that affirmative action opens doors to those who are industrious and deserving. Lance Morelos, who spoke regarding business entrepreneurship, defended affirmative action from misconceptions: "There is no free lunch. It's not 'if you're female or a minority here's a check.' People don't realize that; that's not the way it is." These discursive moves head off the conservative critique that affirmative action goes to the "undeserving poor" and the underclass whose problems are bred from cultural pathologies rather than macro-structural issues (Steele 1990; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997).

For Jillian Rosenberg, the question of "whether or not to check the box" on college and medical school applications threw her into ethnic identity pandemonium because she has a European-descent parent. Affirmative action programs operate on the beliefs that to be a racial/ethnic or gender minority is to be historically, if not currently, oppressed and that diversity is an asset in workplaces and schools. Some people, such as Jillian, do mental and emotional contortions in order to figure out what it means to be a minority (or half a racial/ethnic minority) and to have achieved middle-class socioeconomic standing. When I met her, Jillian was attending Yale University and considering applying to medical school. When applying to Yale, she had marked that she was a racial/ethnic minority yet felt unsure as to whether she was exploiting her background, and at the time of my interview she was facing a similar predicament regarding medical school applications:

I definitely had a struggle with how I feel about affirmative action type stuff, because I know that when I'm applying to med school being Mexican is going to help me in. I know that it helped me get into Yale. I know there were a lot of really good things that I did and I deserve to be there, but I know that it [being Mexican] played a part. . . . I felt like I was exploiting it. . . . So, it's just hard.

On the whole, respondents who received affirmative action benefits were grateful. Their tacit understanding is that while they encountered both institutional and public discrimination, race relations in the United States improved slightly from that which their parents experienced. While this chapter has demonstrated the ways in which both institutional mechanisms and historical context shape racial formation and integration into dominant society, state policies such as affirmative action help ameliorate racial inequality. With the passage of Proposition 209 in California in 1996, however, state-enforced affirmative action in public institutions was dismantled. Since “inequality is not fated by nature . . . [but] is a social construction, a result of historical acts,” the good news is that intentional policies can be *changed* to produce more equitable outcomes (Fischer et al. 1996: 7). As the state and nation struggle with how to repair historical and contemporary racial power imbalances and injustices, it is important to think about the ways in which the state and other institutions have a formative hand in both creating and, alternatively, eradicating racial inequalities.

Assimilated and Racialized

While thinned attachment and cultural maintenance families’ levels of commitment to Mexican culture vary, they are indistinguishable in their levels of academic achievement. A difference between thinned attachment and cultural maintenance families was the tendency for thinned attachment families to be more pacifist and accommodationist than their more culturally identified counterparts. This is due to the stress that a thinned attachment orientation placed on acculturating to and succeeding in mainstream institutions. By definition, those on a thinned attachment trajectory were more likely to check their ethnicity at the school’s front door and try to succeed by the established rules. There were notable exceptions, however, where thinned attachment individuals and families took defensive action that contradicted their normally accommodating stance. In situations risking or damaging a family member’s academic achievement, thinned attachment families changed their cooperative stance. Threats to educational attainment pushed most respondents, regardless of attachment to heritage, to adopt direct, confrontational action, such as meeting with school officials and challenging students’ mismatched academic placement, unfair treatment, or the curriculum.

As we saw in the prior chapter on discrimination, cultural maintenance families were generally more assertive, combative, and interventionist than thinned attachment families. This self-confident and forceful quality was

mediated by generation. The first-generation immigrants were relatively uninvolved as overseers of their American-born children's education because of their unfamiliarity with and insecurity about navigating the educational system. The second-generation Mexican American parents, by contrast, were educated in the United States and well versed in racialized and racializing educational systems. Cultural maintenance parents were especially predisposed to take on their children's educational plights with attention and vigor since living proudly as an ethnic minority in a nation with predominantly white leadership was a chief goal.

A commonality beyond academic achievement that cross-cuts thinned attachment and cultural maintenance designation, generation, and gender is the experience of racialization despite assimilation. Despite English proficiency, adoption of dominant cultural norms, ability to effectively navigate mainstream institutions, and even impressive educational achievements in later generations, many Mexican-origin individuals are racialized as non-white and treated as inferior.

Institutions shape a host of life outcomes, including immigrants' incorporation into a community (Bloemraad 2006; Menjivar 2000; Reitz 1998) and notions of civic participation and national identity (Bellah 1986; Wedeen 1999). Immigrant groups' incorporation trajectories depend in part on the interplay among context, "structures of opportunity" (institutions, cultural beliefs, and social networks) (Alba and Nee 2003: 14), and purposive action by immigrants and their descendants. Since "every state institution is a racial institution" (Omi and Winant 1994: 83), examining the interplay between structures (schools) and agency (families and individuals) is crucial in understanding how these social influences bear on racial self-understandings and the assimilation process. The way Mexican American students are treated in schools and the way families handle their children's experiences of schooling is another "bump" in the nonlinear process of incorporation into U.S. society. Schools, among other social arenas, play a major role in constructing race, endowing it with meaning and creating differential treatment and inequality based on racial divisions.

