

CONCLUSION

Teresa García's story, related in Chapter One, may indeed serve as an inspiration to many Mexican immigrants in New York City. For some, she may be "assimilated," but in the view of Tepeyac and herself, she has just "integrated" into life in New York City. Teresa is definitely not a product of the American "melting pot," because she did not get rid of the old to acquire the new. Rather, she has kept the old and mixed it with the new. As she keeps her language and customs, and successfully integrates to New York City's social, economic, and political fabric, she becomes the prototype of Tepeyac's goal for Mexican immigrants, and the example of what these immigrants would like to be. But Teresa's success did not just "happen." She worked hard to reach the position she now has, and New York City's friendliness towards immigrants definitely helped her. While attending CUNY, she was able to pay in-state tuition, although she was undocumented. Things are different after the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks because after that day the school changed its position and decided to charge out-of-state tuition to undocumented immigrants. Thus, Mexican immigrants are now confronting new challenges.

In the midst of this new challenges, eating "cemitas" (a round piece of bread stuffed with meat, cheese, potatoes, etc. originally from the Mexican State of Puebla), listening to Mexican music on the radio, and even seeing the opening of a Mariachi Academy in East Harlem, may represent a dream that came true for Mexican immigrants in New York City

(Navarro, 2003). In a city where colors and flavors from around the world mix to form new ones, New Yorkers may even be happy to have the opportunity to eat “cemitas” and listen to the Mariachi music. The “problem” then is not Mexican immigrants in New York City. The “problem” is that they are the fastest growing immigrant group in the city, and they continue to increase in number throughout the United States. In fact, it is estimated that by the year 2040, there will be approximately 54,031,000 people of Mexican origin in the United States (see Appendix M).

For American “purists,” the immigration of so many people with such a different culture, language, and customs calls for a return to the Americanization movement. For the American “liberals,” the way these Mexican immigrants and their children are treated represents an opportunity to prove that America has passed its racist, prejudiced stage, and that the statement in the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal” has become a reality in the form of cultural pluralism and multiculturalism. According to historian Jim Cullen, this is not a new dilemma in American history: “For much of our history,” he writes, “we could never quite decide whether we finally regarded immigrants as a blessing or a burden (Can we assimilate them? Will they drive down our wages? Will our children marry them?) Immigrants themselves have been unsure about whether to stay –and even how to navigate tensions between old-timers and new-comers)” (Cullen, 2003, p. 230).

In the case of Mexican immigrants in New York City, what Cullen says is true. Americans have ambivalent feelings towards them, most admitting that such immigrants are hard workers, at the same time considering them “illegal aliens”. On the other hand, caught between two worlds, immigrants travel back and forth from New York City to their home communities in Mexico. Many do it physically, establishing migratory circuits by

spending part of the year in one country and part in the other. Others do it in their minds and hearts, celebrating their Mexican traditions and culture, yet wanting to be a part of the American fabric --encouraged, for example, by Tepeyac's leaders to take advantages of American laws, such as the Civil Rights Act to demand the right to keep those traditions and culture.

In conclusion, it can be said that the hypothesis presented for this thesis has been strongly demonstrated. Taking as a case study those immigrants who participate with Tepeyac, we have seen that Mexicans in New York City have exchanged the ideal of assimilation that immigrants from 100 years ago followed, for that of integration. Mexican immigrants want to preserve their language and culture at the same time that they wish to integrate economically and politically to the city. The fact that Tepeyac has so many members and is able to mobilize them for different events in which they demand a place for their traditions and culture in the City, shows evidence that Mexicans want to continue being Mexicans, at the same time that they want to be recognized as an ethnic group and be integrated into the City's life.

Moreover, we can also see that the theories presented in Chapter One --segmented assimilation, transnational communities, and the immigrant's ability to organize function-- can partially be applied to Mexican immigrants in New York City, as the following section explains.

