

Chapter 2

The Latin Americanization of the US Labor Force

Unlike the nations of Europe that have only recently begun to accept the fact that they are nations of immigrants, the United States has been defined by immigration throughout its history. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, immigrants from the nations of Europe contributed to the great diversity in national and cultural origins that define the nation. At the turn of the century, most Americans lived in small towns and on farms (Portes and Rumbaut 2006), but a dynamic economy and growing urban centers provided new immigrants ample opportunity for employment in construction and manufacturing and a chance to move up the economic ladder. After two or three generations, the children of these immigrants became fully assimilated middle-class Americans. The common assumption that informed classic theoretical models of incorporation and assimilation was that over time the cacophony of languages and cultures that defined immigrant America would give way to English and a common American cultural identity. Although such a blending of different ethnic groups has indeed occurred, at least for Americans of European origin, the continual infusion of new cultures and languages means that the United States today is as diverse as it ever was. What is different today, though, is the fact that the new immigrants are no longer from Europe. For the last few decades, the vast majority of immigrants have come from Asia and Latin America (He 2002), a fact that has significant implications for the racial and ethnic composition of the future labor force.

Traditionally, Hispanics have been geographically concentrated. Those of Mexican origin remained in the southwestern United States, which until the end of the nineteenth century was part of Mexico. Puerto Ricans and Dominicans have historically settled in the cities of the northeast, and Cubans fled their home island to recreate Little Havana in Florida. Today, Spanish language television and radio can be heard in the heartland and in southeastern states in places that until recently had never known Hispanics. Although the majority of Americans are still white and non-Hispanic, by the middle of the twenty-first century approximately one-half of all Americans will trace their heritage to Africa, Asia, or Latin America (Passel and Cohn 2008). Individuals from Latin America and Asia are redefining the cultural landscape of California and Texas and becoming important economic and political forces in other states as well (Hayes-Bautista 2004). Despite the anti-immigrant sentiment that informs much public discussion related to the Hispanic population, the

labor needs of the nation will in all likelihood continue to attract both legal and illegal immigrants. Immigration and high fertility mean that the Hispanic population is relatively young and will make up a growing fraction of the population and the labor force in the years to come (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Today, one-third of Hispanics, but only a quarter of non-Hispanics, are under the age of 18 years (Tienda and Mitchell 2006b). In the future, the levels of productivity of the Hispanic population will affect the nation's overall level of material welfare and global power.

Although most Hispanics are native born, immigration is a central demographic and cultural phenomenon for the population as a whole. In this chapter, we draw upon the group's immigrant experience to explain the marginalized status of segments of the Hispanic population. Even after several generations in this country, many Hispanics remain trapped in the lower class. For them, the immigration experience has not led to the American dream. Theirs is a story of failed incorporation into the economic and political mainstreams. In this and subsequent chapters, we examine the consequences of that failed incorporation for the population's access to the social rights we elaborated in the first chapter and delve into its possible causes. The extent of the problem is massive and made ever more serious by the serious economic downturn that began in 2008. Even for the Mexican-origin population of the Southwest who were basically colonized when the northern part of Mexico was annexed in 1848 after the Mexican war, the outsider metaphor still holds. Issues of cultural and racial difference, then, are central to the story of Hispanic incorporation and the issue of coexistence and economic success must be understood in the context of significant differences from the mainstream.

Multiculturalism and Diversity

Richard Alba, a keen observer of American ethnicity, observed some years ago that since the large-scale European immigration that created the ethnic diversity of nineteenth century urban America ended long ago, distinctions between Americans of European origin have all but disappeared. Today, differences between individuals of English, German, French, and other nationalities have been replaced by a common American cultural identity (Alba 1990). There can be little doubt that distinctions among Americans of European origin are less obvious or socially significant than those between European-origin Americans as a whole and African-Americans, Asians, and Latinos. In addition to representing minority groups, Americans of Asian and Latin American origin differ significantly among themselves. Latinos with roots in the Caribbean are very different from those who emigrated from Mexico or those who have lived in the American Southwest since it was part of Mexico. Puerto Ricans are full US citizens whether they were born on the mainland or on the island of Puerto Rico, Cuban-Americans are political refugees, and Mexicans are for the most part economic migrants.

Unlike Asians, Hispanics at least share a common core language, Spanish. In addition to variation in their nations of origin, differences among Latinos arise from the fact that the different nationalities arrived at different historical moments and

settled in different parts of the country, factors that have influenced their social and occupational opportunities (Montes de Oca, Molina, and Avalos 2008; Portes and Bach 1985; Portes and Rumbaut 1996, 2006). California is home to both old-time Hispanic families that have been in the state for generations and more recent immigrants. Other cities and states have seen rapid recent growth in their Hispanic populations, and especially the Mexican-origin population (Suro and Singer 2002). Los Angeles, with over 1 million residents of Mexican origin, has the largest Mexican-origin population in the country; Chicago, with over one-half million Mexican-origin residents, is second largest (U.S. Census Bureau 2003).