Schools are a racializing agent for all three generations, marking, categorizing, and treating their Mexican-origin pupils differently in various socio-historical milieus. Yet, students and their families are not mere social sponges. Families play a profoundly important role in shaping students' racial identity formation, resistance strategies, and educational trajectories. Family ideologies reflect parents' own experiences in their educational and family systems. In this way, as parents call upon their own experiences in school, gender ide-

ologies and parenting tactics interact with the processes of racial identity formation and incorporation into U.S. institutions. However, as Pattillo-McCoy (1999: 115) notes in her study of middle-class black youth, “Without minimizing the importance of individual agency, . . . context exists above and beyond individual and family circumstances. Choices are made within the limits of what options are presented to these young people.” For the Mexican American families in this book, this signals the importance of understanding the influence of generation and historical timing on the structure of educational systems as well as the ways in which families can serve as a buffer for their children.

Although education was consistently seen as key to achieving the American Dream, changing sociopolitical environments meant that the racial messages conveyed by institutions and families shifted accordingly. The immigrant generation advocated the ideology of education leading to upward mobility but with a gender bias. The education of the second generation was marked by overt Jim Crow–style segregation, while the third generation was typified by a more covert institutional discrimination. While these ideologies are not clearly defined by time period and probably coexisted, the primary distinction between the two eras is the degree of intensity of segregation and prejudice. Second-generation Mexican Americans attended school in unequal buildings and were oftentimes barred from access to “white” schools or advanced classes. This second-rate treatment made second-generation Mexican American students view their race as a social identity feature to be managed—to pass, to downplay, to assert, to subvert. This recognition of the salience of race in schools played into the teaching strategies they developed once they became parents.

In contrast to the overt discrimination typical of the 1950s and 1960s, third-generation Mexican Americans, educated in the 1970s and 1990s, had school experiences that were marked by covert discrimination. School tracking systems racially/ethnically segregated students in classrooms (though the school student body might be racially diverse) and classroom curricula valued mainstream American cultural knowledge, ignoring minority forms of knowledge. While the form of discrimination varied with the historical period, the lesson that race is an important aspect of one’s social identity remained constant.

Racial identity formation does not work exactly the same way for females and males, as families and schools bore different expectations for youth according to their gender. Immigrants were inclined to exclude women (wives and daughters) based on patriarchal expectations. Immigrant parents

placed more emphasis on boys' education, yet these young males faced more barriers from schools. The second-generation females' experience in schools moderated the effect of lack of familial support: despite overt segregation, school officials were more disposed to mentor and advance female students than male students. Combining these experiences from home and school results in particular parenting strategies used to coach the third generation. Three parenting styles evolved, with "pointed encouragement" reflecting female parents' desire to furnish direct encouragement to their children (especially daughters) on the basis of what they would have liked to receive in their own youth.

Educational outcomes,⁶ while not central to the analysis presented here, deserve some attention. Educational attainment, which in part reflects changing sociopolitical milieus as well as shifting parenting styles, has risen in each successive generation in my sample. Among my interviewees, college degrees have at least doubled from the second to the third generation (with no college degrees in the first generation). The third generation is on track to meet or exceed their parents' educational levels. While this chapter has focused less on scholastic achievement than the racialized and racializing components of both school and home lives, the middle-class Mexican Americans whom I interviewed showed intergenerational progress in educational gains.

This academic success of my second- and third-generation middle-class Mexican American interviewees needs to be contextualized within broader trends of educational outcomes. While there is nationwide intergenerational progress in that the Mexican American second generation experiences higher levels of educational (and occupational) attainment compared to their parents, they "still trail well behind the mean of the American population" (Zhou et al. 2008: 41). Latinos lag behind non-Latinos in education and in other socioeconomic characteristics (Chapa and De La Rosa 2004). While "Mexican Americans experience dramatic gains in education and earnings between the first and second generations" (Grogger and Trejo 2002: viii), schooling achievement is "modest" (ibid.) or "remains flat in following generations" (Telles and Ortiz 2009: 133). Beyond this trend of noticeable—followed by limited—educational assimilation, racialization in school compounds disadvantage. "Racialization through schooling seems to help cement their low status in American society" (Telles and Ortiz 2009: 133). One reason why my small sample may have achieved educational success is their class advantage, in that most families achieved middle-class status in the second generation.

Finally, it is interesting to consider how social forces that impinge upon the third generation steer this generation's racial self-concept and may inform their future parenting strategies. The third generation's experience of family support for education and struggles in school over institutional discrimination, multicultural curricula, and affirmative action have undoubtedly forced them to deliberate about the salience of race in the United States. We turn next to the third generation, where I investigate the various social spheres that influence this generation's racial and ethnic self-perceptions.