HOW THE PAST OBSCURES CONTEMPORARY ASSESSMEMNTS OF INCORPORATION: DEMOGRAPHIC MODELS OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN THIRD GENERATION DECLINE IN EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT*

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ABSTRACT

Research on the intergenerational educational mobility of Mexican-Americans has consistently found that gains in educational attainment stall or even erode in third and later generations. However, little research has assessed the degree to which this "third generation decline" reflects the underlying dynamics of contemporary incorporation processes, on the one hand, or derives instead from historical artifacts with little bearing on the prospects for economic mobility among the children of today's Mexican immigrants. We address this question by projecting forward the Mexican-American population observed in the 1940 U.S. Census. Using a series of simulations, we gauge the extent to which the educational attainment of today's third and later generation Mexican-Americans is negatively influenced by a combination of three factors: disproportionate concentration in Texas prior to World War II (a context in which intergenerational mobility was extremely limited), selective ethnic attrition, and a negative education gradient in fertility. Results suggest that absent these historical artifacts, average educational attainment of the third- and later-generation Mexican-Americans would be approximately 30 percent higher than the level actually observed in contemporary population data, with Texas and ethnic attrition effects exerting the largest negative bias. These results imply that third generation "decline" derives largely from historical processes, and is therefore unlikely to serve as a reliable barometer for contemporary incorporation dynamics.

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INTRODUCTION

Owing to uninterrupted large-scale immigration to the United States over the past fifty years and the exponential increase of the foreign-born population and their children, the pace and nature of immigrant incorporation into American society remains a central concern among social scientists and policy makers (Bean and Stevens 2003). Due to the aging of the baby boom generation coupled with declining native-born fertility levels the characteristics and productivity of the American workforce will increasingly depend on the economic incorporation of the descendants of today's immigrants (Myers 2007). Of the 28 million working-age immigrants residing in the U.S. in 2011, fully one-quarter lacked a high school education (Ruggles et al. 2010). Thus, for a substantial share of the contemporary immigrant population, future economic incorporation will depend in large part on the degree to which they experience mobility in educational attainment from one immigrant generation to the next.

The low-skill foreign-born population is dominated by immigrants from Mexico; two-thirds of working-age immigrants with less than a high school education are Mexican. Owing to the sheer size of the U.S. Mexican-origin population, a number of studies have been undertaken in order to assess the degree to which Mexican-Americans' educational attainments exhibit inter-generational improvement. While specific conclusions about the nature of the pattern of intergenerational Mexican-American educational progress vary across studies, a general consensus has emerged suggesting that this progress stalls or even erodes after the second generation (Farley and Alba 2002; Grogger and Trejo 2002). Evidence of third-generation decline in the intergenerational educational progress among Mexican-Americans has given rise to concern among social scientists about the pace of

economic incorporation and has led to theorizing about the economic and social obstacles to Mexican-American assimilation (Telles and Ortiz 2008). Moreover, the same body of evidence has led some political analysts and observers to question the nation's ability to integrate low-skilled immigrant ethnic groups, suggesting instead policies aimed at reducing the size of low-skilled immigration flows (Camarota 2001; Douthat 2013).

Still others have urged caution when drawing substantive inferences from the appearance of decline in educational progress among third- and later-generation Mexican-Americans in contemporary population survey data (Alba 2006; Alba and Islam 2008; Bean et al. 2013). Much of this caution derives from the fact that third-, fourth-, and later-generations have been subjected both to a set of historical contextual effects (Alba 2006; Bachmeier 2013) *and* processes of selection into and out of the adoption of Mexican-origin identity (Alba and Islam 2008; Duncan and Trejo 2011). Such historical contexts and population processes thus may negatively bias estimates of educational attainment among later-generation Mexican-Americans while such biases are expected to be largely absent among members of the second-generation, which has not been subjected to similar historical contexts and population processes. This reasoning implies that third-generation decline is at least to some extent an artifact of historical processes that are difficult, if not impossible, to observe in contemporary data.

