

ONE

Schooling in the Pre-Brown Era

The first half of the twentieth century has been one of the most popular periods of research for educational historians. It is not surprising that many have written on the Progressive era, that fascinating period that extended from the 1890s to the late 1930s. Articulated by John Dewey and other scholars during that time, the Progressive movement gave birth to a radically new educational philosophy. It rejected the rigid pedagogy that typified public schools, the uniformity of curriculum, the stress on passivity, and teachers' reliance on rote memorization. Shifting to a "child-centered" curriculum and instruction, Progressive education called for learning experiences that fostered social, cultural, and intellectual meaning.¹ Researchers, however, have consistently pointed out that the Progressive movement was based more on a generalized faith. That is, it lacked grassroots support, it avoided systematic critique of the economic order, and it almost entirely ignored issues of race and ethnicity. Progressivism evolved in a period when bureaucratization, tracking, testing, Americanization, and vocational education became entrenched schooling conditions in American public schools.² Progressivism, in short, seemed to strive in vain for a humanistic and egalitarian educational system.

Progressivism sought to enlist schools to build a better society, so a central theme of the movement was to lend a human hand to the lives of poverty-stricken immigrants.³ Hence, one of the tasks of public schools was to assimilate immigrant children into full-fledged Americans. Even though some scholars have recently moved away from characterizing the immigrant experience in a monolithic way, the research trend has nevertheless focused on European immigrants. Within this context, very little has been written on the schooling experiences of Mexican Americans during this period.⁴ In this chapter, I examine the history of Mexican American education during the first half of the twentieth century. The

purpose here is not to offer a full treatment of all the questions that might be asked about the schooling experiences of Mexican Americans. The issues I treat are limited, but comprehensive enough to provide an understanding of the role public schools have played in the lives of Mexican American children. I concur with Gilbert Gonzalez that the schooling of Mexican Americans during the first half of the twentieth century in the Southwest functioned as a means of social control, an attempt to socialize them into loyal and disciplined workers, and the instrument by which social relations between Mexican and white communities were reproduced. To address these issues, I analyze how the theoretical and practical constructions of school segregation, Americanization, migrant education, intelligence testing, and vocational education affected the Mexican American child. The goal of this chapter is to provide a brief history in order to better understand the Mexican American struggle for equal education during the 1960s and 1970s.

SEGREGATION

Architects of the common school believed in forming national unity, in a place where public education was free, where a common curriculum was provided for all children, and where children from diverse backgrounds were able to learn under the same roof.⁵ But although public schools assimilated more than thirty-five million immigrants during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they failed to integrate a significant portion of the U.S. population. Educational historians have established that people of color, especially African Americans, were marginalized in schools.⁶ *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) had an enormous impact in the United States. These court cases also created a national consciousness that viewed school and social segregation as an African American problem.

Americans have either forgotten or never realized that most Mexican American children were segregated into "Mexican classrooms" or into entirely separate "Mexican schools." Whenever Mexican American enrollments grew, school boards across the nation developed strategies to keep Mexican children apart from their white counterparts. But unlike the segregation of African Americans, which was straightforwardly based on race, the isolation of Mexican children was more complex because it was tangled with issues of language and culture.⁷ During the 1930s, for example, the Texas Department of Education reported that segregating Mexican children on educational grounds in the early grades was permissible because, according to one report, "it is wise to segregate, if it is done on educational grounds, and results in district efforts to provide the non-

English-speaking pupils with specially trained teachers and the necessary special training resources." State officials reasoned that Mexican children needed to correct cultural and linguistic deficiencies before mixing with their "American" peers. Although Texas officials supported the segregation of Mexican youths, they also recognized that many educators were interested in isolating them in order to give "Mexican children a shorter school year, inferior buildings and equipment, and poorly paid teachers."⁸ Annie Reynolds, Associate Specialist in School Supervision for the Office of Education during the 1930s, claimed that segregating Mexican children was based on the fact that "American parents [were] against sending their children to schools attended by Mexican children."⁹

To the extent that the segregation of Mexican American children differed from that of African Americans, a closer examination of local educational policies revealed that cultural and linguistic differences were used as a pretext to keep them apart from white children. In other words, the ethnic background of Mexican children was often the reason for their segregation. University of Texas professor Herschel T. Manuel, in fact, wrote about how curricular and pedagogical rationales were being used to provide Mexican children "schools distinctly inferior to those provided for other White children in the same community."¹⁰ Similar to Manuel, Pauline Kibbe, Executive Secretary to the Good Neighbor Commission of Texas, found that many school boards were segregating Mexican children because of their ethnicity. According to Kibbe, white parents were pressing school administrators and school boards to enact policies to keep Mexican children in separate facilities. Educational professionals, however, did not need to be convinced that segregation was best, because they shared the values of their white communities. In one community, for example, a superintendent said Mexican children needed at least "five or six years of Americanization before being placed with American children." He refused to mix the groups because the Mexican "standard of living is too low."¹¹ In California, Annie Reynolds found a similar trend: politicians in Los Angeles were being pressured by white parents to gerrymander school boundaries in order to ensure that specific schools absorbed "the majority of the Mexican pupils in the district."¹² Throughout the Southwest, school boards established segregationist policies as soon as Mexican enrollments became noticeable.