The growth in the Mexican-origin population is fueled both by high fertility and by immigration from Mexico. High rates of immigration and especially the presence of a large number of undocumented immigrants cause great concern among Americans based on fears concerning security, cultural identity, and the potential that new immigrants will become public charges. Problems related to the control of borders and the incorporation of immigrants are not solely concerns in the United States. Most developed nations of the world are facing a new reality of cultural diversity. The massive international migration of peoples from the poor nations of the South to the developed nations of the North represents a core component of the process of globalization that is fundamentally redefining the nation state system and that makes it clear that labor and capital are increasingly international commodities (Balibar 2004; Lucas 2008). This new economic and demographic reality is driven by the lack of opportunities in developing nations and the need for cheap labor in the developed nations. Despite the economic need for immigrant labor, the new immigrants are feared because of their racial, cultural, and religious differences and almost everywhere face strong opposition.

The fear of immigrants, which often accompanies a fear of minority group members and indigenous peoples as well, is driven by deeply held prejudices concerning security and cultural identity. Strident demands for secure borders in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere, and the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments form central planks in the political platforms of political parties of the far right (Huntington 2004), but they are not confined to xenophobic extremists. The real or perceived threats to national solidarity and identity force even centrist parties to take stronger stances toward immigration, and especially illegal immigration. The result is that the demographic and economic reality of developed nations results in fundamental conflicts between restrictive immigration policies and the needs of competitive labor markets (Casteles 2004; Flynn 2005). Few countries do all that might be possible to seal borders and discourage undocumented immigration.

Because of high levels of immigration, modern cities are as racially and ethnically heterogeneous as ever, if in fact they are not more so. Like the United States, the European Union, Australia, Canada, and other developed nations confront a new multiethnic reality that accompanies a highly dynamic global economy with relatively inexpensive forms of long-distance transportation. Given the low fertility of much of Europe, in as little as one generation, the cultural homogeneity that many Europeans remember will be a thing of the past. Tomorrow's Western Europe will be a mosaic of Eastern Europeans, Latin Americans, Africans, and Asians with a

generous overlay of Islam. The need for groups that differ in race, ethnicity, cultural practices, and religion introduces serious challenges to attempts to create truly multicultural and inclusive societies.

This new reality forces us to reexamine traditional theories of immigrant incorporation. Certain assimilation models, those of both early and more recent observers, view the United States as a melting pot in which immigrant groups undergo a process of assimilation and acculturation until they no longer view themselves nor are they viewed by others as outsiders (Alba and Nee 2003; Gans 1992; Gordon 1964; Perlmann and Waldinger 1997). This relatively rapid, if not always smooth, process might characterize the experience of the white European immigrants of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but it does not accurately describe the situation of African Americans who arrived in this country as slaves, nor does it necessarily reflect the experiences of more recent immigrants from Latin America (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). It also does not accurately characterize the experience of the longer term Mexican-origin residents of the Southwest who became citizens when a large part of Mexico was annexed to the United States. For Hispanics, and especially those of Mexican origin, the economic and social incorporation process has been more differentiated, or as it has come to be referred to, it has been a more segmented process. As we discussed earlier, the term “segmented” refers to the fact that although a large fraction of Hispanic immigrants have successfully ascended into the middle class and become acculturated, a substantial segment remains permanently trapped in the lower social classes, often taking on the economic and social characteristics of an underclass (Portes et al. 2005; Portes and Zhou 1993; Telles and Ortiz 2008).

Incorporation or Permanent Marginality?

This new immigrant and minority group reality undermines the myth of rapid or easy economic incorporation. Unlike earlier European immigrants to the United States from Europe who were white and Christian or Jewish, recent immigrants to Europe, the United States, and other nations are often racially and culturally very different than the host groups. This fact can create serious barriers to full incorporation, especially if the new arrivals do not wish to shed their culture and assimilate completely, or if they see no incentive to do so. The same is actually true for many longer term minority group residents. Those observers who believe that full cultural assimilation is necessary for social cohesion see serious dangers in the retention or excess affirmation of ethnic or racial group identities. They fear that such specific identities can undermine or prevent the evolution of a common national identity and a sense of common purpose (Schlesinger 1992). Unfortunately, not all groups are granted the opportunity of full economic incorporation or cultural assimilation. In many nations marginalized groups, including indigenous peoples, racially and culturally distinct immigrants, religious minorities, and others are denied the opportunity to fully assimilate even if they wish to; often they do not. Rather than abandon all aspects of their cultures of origin, they would prefer to maintain aspects of that culture.

The adjective “multicultural” and the noun “multiculturalism” have been adopted to refer to an idealized situation in which cultural and religious differences are recognized as legitimate and respected by different groups (Fraser and Honneth 2003; Kymlicka 1995, 2007; Kymlicka and Norman 2000; Taylor 1994). We might ask how these concerns apply to Hispanics and whether they retain the option of continuing to speak Spanish and identify with their cultures of origin, or whether in order to succeed they must abandon those cultural markers. In a truly multicultural society, culturally distinct groups would be free to speak their native languages, practice their religions, and live their private lives in accordance with their own cultural beliefs and practices while participating fully in the larger economic and political institutions.

Unfortunately for many groups such as the Turks in Germany or North Africans in France, neither assimilation nor multicultural acceptance seems likely. Rather than dignity and respect, the reality they face includes cultural and racial stigma coupled with economic and social exclusion. These new immigrants, much like older excluded minority groups, often find that rather than enjoying the rights of citizens, or denizens who share many rights of citizens and who can look forward to the possibility of eventually becoming citizens, they face the reality of permanent residential and social marginalization (Lewis 2005; Lewis and Neal 2005). The fact that the new immigrants are racially, ethnically, and culturally different than the receiving populations gives this segregation a distinctly racist aspect (Schierup et al. 2006). In many cases, assimilation is not a choice since exclusion based on group membership can be imposed by the way a society is structured.