I. The Segmented Assimilation Model, The Immigrant's Ability to Organize Function and Transnational Communities: Their Application to Mexican Immigrants in New York City:

In regard to the segmented assimilation theory, it can be concluded that, when it comes to the integration of Mexican immigrants, Tepeyac's ideal is to promote a selective acculturation process, as presented in the Portes and Rumbaut's segmented assimilation model discussed in Chapter One:

External Obstacles:

	Racial Discrimination	Bifurcated Labor Markets	Inner-City Subculture	RESULT:
Selective acculturation	Filter through ethnic networks and confronted with family and community support	Met with parental guidance backed by family and community resources	Countervailing message based on family aspirations and community networks	Upward assimilation combined with biculturalism



Source: Portes, A. & Rumbaut, R.G. (2001). *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Unfortunately, Mexican immigrant's integration shows distressing trends, leaning toward downward assimilation, as presented in the same model:

External Obstacles:

	Racial Discrimination	Bifurcated Labor Markets	Inner-City Subculture	RESULT:
Dissonant acculturation	Confronted directly and without support	Met with individual resources alone	No countervailing message to adversarial attitudes and lifestyle	Downward assimilation



Source: Portes, A. & Rumbaut, R.G. (2001). *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Applying this last part of the model to the Mexican immigrants' case, one can see that it will take hard work and perhaps many years to achieve Tepeyac's ideal of selective

acculturation, with the end result of upward assimilation combined with biculturalism. There is little doubt that Tepeyac's goal is worthy: the immigrants' second generation will soon come of age, and the immigration of young Mexican people is likely to continue. So, every effort to help all these Mexican youth to experience upward assimilation is obviously necessary. In this sense, the immigrant's ability to organize function, as presented in LeMay's assimilation model in Chapter One, has been exemplified in this thesis by Tepeyac Association. Evidence shows that Tepeyac has been very effective in organizing Mexican immigrants in New York City, teaching them how to integrate into the city's economic and political fabric, and that Mexican immigrants have contributed to such organization.

In regard to transnational communities, this thesis demonstrates that this is the type of community Mexicans desire to have in New York City. Besides the fact that they strive to keep their culture and language, their political behavior is also transnational. Mexican immigrants, legal and undocumented, desire to continue being a part of the Mexican political machinery. Some of the legal immigrants have become community leaders, and they lobby with the Mexican authorities to achieve the right to vote in Mexican elections while they are in the United States. The undocumented immigrants also lobby with the Mexican government, with the goal of such government helping them obtain legal residency in the United States.

With the Guadalupe Torch Run, Tepeyac Association epitomizes the most intense way of doing transnational politics. It has helped to transplant the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe as the mother of all Mexicans regardless of their place of residency, and use it just like Miguel Hidalgo did to launch the Mexican War of Independence in 1810. The fact that over 90 percent of the Mexican population is Catholic, and the Virgin of Guadalupe is a Mexican Catholic icon, has helped Tepeyac to mobilize Mexican immigrants politically

in New York City. December 12th, the day that honors the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico, has become the focus of a political statement in New York City.

It is important to remember, though, that if Tepeyac encourages a transnational way of doing politics, this does not mean that they want to transfer the way of doing politics in Mexico and implement it in the United States. As Brother Joel stated, the only degree of assimilation into the American fabric that Tepeyac desires is to become democratic “like the American political system is, so we could totally differentiate ourselves from the PRI political party in Mexico. However, we do not desire to become like the Americans in any other aspects” (J. Magallan, Personal Communication, August 1st, 2001). Thus, transnational politics for Tepeyac may mean using the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe to have the support of the Catholic Church, and to appeal to the desire of Mexican immigrants to keep their own culture and traditions. At the same time, its underlined motivation is for these immigrants to become part of the American political fabric, whether as part of the Latino race or as a separate ethnic group.

II. Will Mexican immigrants in New York City provide a model for the assimilation process of other Mexican immigrants in the United States? Will they, indeed, change the face of America?

On the basis of my study of Tepeyac Association, I would say that Mexican immigrants in New York City have strong possibilities of providing not an old-fashion assimilation model, but rather an integration model for other Mexicans in the United States. Especially when it comes to a transnational way to mobilize politically, such as with the 2002 Guadalupe Torch Run. With that event Tepeyac took the lead over organizations in other American cities that have more Mexican immigrants, but have not organized something of this magnitude. When organizing the Torch Run, Tepeyac was extremely effective in

creating strategic alliances with the Catholic Church, the governments of both the United States and Mexico, and with business corporations. This could provide a model for other organizations, encouraging them to undertake comparable efforts.