By 1930, eighty-five percent of Mexican children in the Southwest were attending either separate classrooms or entirely separate schools.¹³ In Southern California, for example, a significant number of public school districts had schools with between ninety and one hundred percent Mexican American enrollments. The following facts demonstrate the extent of their segregation: San Bernadino had sixteen Mexican schools; Orange County,

fourteen; Los Angeles School District, ten; Imperial, eight; Ventura, four; Santa Barbara, two; and Riverside, two.¹⁴ Many school districts in the state had designated classrooms where Mexican children were “required to attend.”¹⁵ During the 1940s, the Brawley School District (in the Imperial Valley) continued to have designated schools to which “all Latins must go if they cannot pass the English-language examination.”¹⁶ Unlike the African American experience, where segregation was permanent, educational professionals frequently pledged that as soon as Mexican children learned English and became Americanized (during their first few years of school), they would instantly be integrated with white children. Evidence shows, however, that integration almost never occurred, because many English-speaking Mexican American children were found in segregated schools.¹⁷

The segregation of Mexican children became a hot topic during the 1920s and 1930s. Scholars and students of education were writing at length about the limits and possibilities of school segregation for Mexican children. Milo Hogan, for example, became interested in finding out how schools in the Imperial Valley were serving Mexican youth. He claimed that most schools were ill equipped to serve Mexican students in general and those who had limited English proficiency in particular. Searching for a remedy to solve the problems Mexicans were encountering in public schools, he recommended that “whenever possible, separate classes be made for those children who come from homes where a foreign language is used.” Hogan declared that segregation was best for both groups because, he said, “Mexicans may . . . have the drill in English that is necessary and will not have to waste time in a class that is working on a different level.” In addition, he urged school officials to segregate Mexican children because they were not as “independent” as their white peers. Hogan’s point was that classroom integration had the potential to hinder the academic progress of white children.¹⁸

Hogan’s ideas were accepted by many educators in California. Even the more liberal educators expressed concerns about Mexican children being expected to “compete in English with Anglos.” They feared that Mexican contact with bright white children had damaging effects on the Mexican children’s psychological well-being. One teacher described the social and academic climate of segregated classrooms: When Mexican children were placed in classrooms with their own kind, their “faces radiated joy,” they “[threw] off their repression that held them down when they were in the schools with other children,” and there “was no one to laugh at any peculiarity they might possess.”¹⁹ As true believers, liberal teachers were convinced that ethnic integration created negative classroom environments and that it discouraged Mexican youth from staying in school. Whether Mexican children were being segregated for curricular

and pedagogical reasons or to protect them from negative psychological effects, many educators believed they “must not be expected to compete except within their own group.”²⁰

Some social policymakers and educational professionals, however, were not as covert about segregating the Mexican American child. From their perspective, Mexican children were culturally and linguistically distinct and were seen as an entirely different racial group. In California, for example, the government had classified Mexicans as Caucasian. In order to legally segregate them, government officials needed to reclassify their racial/ethnic background. In 1930, Attorney General Webb attempted to categorize them as Indians. He claimed that “the greater portion of the population of Mexico are Indians.” And because many of them migrated to the United States, “they are subject to laws applicable generally to other Indians.” In 1935, the California legislature tried to pass a law to officially segregate Mexican students on the basis that they were Indian. Without mentioning the term *Mexican*, the school code prescribed that the “governing board of the school district shall have power to establish separate schools for Indian children, excepting children of Indians who are the wards of the U. S. government and children of all other Indians who are the descendants of the original American Indians of the U. S., and for children of Chinese, Japanese, or Mongolian parentage.”²¹ This code could have been interpreted as a way to segregate Mexican children, given that they were descended from Indians in Mexico. As Donato, Mechaca, and Valencia noted, “Mexican children became the principal target of the discriminatory school code without being identified, and American Indians, though named directly, were released from legally mandated segregation.”²²

Proposals to legally segregate Mexican children at the state level never passed into law, but segregation did become local custom. In many ways, the schooling experiences of Mexican children reflected those of African Americans because they were in fact separated from white children and were never expected to assimilate into the American mainstream. As the school segregation discourse continued, researchers incorporated questions of Mexican morality, temperament, hygiene, and virtues. Americans take for granted, said Charles Carpenter, that among other things Mexicans are “dirty,” “stupid,” “lawless,” “disease spreaders,” and “lazy.” Interested in whether this characterization was accurate, Carpenter set out to study Mexican children in the Azusa, California, city schools.²³ He also became interested in the social conditions of the “average” Mexican home, their mode of “behavior,” their physical problems, and other social aberrations. Carpenter claimed that Mexicans had different “ideals of honesty, morality, justice, and cleanliness . . . from those of the average American family.”²⁴ Given the “Mexican temperament, the

high percentage of juvenile arrests among Mexicans, and the nature of offenses committed, and their low moral standards," said Carpenter, "it would be advisable to segregate the Mexican and American children in school."²⁵

In this vein, numerous studies supported the segregation of Mexican children because they were deemed to be dishonest, immoral, and violent. Katherine Meguire contended that Americans who were "familiar with the Mexican people list such traits as irresponsibility, imitativeness, thriftlessness, sex-consciousness, individualism, and procrastination as being among the ones which hold them on the low plane at which most of them in the United States exist."²⁶ Like Carpenter, Meguire also supported segregation and proclaimed that it was inherently wrong to mix Mexican and white students. Although educational professionals frequently maintained that Mexican children were being integrated with white students as soon as they became Americanized and learned English, it almost never occurred, because by the time they reached their junior high school years most had already dropped out. Even though the American high school was becoming a mass institution during the early twentieth century—as the graduation rate of all seventeen-year-olds rose from 3.5 percent in 1890 to 28.8 percent in 1930—Mexican youth almost never attended.²⁷ This trend in various parts of the country is shown by high Mexican enrollments at the elementary level and very low rates at the high school level. One example was school attendance in Orange County, California: 4,037 Mexican children were enrolled in 30 elementary schools, but in the county's 10 high schools, there were only 165 Mexican students enrolled.²⁸ In California's Santa Ana school district, there were 1,031 Mexican elementary students attending school; at the high school level only 53.²⁹ Paul Taylor found a similar trend in San Antonio, Texas: 11,000 Mexican American students attending elementary schools, only 250 at the high school level.³⁰

But the most extreme example was found in Sugar Land, Texas (near Houston), during the mid-1930s. In this case, Mexican children represented 56.6 percent of the elementary school population in the district but constituted only one percent of the eighth-grade class. Several years later, enrollments increased to 59.5 percent at the elementary level, but only 1.9 percent were enrolled in the eighth grade.³¹ The point here is that while high school enrollments were increasing at the national level, Mexican youth were barely able to receive a junior high school education.