Characteristics of the Hispanic Population

In the remainder of the chapter, we characterize the Hispanic population and summarize the social and economic forces that are affecting its size, distribution, and its relatively low levels of social mobility. We pay particular attention to education since the educational levels of segments of this population, especially for those of Mexican origin who make up the majority of the Hispanic population, remain extremely low (Telles and Ortiz 2008). These low levels of education seriously undermine possibilities for upward mobility for individuals, but they also reduce the level of social capital for the group as a whole (Borjas 1985). Until a substantial number of Hispanics enter the professions and academia, young Hispanics will lack the role models they need to inculcate the middle-class values related to higher levels of education that lead to upward mobility (Kùna and Prieto 2009). Until Hispanic subgroups have a critical mass of articulate analysts and advocates who can frame issues of exclusion and powerlessness effectively in the mainstream media, the voice of the group as a whole will remain unheard. As we argue throughout this book, low educational levels keep the population from gaining access to the highest corridors of power and from achieving adequate representation in the professions and the academy. Without an educated and articulate group of individuals who can frame the question of exclusion and further the core agenda of the group as a whole,

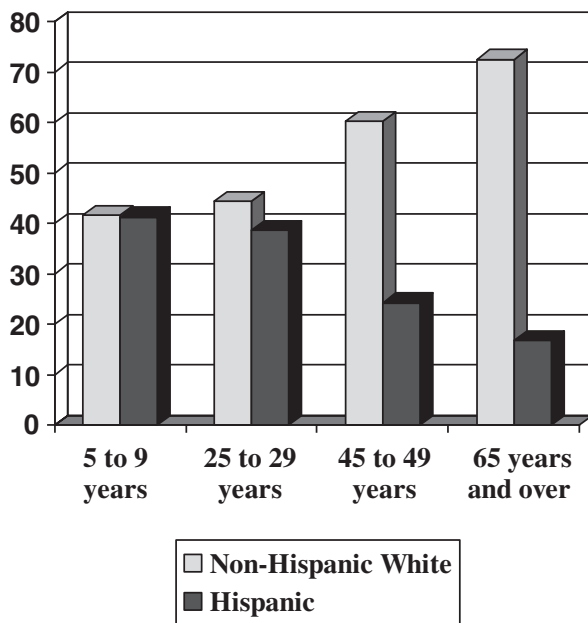
little progress will be made toward equity. In the last chapter, we cite the feminist movement's success in framing issues related to gender exclusion as an effective example of what is necessary.

We begin by documenting the rapid growth of the Hispanic population and draw upon a portrait of the Hispanic population provided by the Pew Hispanic Center that includes detailed analyses of the Mexican-origin population. This portrait is based on Census data for 2000 and on data from the American Community Survey for 2006 (Pew Hispanic Center 2008). In 2000, Hispanics accounted for 12.5% of the population of the United States, but by 2006 they made up 14.8%. During those 6 years, the proportion of non-Hispanic whites dropped from 69.1 to 66.2%, while the African-American share of the population remained basically constant at ~12%. The Mexican-origin population makes up the vast majority of Hispanics, 64%, and a large fraction were born in Mexico. In 2007, nearly 40% of the approximately 30 million Mexican-origin individuals in the United States were foreign-born. This large foreign-born representation gives the group unique characteristics. The foreign-born cling to more traditional values and they are more likely to be married. In 2007 while only about 43% of native-born Mexican-origin women over the age of 18 years had ever been married, over 61% of foreign-born women had been married (original analysis from the Current Population Survey).

In addition to high levels of immigration, the growth in the Hispanic population is fueled by high fertility. In 2007, nearly 22% of births in the United States were to Hispanics, with nearly 12% to foreign-born women. Mexican-origin births accounted for over 15% of all births in 2007, with births to foreign-born Mexican-origin women accounting for nearly 9% of the total number of births in the nation. Together, then, immigration and high fertility represent a demographic engine that will maintain the growth rate of the Hispanic and Mexican-origin populations for some time (Ramirez 2004). As we emphasize throughout this book, this growth in the Hispanic population, as well as the age distribution that results, has particularly important implications for the ethnic composition of the future labor force. Figure 2.1, which is based on 2000 Census data, dramatically illustrates the extent of ethnic-age grading of the population of Texas, a state that has a large Mexican-origin population. The figure shows that in 2000, 44% of infants under the age of 5 years were of Mexican-origin, whereas only 40% were non-Hispanic white. At the other end of the age range, only about 17% of Texans over the age of 65 years were of Mexican origin, whereas nearly 73% were non-Hispanic white.

Texas, California and the other states of the Southwest have large Mexican-origin populations, but the phenomenon of growing younger minority populations is not confined to any one region (U.S. Census Bureau 2003). Mississippi, Tennessee, North Carolina, and other states have experienced rapid growth in their Hispanic populations as these groups seek economic opportunities in new areas and take jobs for which no other workers are available (Suro and Singer 2002). The implications for the composition of the future labor force are obvious. By the year 2040, well over half of the Texas labor force will be Hispanic (Murdock et al. 2002). Although Texas may represent an extreme case because of the size of the state's Mexican-origin population, in most of the rest of the country the working-age population will

Fig. 2.1 Percent of Texas population by age group and ethnicity, 2000
Source: Murdock, S. H. 2004. *Population change in Texas: Implications for human and socioeconomic resources in the 21st century*, slide #30. San Antonio, TX: The University of Texas at San Antonio.



be disproportionately minority in the relative short-term. This fact has profound implications for social stability and the pact between the generations.