Moreover, in a city like New York, Mexicans seem to have everything in their favor as they attempt to present a model of how Mexican immigrants may chose to integrate now: the support of the powerful Archdiocese of New York, the legacy of the city as a multicultural place, and even the legal framework of the Civil Rights Act. All these may mean that Mexican immigrants and their children no longer have to follow the old model of assimilation, but can be free to follow a process of assimilation as a synonym of integration, or selective acculturation as explained in the segmented assimilation model. The question here is whether they are in fact undergoing such a process. Evidence in this thesis suggests that unfortunately, they are not. Mexican immigrants and their children are rather undergoing a process of dissonant acculturation, so there is still much work to do.

In this sense, as we have seen throughout this thesis, the assimilation process of Mexican immigrants in New York City, and throughout the United States for that matter, presents many challenges. Some have to do with the host society: Americans' attitudes towards them and the context of reception, for example. Others have to do with Mexicans as a group: the similarity of culture function, their desire and ability to acculturate, and other factors. Still others have to do with individual immigrants' attitudes, such as individuals' desire to learn English and their perception of American society. Appendix N presents a summary of the different threats presented throughout this thesis that hinder the assimilation process of Mexican immigrants in New York City, as well my own suggested courses of action. This suggested course of action could serve as a model for other Mexican immigrants throughout the United States.

III. How the Future Looks:

It is safe to say that, as long as the economic stagnation in Mexico continues, the immigration of Mexicans to the United States will continue as well. Moreover, immigrants will continue to bring their family members to the United States. In the specific case of New York City, the Mexican population there is likely to continue growing, although the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center may have slowed down such growth. In fact, Cholula, a community in the State of Puebla, which is the state where most Mexican immigrants in New York City are from, reported in the month of January, 2003 a record amount of money received from the United States, compared with other months. Supposedly, the threat of a war between the United States and Iraq lead immigrants to send back home as much money as possible, so they could return to Mexico as soon as possible (“Hechos de Puebla,” 2003).

In regard to the cultural, economic, and political future of Mexican immigrants in New York City, it could be said that it seems promising in some aspects and grim in others. On the bright side, Mexican immigrants are already establishing a cultural presence in New York, with Mexican food and festivals becoming more common throughout the city. Linguistically, although there is no formal research available, the immigrants' children are most likely following the same pattern as the children of the “Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study” (CILS) discussed in Chapter Two: that is, they are learning the English language. To prove or disprove this, I would suggest a similar study to the CILS to be conducted with immigrants' children in New York City. In the area of economics, the immigrants' disposition to take any job is undoubtedly their main asset. In addition, Mexican immigrants may already possess a very important value to “make it” in the United States: their desire and ability to work hard, something that may be equivalent to the

protestant work ethic, which is recognize as a decisive American value to become economically successful. In the political aspect, their main source of hope becomes their children, who in about 10 years will be able to participate politically at the voting polls in significant numbers.

But not everything is so bright for Mexican immigrants in New York City. Anti-immigrant sentiments after the terrorist attacks may be latent in that city, so individual immigrants could be more scared to show their ethnicity or mobilize politically to demand their rights. Although bilingualism is an intellectual asset (Portes & Schauffler, 2001), unfortunately it does not seem to be helping the Mexican immigrants' children to perform better in school because they continue lagging behind, along with the other Latino children, in New York City Schools. The bifurcation of the economy presents problems for the economic integration of Mexican immigrants, but more than this, educational trends present the biggest problem, since in the 21st century a college degree promises to become even more essential for success in the workplace.