Historian Meyer Weinberg claimed that school systems were structured in a way that deliberately denied Mexican children secondary schooling. "[F]armers sat on school boards," said Weinberg, "where they could put their educational philosophy into effect. As an instrument of exploitation, the schools often seemed to be hardly more than an extension of

the cotton field or the fruit-packing shed.”³² On the surface, educators maintained that segregation at the elementary level was best for Mexican American children in order to serve them properly when in fact the goal was to keep them apart from white children and, ostensibly, to maintain a supply of cheap labor in their communities.

AMERICANIZATION

For many Anglo Americans, the influx of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe to inner cities was straining the social fabric of the United States. This demographic shift posed enormous problems in public schools. In 1908, the United States Senate Immigration Commission conducted a study in thirty-seven major cities and found that “58 percent of all students had fathers who were born abroad.”³³ One of the puzzles of this period was that although these new immigrants were seen as a culturally backward mass, social reformers were indeed working to assimilate them into American life. Thus, public schools assumed the role of introducing these children—who spoke numerous languages, hung on to traditional folkways, and possessed multiple loyalties to their mother countries—into the mainstream of U. S. life.³⁴ Assimilating some European immigrants, however, was a complex task.³⁵ Stanford University professor Ellwood P. Cubberley wrote in 1909 that Southern and Eastern Europeans were “illiterate, docile, lacking in self-reliance and initiative,” and lacked “the Anglo-Saxon conceptions of law, order, and government.” He warned social policymakers and school reformers that these new immigrants would “dilute tremendously our national stock, and corrupt our national life.”³⁶ But despite Cubberley’s views, many social and educational reformers worked at integrating Southern and Eastern Europeans into the U. S. mainstream.

In dealing with this new wave of immigrants, educational reformers were forced to define “American” values more self-consciously. To become an American meant learning the English language, lessons of American culture, and new modes of behavior. If immigrant children were unhygienic, non-English-speaking, and politically corrupt, said Sara O’Brien, it was the responsibility of the school to bathe them, teach them English, and inculcate a new set of political values.³⁷ Teachers across the country made it their business to take over the duties regularly performed by immigrant parents. Hopes ran high among educators that public schools could assimilate the newcomers and cure the nation’s social ills. Assimilation, however, also meant that immigrant children needed to reject their own language, culture, identity, and, in essence, their parents. Many immigrant parents feared losing their children through Americanization; others saw it as the doorway to social mobility and new opportunities.³⁸

Unlike European immigrants, Mexicans were looked upon as outsiders who would never blend into the mainstream. Merton Hill, a prominent Americanization specialist in California, for example, cautioned social policymakers and educational reformers that one "of the most momentous problems confronting the great American Southwest is the assimilation of the Spanish-speaking peoples that are coming in ever increasing numbers."³⁹ From Hill's perspective, it was a grave mistake to assume that Mexicans could ever assimilate into the U. S. culture. Like many educators, Americanizers characterized the Mexican people as violent, unambitious, and barbarous. Conducting a study on the schooling experiences of Mexican children in Orange County, California, Simon Ludwig Treff wrote about the culture of Mexican adults, how they congregated "in poolrooms and restaurants and drank and played cards until a late hour," how fights were frequent, and how their "favorite weapon was the knife."⁴⁰ But the most acerbic critique of the Mexican people came from Hazel Bishop, noting that Mexicans failed to "look upon lying and stealing as grievous crimes." In her study she claimed Mexicans were "deceitful," and their "emotional phases [were] largely animal-like."⁴¹ Within this context, many Americans believed nothing was wrong with residential and school segregation.

Very few scholars were criticizing social and educational discrimination against the Mexican people during this period.⁴² Historian and social critic Cary McWilliams, however, wrote that Americanization specialists were socializing Mexican children for subordinate social and economic positions: "Instead of assisting a process of gradual acculturation," said McWilliams, "we have abandoned the [Mexican] people to chance and circumstance. And thereby we have permitted the extension to them, as a group, of a caste-system which had its origins in a semi-feudal slave economy and which has never been obliterated in the United States."⁴³ Most scholars continued to defend U. S. public education, claiming that the Mexican's station in American life was attributed to poor medical care and low wages. It was a sad state of affairs, said Edward McDonough, that economic reality forced them, "including their children, to work in order to survive."⁴⁴

Some white scholars professed superiority over the Mexican people because white Americans somehow placed more value on formal education. McDonough believed that Mexicans were at a considerable disadvantage because, in his words, their

[c]ulture has been geared to an agricultural tempo, and the conflict between rural and urban values is part of the problem. A number of studies are available that point out the fact that the educational status of the Mexican is low because of poor school

attendance, limited average grade completion, and frequent school failures. Some of this low educational status may be explained in terms of high mobility necessitated as transient workers, difficulties centering upon bilingualism, and perhaps a culture that values "living: rather than schooling."⁴⁵

This view was held by many educational professionals in the United States. The belief that Mexicans were indifferent about education was used as a pretext for educators to absolve themselves from responsibility for the Mexican child. Educators blamed school failure on poor school attendance, high transience, bilingualism, and a culture that was unresponsive to school.

Americanization specialists struggled to integrate European immigrant groups into U. S. life. They were virtually unsuccessful with the Mexican people. Because Mexicans were segregated in their schools and communities, reformers believed that public schools needed to give them the skills necessary for their station in American life.⁴⁶ The theory that Mexican children needed to be segregated until they became Americanized became an idea accepted by the educational profession in most parts of the Southwest.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Educational historians have written extensively on the evolution of the American high school, how it was transformed from a selective institution to one that opened its doors to a more diverse student clientele. They explored, in particular, how high schools at first were serving a small portion of the U. S. student population, how they experienced curricular and pedagogical reforms, and how working-class and immigrant children began to attend them. Within the high school literature, an enormous amount of attention was also given to vocational education. That is, how vocational education became an important element in the development of comprehensive high school, how schools were organized to develop human capital through training, and how students were matched to educational programs to meet labor market needs.⁴⁷ Throughout this literature, evidence shows that vocational education programs attempted to train "working-class, immigrant, and black children into manual jobs." More specifically, it demonstrates that the vocational education movement became a "response to the specific job training needs of the rapidly expanding corporate sector than an accommodation of a previously elite educational institution—the high school—to the changing needs of reproducing the class structure."⁴⁸