Figure 2.2 lists the 10 metropolitan areas with the highest Hispanic growth rates in the nation between 1990 and 2000. The increase in the Hispanic populations of the southern cities on the list is truly remarkable. In the Charlotte-Concord, South Carolina metropolitan area, for example, the Hispanic population grew by over 600% in just 10 years. The population of Raleigh, North Carolina, grew by over 500%. Outside of the South, Portland, Las Vegas, and Indianapolis experienced large increases in their Hispanic populations. More recent data from the Census bureau indicate that the growth rates of the Hispanic population outside of its traditional locations are continuing and parts of the country that at one time had no Hispanics are rapidly becoming heavily Latino. In 1990 approximately 85% of Mexican immigrants settled in California, Texas, and Illinois, but by 2000 that proportion had declined to 68% as the result of the more diverse set of destinations (The American Immigration Law Foundation 2002).

In the future then, Hispanics will constitute a larger proportion of the population at large and of the labor force in particular. As a result, the economy of the United States will increasingly depend on the productivity of a heavily Hispanic labor force. The collective economic welfare of the nation will therefore depend on their productivity. In 1945 there were 41.9 workers for every retired person receiving Social Security; by 2030 each retiree will depend on the contributions of slightly more than two workers (Social Security Administration 2004b). If a large fraction of those workers are confined to the low-paying service sector they will simply not be able to bear the burden. The impending retirement of the baby-boom generations requires

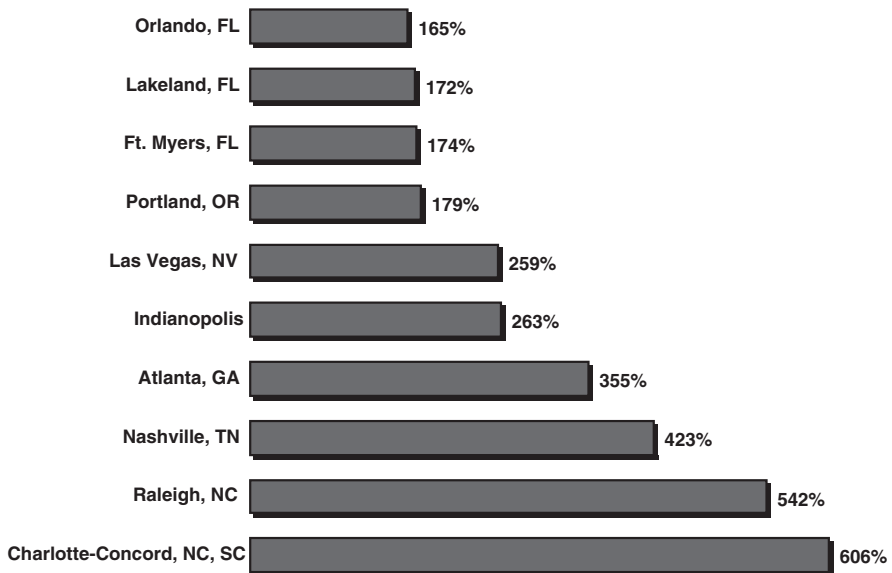


Fig. 2.2 Ten metro areas with highest Hispanic growth rates, 1990–2000

Source: Frey (2006).

huge investments in the education of those who will support them. Unfortunately, as we document throughout the book, that is not happening and the consequences are potentially serious. The United States faces the real possibility of rapid and extensive economic decline. In addition, the ethnic-age grading of the population of the future introduces an ethnic dimension to our system of social stratification that could have serious political consequences. The fact that the productive potential of a large segment of the future labor force might be undermined by poor health and low educational levels has profound implications for older as well as younger Americans. Everyone's welfare depends on the productivity of minority Americans. Yet, as we demonstrate next, the data related to education present a disturbing picture.

Low educational levels among Hispanics represent a major structural weakness in the economy of the United States. Let us review data that illustrate the magnitude of the problem. Figure 2.3 provides information on high school graduation rates for non-Hispanic whites, African-Americans, and three Hispanic subgroups for 2007 from the US Department of Education. These data clearly reveal the disastrous situation in the Mexican-origin population. While 94% of non-Hispanic whites and 88% of African-Americans have graduated from high school, only 65% of Mexican-origin adults have graduated. This is a rate that is substantially lower than those of Puerto Ricans or Cubans and reveals the uniquely serious problem for Mexican-origin adults. There are other aspects of this educational deficit that bode ill for the future of the labor force.

Figure 2.4 presents the data on high school graduation rates separately by gender for non-Hispanic whites, African-Americans, and the combined Hispanic category.

Fig. 2.3 High school graduation rate by race and Hispanic nationality (25–29 years old), 2007
Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2007a).