In this regard, Tepeyac's work will continue to be important helping Mexican immigrants to integrate into New York City life. The Association will likely continue implementing different educational programs to improve the human capital of Mexican immigrants and their children. It is also likely to continue mobilizing these immigrants politically, fighting for a general amnesty and the rights of undocumented immigrants. In this sense, it will be interesting to see if it actually accomplishes the recognition of a religious holiday, December 12th, as the day of the Mexican. It could be argued that the Irish have accomplished something equivalent with Saint Patrick's Day, which though it is not recognized as an official holiday, it is celebrated with parades and festivals in cities across the United States. But Irish immigrants became American citizens relatively easily,

and each one of them represented a potential vote for American legislators. If the general amnesty is granted, the next step for Mexican immigrants, not only in New York City, but across the United States, will be to become American citizens and to participate at the voting polls.¹

In regard to the entire Mexican immigrant community in the United States, and to the fears and debates its growth has spurred, evidence shows that in the economic aspect, Americans do not have to fear that Mexican immigrants will take jobs away from them, at least the professional ones. Unfortunately, the educational attainment of Mexican immigrants and their children is lagging way behind of that of the native-born population, which means that it will be difficult for them to compete for professional jobs, let alone take them away from Americans.

In the cultural and political aspects, my assessment is that, although Mexicans are behaving transnationally, Americans need not fear balkanization. Referring specifically to biligualism among immigrants' children, and taking as an example the members of a relatively radical organization like Tepeyac, the immigrants main worry, which could be mirroring that of other Mexicans across the United States, is not that their children learn more English than Spanish, but that they are doing so badly in American schools. Thus, the main goal of Tepeyac's after school-program is not to teach those children anti-American sentiments or to promote balkanization, but rather to empower them as bicultural and bilingual individuals, and to tutor them so they can do better at school.

¹ If Mexicans did this, and as a result they actually got December 12th to be recognized as a Mexican holiday as the Irish did with Saint Patrick's Day, the main goal of the Mexican government when passing dual nationality legislation (to have powerful friends, and not weak ones), would be accomplished. However, we should not forget the inconsistencies of the Mexican government, since they do not allow Mexicans holding dual nationality to vote for Mexican elections.

It is also safe to say that a transnational way of doing politics does not represent a threat to the unity of America, or to the American civic culture. Although Mexico is changing and there is a sense of a “true democracy” now, actions speak louder than words, and with high levels of poverty still in this country, it is very unlikely that Mexican immigrants will begin to trust the Mexican political elite. Even Tepeyac’s General Director, Brother Magallan, admires the democratic values of the American system more than the Mexican ones. Therefore, although first generation immigrants are likely to continue exercising a transnational way of doing politics, it is unlikely that the second generation would present a threat to the unity of America by aligning more with Mexican than with American politics. They are learning from their parents to mistrust the Mexican political elite, and it is more likely that they will continue to rely on the American resources available to them as a minority group, such as the Civil Rights Act. By doing this, it could be argued that they are indeed becoming a part of American history and civic culture, since the civil rights movement is part of such history, and the Civil Rights Act is now a part of the civic culture. Thus, even without realizing it, when Mexican immigrants and their children demand their rights within the framework of the Civil Rights Act, they are indeed seeking to assimilate, at least to the political culture of the United States.

In the midst of the ongoing debates, and the continued struggle of Mexican immigrants to survive, what seems certain is that the old formula of the melting pot will not work to assimilate them. Mexican cultural elements such as food, holidays, and language are definitely permeating the country. The Republican Party, although considered the more conservative, is already using this language to lure Latino voters. Thus, Mexicans may integrate economically and politically, but are unlikely to abandon their culture.

What is also certain is that some of the elements of the old formula immigrants used to succeed in America may still work. Learning English is still essential. Immigrants' acculturation, that is, learning and absorbing certain aspects of their new country, may also still be necessary. Moreover, while getting an education may have been a luxury for immigrants and their children 100 years ago, in the 21st century is a necessity. Mexican immigrants may now enjoy the legal benefits laid out by the civil rights movement, but this does not mean they can achieve the American dream for free. The aftermath legislation of the civil right's movement, such as bilingual programs, affirmative action and dual nationality programs, will work to help immigrants and their children to the extent that they work hard to help themselves. Therefore, even though Mexicans may have exchanged the ideal of assimilation for that of integration, the "American dream," exemplified with Teresa's story, can only become true for Mexican immigrants as long as they understand the new realities of the American economy and work hard to improve their human capital.