In examining the history of vocational education in California from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, Harvey Kantor

maintained that vocational education never fully succeeded in training workers for industrial occupations. What the movement did accomplish, according to Kantor, was to make preparation for jobs the major function of the American high school. Moreover, it made educators and social policymakers think of education as the cure for the nation's economic ills.⁴⁹ To the extent that the classic high school was serving a small percentage of the nation's youth, the Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education claimed in 1914 that vocational education was the way to equalize schooling because it recognized different abilities.⁵⁰ The commission was convinced that vocational education would provide better opportunities for all youth at the secondary level; its report resulted in the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917, which provided federal funds to expand vocational education programs in U.S. public schools. The Smith-Hughes Act, however, had far-reaching effects, as it resulted in "strengthening and legitimizing the evolving dual system of education."⁵¹ According to educational historian Edward Krug, the act contributed "to a widespread bias against the so-called academic side of school work, particular for the alleged 'masses.' This bias," continued Krug, "flowed from the attempt to promote industrial education by disparaging the work of what were referred to as the 'literary' schools."⁵² By establishing a system of education that separated youths into academic or vocational tracks, the movement created a class-based education. It also assumed that poor and minority children would be best served by vocational education programs.

The vocational education debate highlights one of the most complex issues concerning the relationship between schooling and democracy. For example, it was argued that providing an education that met individual needs and interests was democratic because it placed youth at the center of educational decisions. But it was also undemocratic because it provided youth with educational opportunities that stratified them into social classes.⁵³ A dual system of education, in this case, meant that working-class and minority youth were given the skills necessary for the lower echelons of the labor market while middle-class youth received an academic education that coincided with the social and cultural hegemony they already possessed. During this period, the high school became a mixture of planned social and academic activities with a variety of curricula that attempted to prepare a new generation for a society that was based on large organizations and occupational specialization.⁵⁴ Within this context, very few educational historians commented on how vocational education affected Mexican American youth.

Mexican children were tracked in vocational education programs because educators believed they possessed a natural capacity for the

manual arts. Gilbert Gonzalez notes that school districts in Los Angeles conducted surveys "of students' interests to see whether labor needs and student interests corresponded." An important mission of schools in this area, reported Gonzalez, "involved bending, if necessary, the students' interests to meet the available occupational opportunities."⁵⁵ Public schools acquainted Mexican students with vocational education programs and counselors matched them to specific curriculum tracks. By sorting students to either vocational or academic placements, some youth were prepared for white collar jobs while others were trained for local labor markets in low-paying vocations.⁵⁶

Many students were sorted into vocational education tracks based on ostensibly "scientific methods." Among a variety of tests to ascertain occupational abilities, the earliest instrument was developed by Harvard University psychologist Hugo Munsterberg, who pioneered a vocational-aptitude test. Munsterberg's goal was to bring together scientific management and vocational guidance. In the same way that scientific management studied industrial organizations, Munsterberg examined the job performance and aptitudes of individual workers.⁵⁷ Although "specific tests" were used to guide youth into vocational tracks, teacher judgment, student grades, student behavior, and student social and ethnic background were also used as sorting devices. Educational historian Herbert Kliebard notes that school reformers instituted "a process of scientific measurement leading to a prediction as to one's future role in life. That prediction," he said, "would then become the basis of a differentiated curriculum."⁵⁸

In examining the vocational education movement and its effects on Mexican American youth, Merton Hill claimed that because Mexican children demonstrated a "considerable aptitude for hand work . . . courses should be developed that will aid them in becoming skilled workers with their hands."⁵⁹ Hill advocated programs to train Mexican boys to become skilled laborers and Mexican "[g]irls . . . to become neat and efficient house servants."⁶⁰ While the expressed goal was to train Mexican youth for skilled vocations, there was an emphasis on matching them with low-level curricula. And because most Mexican youth were unable to reach the high school level, some reformers waged a campaign to introduce manual training during the elementary school years. William Ward claimed that public schools needed to give Mexican children less academic preparation and "more handwork and practical arts." It was necessary, he said, to introduce "[m]anual training and domestic science, hygiene, home-making and repair . . . in the fourth and fifth grade."⁶¹ In Colorado, Philip Pratt also advocated the introduction of the "manual arts, home-making, music, and art . . . earlier in the curriculum." According to Pratt, these were "the subjects that the Mexican can grasp and which will be of practical use to him

later in life."⁶² But unlike other advocates wanting to introduce vocational education during the elementary school years, Pratt added that such training was better than the agricultural labor most Mexican youth performed. From his perspective, vocational education "might spur some of them on to greater achievement."⁶³

To the extent that Mexican American women were usually restricted to domestic services, there was a desire to teach Mexican girls the virtues of thrift, responsibility, and morality. Katherine Meguire, for example, urged public school teachers to give Mexican girls skills in "manual arts and home-making" during the upper elementary grades so they may one day learn "how to live wholesomely."⁶⁴ Meguire urged public schools to teach Mexican girls "something about cleaning, table-setting, and serving."⁶⁵ Similarly, Inez Whitewell became interested in educating Mexican girls in Arizona who were unable to attend high school. Whitewell campaigned for a curriculum and pedagogy that prepared "Mexican girls to . . . fulfill the requirement of people of the community who might desire to hire them to help in the care of children."⁶⁶ There was a general consensus among vocational educational reformers that a Mexican girl needed the kind of training necessary to "become proficient in the home and in the community of which she is a part."⁶⁷

Mexican children were frequently channeled into vocational education programs. Separate industrial secondary schools were also constructed especially for them. At the Andrew Jackson Industrial Arts High School in Los Angeles, for example, William McGorry said "the curriculum is industrial in nature, providing vocational training and skills which will make possible occupational orientation and employment. This type of curriculum," wrote McGorry, "has proven valuable to the school's Mexican boys because of their unusual manual ability and concrete intelligence."⁶⁸ In the Chaffey School District in Southern California, however, Merton Hill pushed vocational education for Mexican children because "Mexican children are actually making only 42% as satisfactory progress through the schools." He was adamant about "building and equipping an industrial high school for Mexican adolescents . . . in order to provide a partial solution of the problem of educating" them.⁶⁹

Although the vocational education movement opened up some opportunities to poor and minority youth, it also paved the way for a dual system of education in the United States. After creating a structure that guided all youth into academic or vocational tracks, the reform was seen as the natural course of study for Mexican American youth. In the end, the reform established closer relations between schools and local political economies, and vocational education became a part of the schooling experience for Mexican American youth for years to come.