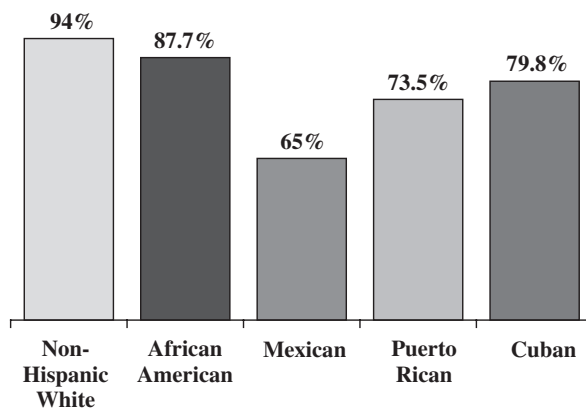
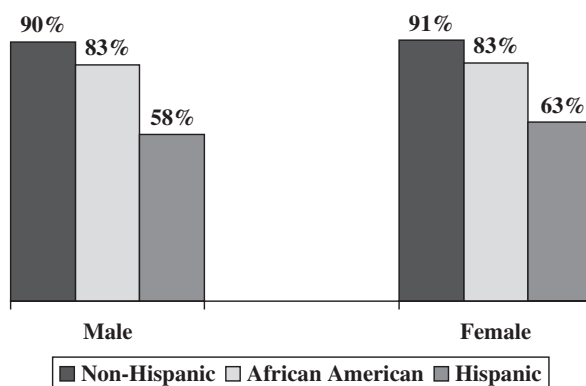


Fig. 2.4 High school graduation rate by gender, race, and Hispanic ethnicity (25 years and over), 2007
Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2007a).



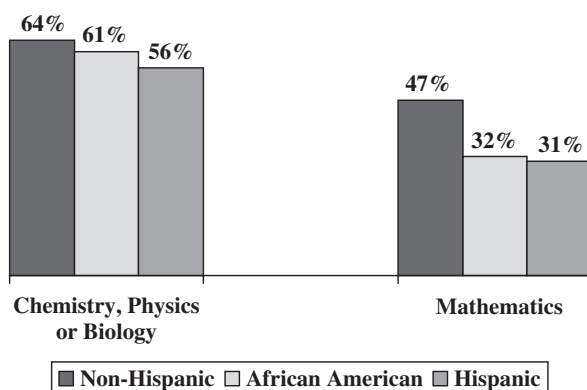
It shows that among Hispanics males have lower graduation rates than females. In addition to all of the other negative consequences associated with low levels of education, they may eventually undermine family life. Currently, Hispanics are more likely to be married and have intact families than non-Hispanics. However, with such low levels of education Hispanic males may find themselves increasingly unable to provide for their families and Hispanic females may find themselves in a very different marriage market with fewer marriageable males. Such a situation limits the potential source of mates for African-American females (Catanzarite and Ortiz 2002). For Hispanics in general, and for the Mexican-origin population in particular, low rates of high school completion bode ill for the future. Without a high school degree, higher levels of educational attainment are not possible and individuals with such low levels of education are at elevated risk of crime and a life of disorganization and poverty. The large numbers of such poorly educated individuals means that a huge potential in terms of human capital will never be realized. The situation is particularly dire in states like California, Illinois, and Texas, which have large Mexican-origin populations.

Let us delve further into the problem of low educational attainment among Hispanics in order to understand other important aspects of the educational deficit.

As we mentioned earlier, the vast majority of Hispanic men are economically active. Hispanic students 16–24 years of age accounted for about 40% of high school dropouts in 2005 (Child Trends 2005). The situation is even worse for the foreign born, fewer than half of whom graduate from high school (Lowell and Suro 2002). Although the situation has improved recently among younger immigrants, high school graduation rates are particularly low among the older immigrant population (Lowell and Suro 2002; Wojtkiewicz and Donato 1995). Among Hispanics, those of Mexican origin have the lowest level of educational attainment. In 2000, only 46% of the Mexican-origin population aged 25 years and older had received at least a high school diploma (Ramirez 2004). Unless the educational level of this population increases dramatically and rapidly, the working-age population of the future will be characterized by low productivity and low income. These lower educational levels and the large number of recent immigrants among Hispanics translate into lower household incomes for young working-age families (Angel and Angel 2006). Almost one-quarter of Hispanic immigrant households reported annual household incomes of less than \$20,000 in 2006, while 17% of non-Hispanic whites report incomes that low (Pew Hispanic Center 2006).

The low high school graduation rate is one clear indicator of the seriousness of the educational deficit among Hispanics, but there are other aspects of the educational experience to consider, including the nature and content of the courses that students take. As Fig. 2.5 reveals, among high school students, Hispanics are less likely than non-Hispanic whites or African-Americans to pursue a college preparatory curriculum and they are less likely to take coursework in math and science. Even when they do complete high school, Hispanics are not as prepared as non-Hispanics to major in subjects in college that require a strong mathematical background. Not only do the physical sciences require a strong background in mathematics, but the social sciences do as well as the amount of quantitative data available for social research and planning explodes. Increasingly, leadership positions in business, government, and the academy require advanced degrees and a proven ability to analyze complex data and explain it clearly.

Fig. 2.5 High school graduates who completed advanced science and mathematics courses by race and Hispanic ethnicity, 2000
Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2004).