PSYCHOMETRICS

The manner in which Mexican American youth were being sorted began to raise serious questions among progressives about the openness and fairness of the social class structure. Educational professionals, however, needed to construct a method to sort students in an objective and scientific way. Curriculum differentiation and segregation were strengthened by the use of the "objective intelligence test." Particularly after World War I, the capitulation of schools to business values and concepts of efficiency led to the increased use of intelligence testing as an ostensibly unbiased means of measuring the product of schooling and classifying students. However, if the rhetoric of educational reform during the early twentieth century was "Progressive," much of its content was supplied by the new science of evolutionary genetics. As educational historian Clarence Karier noted, "nativism, racism, elitism and social class bias were so much a part of the testing and Eugenics Movement in America."⁷⁰

Intelligence testing captured the interest of educational reformers in the United States. Between 1921 and 1936, more than 4,000 articles on testing were published; by 1939, approximately 4,279 mental tests were being circulated.⁷¹ To the extent that the psychometric movement was based on notions of human excellence and genetic endowment, other differences such as moral character, social worth, and race and ethnicity became part of this work. Within this context, many studies professed Anglo American intellectual superiority. Professor Henry Goddard, for example, found that 83 percent of Jews, 80 percent of Hungarians, 79 percent of Italians, and 87 percent of Russians were feeble-minded, based on "culture-free" tests.⁷² In the testing literature, educational historians have documented the uses and misuses of intelligence testing on various immigrant and minority groups. Very little has been written about Mexican American children.

The study of intelligence has always been controversial. The field, in fact, developed into a heated discussion between "hereditarians" and "environmentalists," better known as the "nature versus nurture" debate. Alfred Binet and Thomas Simon became the authoritative figures on the subject during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In constructing the first "scale of intelligence," the original idea behind their work was to study the "feeble-minded." By 1908, Binet had become interested in studying the concept of normal intelligence among children. The purpose was to "measure the intellectual capacity of a child . . . in order to know whether he is normal or retarded." Binet's work had important implications for schooling. He believed some children were unable to profit from regular instruction, that schools were unable to serve their

special needs, and that teachers needed to be mindful about the future capabilities of these pupils. Binet also became interested in the ability to judge, comprehend, and reason. These capacities, according to him, were the "essential activities of intelligence." Reporting a correlation between intelligence and academic achievement, Binet concluded that IQ was a strong predictor of academic success.⁷³

Binet received international acclaim for his scale of intelligence, and educators became interested in using the instrument to sort students and to control problems of "retardation." Stanford University professor Lewis Terman, in fact, saw the social significance of intelligence testing as a way to select and sort the "feeble-minded." Convinced that intelligence testing would bring "ten of thousands of these high grade defectives under the surveillance and protection of society," Terman also believed that it would decrease the "reproduction of feeble-mindedness and [would aid] in the elimination of an enormous amount of crime, pauperism, and industrial inefficiency."⁷⁴ In addition, Terman saw intelligence testing as a way to identify high-ability children. Because poverty and neglect concealed the raw talents of many children, he said, locating those who were gifted was extremely important because a nation depends on its geniuses.⁷⁵

The construction of intelligence tests took a major leap forward during World War I. Psychometricians collected data from testing more than 1.7 million U. S. Army recruits, the nation's largest testing effort. Although several types of examinations were used, results came primarily from the Army *Alpha* and *Beta* tests. The Alpha exam was designed for literate English-speaking recruits. Attempting to find general attributes of intelligence, the test included items such as the ability to follow oral directions, solve mathematical problems, demonstrate common sense, recognize synonyms and antonyms, unscramble fragmented sentences, complete number series, and identify analogies. The Beta exam was designed for illiterate recruits or those who were non-English speaking. Relying on visuals and manipulatives, these recruits were asked to demonstrate the ability to trace a path through a maze, count the number of cubes in a picture, complete a series of letters according to a pattern, match or substitute digits from one to nine, determine whether pairs of numbers matched, complete a picture by adding missing parts, or assemble pieces of a puzzle to form a square. Psychometricians analyzed the data and found that African American and immigrant recruits scored lower than white "natives." In terms of the average (median) Alpha scores, white Army recruits of native birth ranked first, foreign-born whites second, northern blacks third, and southern blacks fourth. Although the Beta score median difference was generally smaller and more

favorable for black recruits, the rank order of the racial/ethnic groups remained unchanged.⁷⁶

In 1918, Robert Yerkes, head of the United States Army psychology team, proclaimed that the results of the testing program exceeded original expectations. In addition to sorting out the feeble-minded, he noted that its results were also capable of identifying those with superior intelligence. Like Terman, Yerkes envisioned intelligence testing as a vehicle to scientifically identify bright children and classify them at an early age.⁷⁷ Other psychologists, such as Carl Brigham, used the Army test results to illustrate racial and ethnic superiority. He tried to confirm the belief that the "Nordic Type" was intellectually superior to African Americans and Southern and Eastern Europeans.⁷⁸ Brigham strengthened the hereditarian position, his ideas became firmly entrenched in academic circles, and it became interpreted as scientific proof that there were differences in racial intelligence.

As the testing movement continued, some psychologists became interested in Mexican children.⁷⁹ Lewis Terman, Thomas Garth, William Sheldon, Kimball Young, O. K. Garretson, and B. F. Haught, to name a few, attempted to verify that Mexican children were innately inferior to their white peers. Sheldon, for example, compared 100 Mexican and 100 white first-grade children in Roswell, New Mexico, in 1923. Using the Cole-Vincent test on a group of fluent English-speaking Mexican and white students, Sheldon found that "whites were decidedly superior in tests involving (all degrees), judgment, and the higher associative processes, especially where attention and accurate observation were necessary." In contrast, the "average Mexican child was found to be fourteen months below the normal mental development for White children of the same age and school environment." Sheldon's main finding was that "Mexicans as a group possessed about 85 per cent of the intelligence of a similar group of White children."⁸⁰

During the same time period, University of Denver professor Thomas Garth compared the intelligence of Mexican, biracial Native American (that is, white and Indian), "full-blood" Plains, Pueblo, Navajo and Apache Indian children. Using the National Intelligence Test (NIT), Garth found that biracial Native Americans scored highest, Mexicans second, Plains third, Pueblo fourth, and Navajo and Apache fifth. Although Garth was a staunch hereditarian, he gave some credit to the environment position. He used the perspective of a superintendent from an Indian School in Oklahoma to explain why biracial children were performing better than full-blooded Indians. The superintendent believed that higher test scores were attributed to Indian exposure to white environments. In the words of the superintendent:

I think there is no question but that the presence of a child in the home where one parent is white will influence the child to behave more as a white man behaves. It is simply a question of the influence of environment. In the full-blood home the atmosphere of the home is more backward and less influenced by the white civilization.⁸¹

Although Garth believed that whites were genetically superior, he also admitted that his comparative study of "mixed" and "full-blood" Native Americans disproved "innate racial differences in intelligence . . . [but that] . . . differences in opportunity and in mental attitude toward the white man's way of thinking and living are made apparent."⁸²

In subsequent years Garth focused on Mexican children. He tested 1,004 Mexican children from Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado in the third to the eighth grades. Using the National Intelligence Test, he claimed that Mexican children, as a group, had an IQ of 78.1. His results were significantly lower than those found in the previous studies. The average IQ test score for white children was 100, but one study showed 79.0 for a group of Mexican children of sugar-beet workers in Colorado; Young found 87.5 in California; 83.0 from Garth's previous study in San Antonio; and 89.0 from Sheldon in New Mexico.⁸³ One of the more important findings Garth wanted to convey to school reformers was that the retardation level of Mexican children was thwarting the quality of public education in the Southwest. He maintained that 80.5 percent of Mexican children tested were retarded.⁸⁴

University of Texas professor O. K. Garretson spoke more directly to questions of Mexican American retardation. In a study of factors that led to academic retardation, Garretson tested 117 Mexican children in a small Arizona school district. In addition to his claim that Mexican children were genetically inferior, he also said that irregular school attendance, transient residence patterns, and linguistic differences exacerbated the level of their school retardation.⁸⁵ Most psychometricians, especially Garretson and Garth, lacked insight about what contributed to the problems Mexican children were facing in school. They failed to raise questions of power, low wages, ethnic discrimination, and power differentials between Mexican and white communities. Whether or not social scientists were considering these issues at the time, Garretson blamed Mexican academic failure on the environment and inferior natural capacities. His theory about Mexican intellectual inferiority, however, became accepted as conventional wisdom by most psychometricians, social policymakers and educational professionals.⁸⁶

At the same time psychometricians were purporting that Mexican children were innately inferior to their white counterparts, environmental-

ists were challenging this claim because a significant number of non-English speaking children were being tested. The point critics made was that IQ tests were mismeasuring the intelligence of Mexican children. Garretson responded that his results were accurate because his sample included Mexican children from the third to eighth grades and that most Mexican children were given the opportunity to learn English before they were tested in the third grade. Garretson, however, failed to acknowledge that many non-English-speaking Mexican children were entering school at different grade levels, that is, not all non-English-speaking children coming to the United States were beginning school at the kindergarten level.

Some psychometricians attempted to discount the language issue by constructing a test that was supposedly "completely independent of language."⁸⁷ As a case in point, Franklin Paschal and Louis Sullivan designed "a test or scale that can be applied by an American to the Mexican child or adult and despite his limited use of English obtain results as free from personal error as the theory of mental tests demands."⁸⁸ (As an example of how this test functioned, children were given oral directions in English or in Anglicized Spanish.) University of New Mexico professor B. F. Haught pushed the language-free intelligence test issue a bit further. He became interested in finding "objective evidence that such a language difficulty does or does not exist."⁸⁹ To the extent that Mexican children were scoring below the "standards obtained by those of Anglo descent," Haught, like Paschal and Sullivan, disputed the idea that low performance was a result of "a language difficulty encountered in taking tests."⁹⁰ According to Haught, the intelligence of Mexican children failed to increase with age and "older children are handicapped as much as the younger, [so there seems] to be no justification for assigning the difficulty to inability to use or understand English." He claimed that intelligence declined when Mexican children reached the age of ten. With this in mind, he said that the Mexican child's "intelligence quotient is 79 compared with 100 for the average Anglo child."⁹¹

Florence Goodenough, a psychologist at the University of Minnesota, also became interested in constructing a language-free intelligence test. Devising a nonverbal exam and administering it to 2,457 children in the United States, Goodenough also included 367 Mexican children from Los Angeles. Not only did she claim that her verbal test was "completely independent of language," but that her results corresponded with the "rank order of the various nationality groups . . . found by means of other intelligence tests."⁹² She claimed that whether Mexican children took the standardized IQ exam or one that was "independent of language," they were intellectually inferior to their white peers.