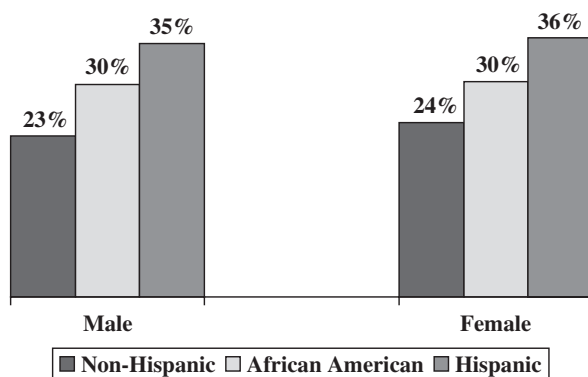


Pathways to Higher Education

The fact that large numbers of minority youth do not graduate from high school or are poorly prepared for college work even when they do limits their future educational possibilities. One indicator of the more limited higher education options is revealed by the fact that even when they go on to post-secondary education, Hispanics are more likely than non-Hispanic whites and African-Americans to attend a 2-year college rather than enroll in a 4-year institution. Of the 1.7 million Hispanic students pursuing post-secondary education, approximately 640,000, or 38.3%, attend 2-year institutions (Kohler and Lazarin 2007). Only 28.3% of non-Hispanic white and 28.1% of African-American students pursuing a post-secondary education are enrolled in 2-year colleges. Figure 2.6 presents comparisons of the proportion of all higher education degrees that are from 2-year colleges by race and Hispanic ethnicity. It shows that for non-Hispanic white males 23% of all degrees are from 2-year institutions, while among Hispanic males 35% of all post-secondary degrees are from 2-year institutions. While graduation from a 2-year program can prepare one for a good job in many areas, 2-year degrees do not qualify one for the highest administrative or professional positions. Clearly some students transfer from a 2-year to a 4-year college, but many do not. In fact only one out of five community college students eventually earns a bachelor's degree (Long and Kurlaender 2008).

Fig. 2.6 Two-year degrees conferred by gender, race, and Hispanic as a percentage of all post-secondary degrees, 2003–2004

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2005).



Lower rates of enrollment in 4-year colleges and lower graduation rates represent a further barrier to the accumulation of material and social capital for the Hispanic population. While the proportion of Hispanics who graduate from 4-year institutions of higher learning has nearly doubled since 1960, they are far less likely than non-Hispanic whites and blacks to receive a diploma (National Center for Education Statistics 2007c). Figure 2.7 shows that in 2007, 12% of Hispanic males and 14% of Hispanic females had received a baccalaureate degree compared with 18% of African-American males and 19% of African-American females. College education among non-Hispanic white males is nearly three times higher than that of Hispanic males. Non-Hispanic white females are over twice as likely to have at least a bachelor's degree than Hispanic females (National Center for Education Statistics 2007c).

Fig. 2.7 College graduation rate by gender, race, and Hispanic ethnicity, 2007
Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2007b).

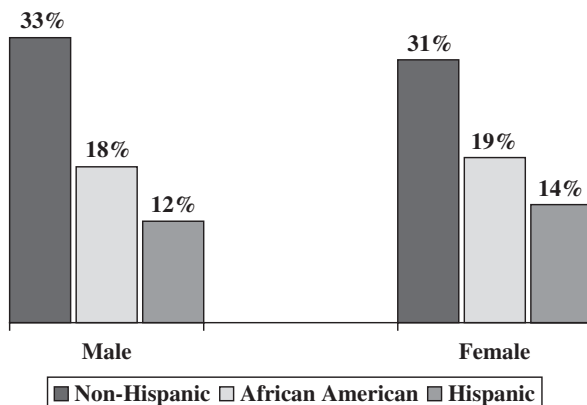


Figure 2.8 again shows the unique problem of low educational levels among Mexican-origin adults. This figure presents the proportion of non-Hispanic white, African-American, and three Hispanic group adults aged 25–29 years who have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. Only 8% of Mexican-origin young adults have a bachelor's or advanced degree. This is far lower than non-Hispanic whites, but also substantially lower than African-Americans or the other two Hispanic groups. The reasons for this astonishingly low level of higher education are no doubt complex and probably include such factors as a student's preparation in high school, his or her self-concept and educational ambition, family support, peer influences, parental expectations, financial resources, and institutional factors (Pino 2005). What seems clear is that this confluence of factors has a devastating effect on college graduation rates. The result is a population in which children and adolescents do not expect most adults to have high levels of education and commensurate occupational ambitions. As we argue throughout the book, until there is a sufficiently large group of Hispanics, and especially much larger groups of Mexican-origin men and women

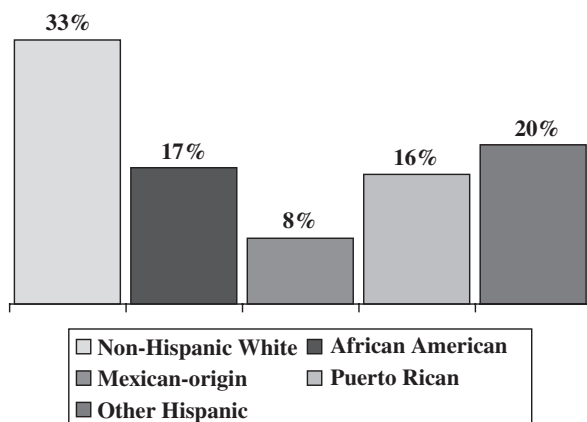
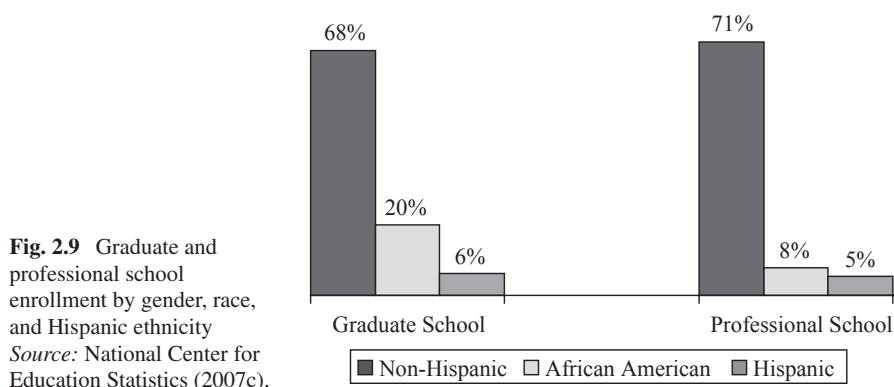