Emulating the research trend of prominent psychometricians, students of education reached similar conclusions. Rollen Drake, for example,

tested 144 Mexican and 173 white seventh and eighth graders in a Tucson, Arizona, school. Using the Pinter nonlanguage test, the National Intelligence Test, and the Stanford Achievement Test, he concluded that there was "a racial difference in mentality between Mexican and white children." Like Haught, Goodenough, and Pascal and Sullivan, Drake concluded that the "language handicap is of but small importance by the time the Mexican child has completed the sixth grade." From Drake's perspective, the "racial problem which exists when Mexican children are present in the upper elementary grades of the public schools is not due, to any great extent, to the fact that the Mexican children speak a foreign language, but probably due to the fact that they are definitely lower mentally than white children."⁹³

In another study, Philip Pratt compared a group of Mexican and white students from Colorado. He contrasted the academic achievement of 95 Mexican and 146 white children in reading and math from the third to the eighth grade. Pratt's conclusions, based on the Stanford Grade Equivalents, was that with "two exceptions, that of total arithmetic in the sixth and seventh grades, the Mexican mean in every instance was lower than the mean of the whites." He found that the mean intelligence quotient for Mexican children was 79.5, and 89.8 for their white peers.⁹⁴ Unlike other studies that merely compared Mexican and white children, Pratt's study made various recommendations to improve their schooling conditions: a curriculum that was suitable for the Mexicans' station in life, and schools that emphasized the manual arts, music, and hygiene in segregated environments up to the fourth grade. He also acknowledged the importance of having access to books and magazines in the home, parent participation, social living and citizenship courses, and the enforcement of compulsory school attendance laws for Mexican children.⁹⁵

Wilbur Cobb studied the children of Mexican migratory workers in Ventura, California. Cobb became interested in finding out the extent to which Mexican migrant children were retarded, and its economic impact on the community.⁹⁶ After testing 1,909 Mexican migratory children with the Stanford Achievement Test, Cobb found that 87.6 percent were retarded, 11 percent were performing at grade level, and 1.2 percent were accelerated. He also asserted that most Mexican children were two years and six months behind in reading, one year and eight months in math, three years and two months in history, three years in language, three years in literature, two years and seven months in physiology and hygiene, and two years and three months in geography and spelling. Cobb bypassed the economic burden of retardation on the community, but he did point out that during the harvest season Mexican migratory school children outnumbered white students two to one. From his perspective, the Mexi-

can presence posed "a hardship on the local community." Cobb recommended state intervention in order to reduce the "financial burden of educating the migratory children . . . [in] . . . particular school districts."⁹⁷

As the testing movement continued, University of Texas professor George Sanchez began to challenge psychometricians. From his perspective, there was a mismatch between IQ tests and the Mexican child's language, culture, and socioeconomic background: The IQ test merely measured environmental effects and the Mexican's range of ability differed very little from any other group's. Sanchez made it clear he did not intend to discredit the field of testing. It "would be shortsighted to propose the abandonment of mental tests in the bilingual problem," he said, "and nothing herein should so be interpreted." His point was that psychometricians needed to be more cautious about testing children in a language and culture the subjects did not understand and, more important, using results to marginalize them.⁹⁸ Despite Sanchez' critique, intelligence testing became an accepted educational practice across the nation, it became an important part of the Mexicans' school experience, and it became a method to classify and sort them into different courses of study.

CHILDREN OF THE HARVEST

Chicano historians have pointed out that, contrary to conventional wisdom, Mexican Americans were "strongly represented in most of the Southwest's cities."⁹⁹ Ricardo Romo found that the percentage of the Mexican population in urban centers in the Southwest was distributed in the following way: 18.6 percent in New Mexico, 36.0 in Arizona, 46.6 in Texas, and 66.3 in California.¹⁰⁰ Although a significant portion of the Mexican population was urban, many others were living in rural areas and tied to the nation's agricultural economy. Some were following the harvest season throughout the United States. Unlike the Mexican urban worker who was able to earn a very modest living with one income, Mexican agricultural workers depended on the labor of the entire family, including women and children. As a result, Mexican migrant children and their families faced different problems than their urban counterparts.

The agricultural economy of the American Southwest had always relied heavily on Mexican labor. The region's mild climate, fertile soils, and early-twentieth-century technological innovations led to an economic dependence on Mexican labor.¹⁰¹ In the 1940s, Cary McWilliams described the agricultural economy in the Southwest as "factories in the fields," an exploitative system that was relentless and inhumane.¹⁰² American growers sought the Mexican family because, noted Cary McWilliams, they "stick together; they work and camp and move as a unit. This, in turn, helps

to organize the labor market and it also gives the contractor a closely knit working organization."¹⁰³

The economic worth of the Mexican migrant family to U.S. agriculturists had considerable consequences for public schools. In some school systems, for example, local growers and educational professionals worked in tandem, separating migratory children into different schools, shortening their school days, and, in many communities, refusing to admit them to school.¹⁰⁴ The decision to limit or deny schooling opportunities to Mexican children was rooted in an educational philosophy that disregarded them as part of the nation's public school clientele. As Charles Gibbons and Howard Bell wrote in 1925:

[L]ocal school districts [in Colorado] in which these families are living while working the beets are assuming no responsibility for the schooling of the Mexican children; they simply do not want them in their schools. Ostensibly their reason for not wanting them is that as soon as beets are over the family will move, and therefore to force them in would disorganize the school. This argument has some merits but its validity is weakened by a knowledge that the children are not wanted on the grounds that they are Mexican.¹⁰⁵

Mexican migrant children in the Southwest were not being served equally to whites because of indifference, because local economies depended on their labor, and because they were ethnically distinct. In 1933, Annie Reynolds found that the employment of Mexican migrant children had serious consequences on their school attendance. The U.S. Bureau of the Census, for example, compared the attendance record of Mexican and white children from ages six to fifteen in various counties in the Southwest. The bureau found that Mexican attendance was disproportionately low. For example, while the percentage of white attendance ranged from 71 to 96 percent, that of Mexican children varied from 39 percent to 89 percent.¹⁰⁶ In Colorado, Paul Taylor found that "during the seasons of beet work in spring and fall, Mexican children of school age are generally in the beet fields, and not in school."¹⁰⁷ A report from the Colorado White House Conference on Child Health and Protection also attested that the school attendance of Mexican children was extremely low. They found that in the sugar beet industry, public schools were evading the "Colorado compulsory school laws and child-labor laws by claiming that the children are employed by their parents who need the help of the child to support the family."¹⁰⁸

These reports suggested that low attendance was attributed to the economic survival of the Mexican migrant family. Gibbons and Bell,

however, went a bit further and spoke more directly to the problem of school discrimination. From their perspective, local communities were refusing to educate Mexican migrant children because of their ethnic background. They argued:

Since most of the contract families are of Mexican descent, the question may properly be raised as to what their place is in the community. A barrier exists between them and the others in the community. . . . The root of the trouble lies much deeper than the Mexican's shortcomings; it is the fact that he is a Mexican. . . . The situation was well put by one man who said "The Mexican is a necessary nuisance," meaning that he was necessary because the culture of beets demanded him, a nuisance because he was a Mexican. . . . He is wanted because of his work, and that only. The local people feel practically no responsibility towards him; they see only his ability to work.¹⁰⁹

Like Colorado, most communities in Texas regarded the Mexican migrant worker in the same manner—a necessary evil, according to Pauline Kibbe. Mexican migrant workers were nothing more than a necessary part of the harvest season, and "[j]udging by the treatment that has been accorded him in that section [west Texas] of the State," wrote Kibbe, "one might assume that he is not a human being at all, but a species of farm implement that comes mysteriously and spontaneously into being."¹¹⁰

The 1920s and 1930s was indeed an era when school systems and communities were refusing to take responsibility for the Mexican migrant child. School superintendents, principals, and teachers, however, continued to attribute the problem of irregular school attendance to poverty, indifference to education, lack of suitable clothing, poor health, and local discrimination. Herschel T. Manuel challenged local professionals and claimed that irregular school attendance was also attributed to the fact that very few cared whether Mexican children attended. It was understandable why so few actually went to school, given their inferior school facilities and the "shabby treatment often received from other children in school." Manuel also noted that it was not always a question of inferior facilities but also the "lack of sympathy on the part of their teachers."¹¹¹ In all, the Mexican migrant average daily attendance was approximately thirty-three percent whereas the corresponding figure for white children was seventy-five percent.¹¹²

The relationship between school and the local agricultural economies was indeed stronger in some locations than others. In the nut groves of Southern California, for example, the "La Hambra Mexican school" accommodated local farmers during the harvest season. The school began and

dismissed school early in order to supply local growers with child labor. Despite the structure of many Mexican migrant schools, educators frequently rationalized that indifference to education was the root problem of low school attendance. Jessie Hayden explained that poor health kept many migrant children out of school and that "the loss of interest in school tasks through lack of proper motivation is doubtless the most important factor to be considered." Aside from the meager earning Mexican migrant families survived on, Hayden claimed that the "desire of the family to obtain larger family earnings is the cause for non-attendance."¹¹³ He believed that the Mexican migrant family was more interested in making money than educating its children. Hayden avoided other issues, however, such as how the local school board and the La Hambra Citrus Association worked together to ensure that enough Mexican migrant labor was available during the harvest season.

Manuel discussed the number of ways schools and local growers were contributing to the low Mexican migrant school attendance. Unlike other researchers, he discussed problems of school and community discrimination. But there were other reasons why Mexican migrant attendance was so low in some communities. One Texas superintendent, in fact, openly admitted that many white citizens coerced Mexican families to keep their children out of school. "Whites scare them out of it," said the superintendent. "They tell them if they send their children to school, they will be out of a job." Fearful of losing their jobs, many Mexican families kept their children home.¹¹⁴ Many white communities, in addition, felt it was in their best interest not to educate the Mexicans because, as one superintendent said, "white people claim that when a Mexican gets a little education he becomes bigoted, wants to become a contractor, etc. This," he concluded, "is very likely true."¹¹⁵ Keeping Mexican children out of school, the superintendent continued, was not "a problem at all. . . . The larger number of Mexicans care nothing about going to school, and practically all the White people care not whether they go. This makes it easy. Where we have some 350 Mexicans in the community, only about 50 ever enter school."¹¹⁶

The Mexican migrant family became an important part of the nation's agricultural economy. Agribusiness purchased, sold, and transported them from one region to another. The priority was not to educate the Mexican children but to exploit their labor. As a result, educational professionals made it their business to supply farmers with child labor during the harvest season. In short, compulsory education laws did not apply to Mexican migrant children, school authorities frowned on their presence, white communities did not want to serve them, and Mexican migrant parents feared sending their children to school. This arrangement created

a third-class existence, it intensified class divisions, and it defined ethnic relations between Mexican and white communities for years to come.

CONCLUSION

The educational sphere during the first half of the twentieth century was, among other things, an ideological medium through which scholars, social policymakers, and educational professionals dealt with fundamental questions of integration, language, culture, class, intelligence, and ethnicity. Mexicans were immigrating to the United States at a time when educational professionals were becoming empowered to classify children according to what they thought was best for their client, when the results of IQ tests were being accepted as proof of native ability, when those in control of schools generally agreed that their function was to sort and train students to fit into the existing economic structure, and when much writing in education and social science tended to portray Mexicans as a detriment to U.S. society. Educators and the lay public viewed Mexicans as lazy, dirty, stupid, deviant, disease ridden, and amoral. It was not surprising, then, that educators made concerted efforts to keep Mexican youth apart from their white peers. Many educators claimed that segregating Mexican children during the elementary grades—to remedy their cultural and linguistic deficiencies—was best for all children. Whether Mexican children were limited or fluent English speakers, they were placed in separate classrooms or in entirely separate schools.

In addition, well-known educational reformers wrote copiously about the need to assimilate European immigrants, they remained silent about Mexican children. The problem was that the inferior and low castelike status was seen as a fixed condition that public schools were unable to change. Whether Mexican children attended urban, suburban, or rural schools, they were tracked in disproportionate numbers into classes or schools that emphasized the manual arts or where low literacy skills were taught. Throughout the Southwest, Mexican youth were enrolled in separate vocational classes or in completely separate industrial schools, where boys were being socialized to take on unskilled occupations and where girls were still prepared to become domestic servants. As late as the early 1950s, most educators still believed Mexican youth were best suited for manual labor, where their intelligence and “temperament” matched specific curricular and pedagogical practices. These schooling practices, in turn, strengthened biased educational policies and codified the sociopolitical and economic relations between Mexican and white communities.