Fig. 2.8 Individuals 25–29 years old with a bachelor's degree or higher by race and Hispanic nationality, 2005
Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2007b).

with a college education or more, large segments of this population will remain trapped in the lower social classes.

Clearly it is imperative to attempt to keep adolescents in school and to improve their performance while they are there. Educators and advocates for the Hispanic and Mexican-origin population have worked for years to improve primary and secondary educational outcomes (The Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans 2009). Bilingual educational programs as well as other interventions have been tried with only limited success (Crosnoe 2006). Such efforts are necessary and laudable but often focus on those with little chance of succeeding educationally. While some may consider it as elitist to focus on the segment of Hispanic students with the greatest educational potential in an attempt to increase their chances of success in higher education, unless more Hispanic students go on to become doctors, lawyers, and other professionals the population as a whole will lack economic and political power. At the same time that we do whatever is necessary to keep students in high school through graduation, it is imperative as well to make sure that those with the intellectual and social resources to succeed have the chance to obtain the highest quality post-secondary educations at the nation's leading institutions of higher learning.

As complex as the predictors of the lack of college and university educations among Hispanics may be, the lack of funding is certainly a critical determinant. The amount of funding available clearly influences a student's decision as to whether and where to attend college, what to major in, and where to live (Pino 2005). A good student from a middle-class family can often pay for his or her education with parental contributions and scholarships and graduate debt-free. For many students, and especially those whose families have limited resources, loans and other forms of financial aid are necessary. In general, Hispanic students receive less financial aid than non-Hispanic white or African-American students (Kohler and Lazarin 2007). The lack of access to financing is probably one of the major reasons as to why many Hispanic students do not finish college or delay graduation. It also affects the probability of continuing on to graduate or professional school. Figure 2.9 shows that Hispanics are greatly underrepresented in graduate and professional schools.



While nearly 15% of the population at large is Hispanic, only 6% of those attending graduate school and 5% of those attending professional schools are Hispanic.

Educational Barriers to the Professions

These statistics show that the educational deficits among Hispanics, and especially among those of Mexican origin, are serious and it is clear that they will be difficult to correct. Unfortunately, Hispanics and other minority Americans have not been as successful in reversing historical disadvantages as one might have hoped. Although feminists have been able to frame the problem of gender inequality in various areas of life as a structural problem that requires direct solutions, minority Americans have not been as successful in framing the inequities that affect them as the result of historically determined structural factors that must be directly addressed. Calls for the direct redress of previous disadvantages are greeted as examples of special group privilege or reverse discrimination. In the absence of programs that guarantee admission to higher education to representative numbers of Hispanics and other minority students, coupled with targeted programs to make up for inadequate secondary educations, the chances for upward mobility for the group as a whole will remain limited.

It is true that traditional programs aimed at reducing high school dropout rates and supporting minority students in college are insufficient to greatly increase the number of highly educated Hispanic professionals. The traditional liberal approach to the problem of low educational achievement is to focus on elementary and secondary education where the foundation for future success rests. However, as we have said before, in the absence of a significant number of Hispanics with advanced degrees, such efforts will probably continue to see limited success. In our opinion it is imperative to get as many students as possible through college and into graduate and professional schools in the short run. The level of financial support is critical to educational success and includes funding for student support services, student mentoring, one-on-one career counseling, informational programs concerning graduate education, and a substantial increase in the number of Hispanic faculty.

In addition to increased institutional commitment, enhancing the networks outside the university environment is very important in the development of knowledge of and positive expectations concerning possible career pathways. Because the Hispanic family plays such an important role in the lives of its children, it is necessary to change parental expectations concerning their children's education. Numerous observers have noted the desire among Mexican-origin parents that their children remain close to home, which means that they often cannot take advantage of the best educational opportunities. Again, an increased number of highly educated role models can communicate to the Hispanic community the necessity of a broader perspective and the realization that social mobility often means abandoning traditional practices and familiar environments.

Low levels of college, graduate school, and professional school graduation mean that the pool of Hispanic faculty, and especially Mexican-origin faculty, at colleges

and universities remains small. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2006), about 15% of US faculty in colleges and universities were minorities in 2003. Approximately 6% of faculty members were African-American and less than 4% were Hispanic. Nearly half of college faculty members (47%) were non-Hispanic white males and 36% were non-Hispanic white females. Minority representation at the nation's elite research and teaching institutions remains extremely low even in states with large Hispanic populations. At the University of Texas at Austin, the authors' home institution, located in a state in which over 35% of the population is Hispanic, 81.6% of faculty members are non-Hispanic white, 3.7% are African-American, and only 5.8% are Hispanic (U.T. Office of Information and Management 2007).

The Core Barrier to Group Mobility

We end this chapter by reiterating the profound negative impact of low levels of education on Hispanic occupational job opportunities, income, and wealth. The mechanism by which low levels of education affect income and wealth is, of course, through occupation. Professional occupations which pay well and allow one to save and accumulate wealth require high levels of education. Individuals with low levels of education are confined to low-wage jobs in agriculture, construction, and the service sector. Figure 2.10 shows the proportion of Hispanic workers in major occupational categories. The data are quite telling and show that only 6.8% of professionals are Hispanic, whereas 39.7% of agricultural workers are Hispanic. Relative to their population representation, Hispanics are overrepresented in services, construction, and production. The earnings and asset accumulation of the Hispanic population at large are consequently limited in comparison to that of non-Hispanic whites.

In the population at large, while 10.3% of non-Hispanic whites have household incomes below the poverty line, which for a family of four with two children was \$20,444 in 2006, 24.3% of African-Americans and 20.6% of Hispanics have incomes below poverty. Poverty affects Hispanic children most seriously as

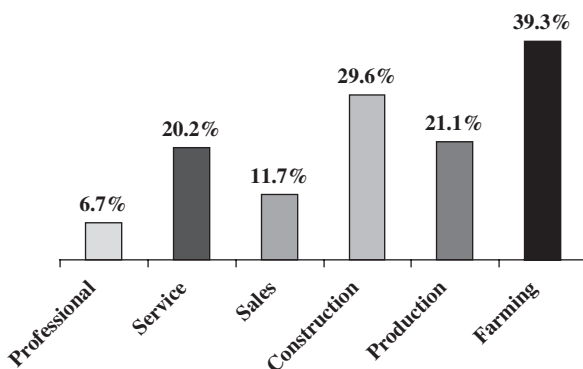


Fig. 2.10 Hispanics as a percentage of selected occupations, 2006
Source: Current Population Survey 2006.

Fig. 2.11 Child poverty rate by race and Hispanic ethnicity, 2007
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2008b).

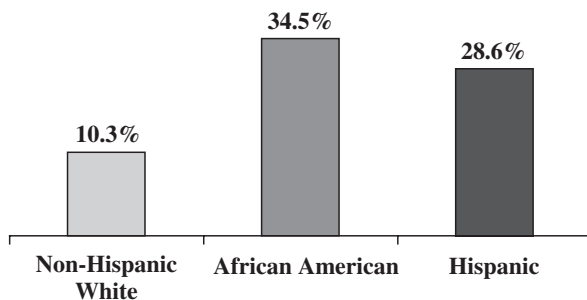
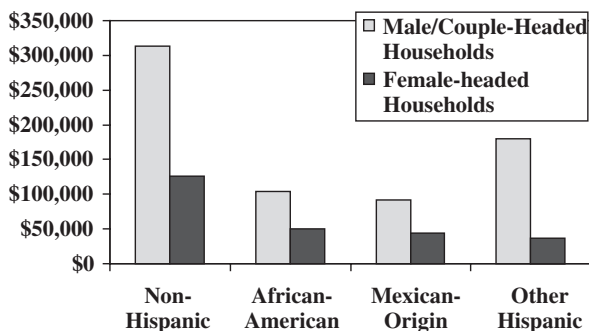


Fig. 2.11 shows. In 2007 while 10% of non-Hispanic white children lived in families with incomes below the poverty threshold, 29% of Hispanic children lived in poverty. Low levels of human capital reduce the number of high earners among Hispanics, especially for those of Mexican origin. In 2002 while 54% of non-Hispanic white workers earned \$35,000 or more, only 24% of Mexican-origin workers had incomes in this range. Approximately 35% of Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and other Hispanics had incomes this high or higher (Ramirez and de la Cruz 2003).

Low incomes translate directly into impaired asset accumulation over the life course. As we will further illustrate in Chapters 5 and 6, the situation is particularly serious for households headed by a female. Figure 2.12, which is based on a longitudinal study of individuals nearing retirement in 1992 that we will discuss further in Chapter 6, shows that while non-Hispanic white couple-headed households had over \$300,000 in assets in the years just prior to retirement, Mexican-origin couple-headed households had less than \$100,000 in assets. The figure clearly shows the far more serious situation for female-headed households and adds another dimension of disadvantage to that related to minority status. Figure 2.12 shows that even non-Hispanic white female-headed households had fewer assets (less than \$150,000) than non-Hispanic white couple-headed household. The lack of wealth among Mexican-origin female-headed households is far more serious since they report a net worth of only \$50,000. The combination of minority status and gender results in greatly exaggerated economic vulnerability. Since many children grow up

Fig. 2.12 Racial and ethnic group differences in household wealth among adults aged 51–61 years, 1992
Source: Health and Retirement Study.



in female-headed households, the low levels of income and resources contribute to the ongoing lack of educational opportunities in the Hispanic population.

These low levels of wealth among both couple-headed and female-headed households leave Hispanic families with little buffer in the event of economic crises. In the next chapter we move on to an examination of the consequences of low levels of human capital among parents for Hispanic children. As we have shown in this chapter, blocked educational opportunities translate directly into limited occupational opportunities, low wages, and the lack of work-related benefits. The result is that low-wage parents are limited in what they can do for their children and find themselves highly dependent on public programs for health care and the other services that their children need. As we will see, as important as public programs like Medicaid, cash assistance, food stamps, housing assistance, and the rest of the means-tested welfare state are, they do not fully guarantee the health and well-being of poor children.

Hispanic Families at Risk

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