In this paper, we examine the degree to which third-generation decline in the intergenerational educational progress of Mexican-Americans derives from historical artifacts and population processes by projecting forward the Mexican-American population observed in the 1940 U.S. Census. This projection allows us to simulate the influence of historical effects and processes on the educational attainment of today's third-plus

generation. In the following section we clarify what is meant by "third-generation decline" and summarize the research evidence demonstrating this result in many contemporary population surveys. We also discuss the historical contexts and population processes that might be expected to bias the educational attainment of later-generation Mexican-Americans downward. We then describe the method employed to project forward the 1940 Mexican-American population, and all of the various data sources and inputs used in the projection, and the method by which we simulate the effects of historical context and population processes on the educational profile of today's third-plus generation Mexican-American population. The results of the projection and simulation exercises are then presented and discussed. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of the results, concentrating primarily on assessing the extent to which on-going theoretical and policy discussions should be informed by the appearance of third-generation decline in Mexican-American educational mobility.

BACKGROUND

What is "Third Generation Decline"?

We use the term "third-generation decline" to refer to a slowing of the pace of inter-generational mobility in educational attainment. This could refer to mobility across several immigrant generations within an age cohort (e.g., comparing years of completed schooling among 1st, 2nd, and 3rd generation adults aged 25-44), or to mobility from parents of a given immigrant generation to children in a subsequent immigrant generation (e.g., years of schooling completed by 1st generation parents, aged 45-64 compared to 2nd generation children aged 25-44). In reality, by this definition third-generation decline is almost

certain to occur because the substantial gains in education by the second generation over the first are unlikely to be matched between the second and the third due to differences in access to educational opportunities between Mexico and the United States. Thus, if within a given age cohort of adults, the first generation averaged eight years of schooling, the second generation averaged 12, and the third generation averaged 14, by the definition offered above, because the increase in average educational attainment was only half as large from the second to the third generation as from the first to the second, one might technically conclude that a "decline" in educational progress has occurred from the second to the third generation.

A *relative* definition of third generation decline is likely to bring more clarity to the picture. That is, a better sense of the degree to which educational mobility may be slowing can be gained by introducing a reference point toward which educational attainment "should" be converging. Customarily in assimilation research, native-origin non-Hispanic whites serve as the reference group (Alba and Nee 2003; Bean and Stevens 2003; Bean et al. 2013; Park and Myers 2010; Telles and Ortiz 2008). Thus, in the scenario introduced above where average years of schooling were 8, 12 and 14 among first, second-, and third-generation immigrants, respectively, markedly different conclusions would be drawn about whether there is evidence of a third-generation decline based on the average attainment of the reference group. For example, one would be unlikely to conclude that third-generation decline had occurred if the white reference group also averaged 14 years of schooling because third-generation Mexicans would have converged to the educational attainment of the reference group. If, however average educational attainment in the reference group was 18 years, one might reasonable conclude that inter-generational progress toward

educational assimilation has slowed considerably between the second and third Mexican-American generations.

Empirical Evidence of Third-Generation Decline

Scholarly and public policy debate is over the *interpretation* of third-generation decline, rather than whether there is empirical evidence of its existence, about which there is a rather clear, general research consensus. Even though the specific pattern of inter-generational progress in educational mobility varies depending on the data and methods employed by researchers, the body of empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that such progress slows considerably, or even erodes, after the second generation. This is illustrated in very simple terms in Table 1, which displays the percentage of the population completing post-secondary education among three generations of Mexican-American adults, by age group, and compares these attainments to third-plus generation non-Hispanic whites (hereafter, "whites"). For all age groups, third-plus generation Mexican-Americans fail to reach the educational attainments among whites.

Moreover, within each age group, little to no additional progress is made toward educational convergence with whites after the second generation. Even when comparing improvements that children in a subsequent generation make over their parents in a prior generation, we see a substantial slowing of intergenerational educational mobility after the second generation. For example, 45 percent of the children of Mexican immigrants aged 35-44 average completed education beyond high school, compared to 16.7 percent of immigrants of their parents generation (aged 55-64), an increase of nearly 30 percentage points. Among third-plus generation adults aged 35-44, however, 46 percent achieve

educational levels beyond high school, which is a mere six percentage point increase over their parents, 2nd generation adults aged 55-64.

The simple patterns of third generation delay depicted in Table 1 are nevertheless, largely reflective of more detailed existing studies based on a variety of different empirical methods and existing data sources (Duncan, Hotz, and Trejo 2006; Glick and White 2003; Grogger and Trejo 2002; Reed et al. 2005; Smith 2003; Telles and Ortiz 2008). On the basis of these and similar research results, observers have offered pessimistic interpretations about the prospects for the upward mobility and incorporation of the children of contemporary Mexican immigrants (Camarota 2001; Douthat 2013; Huntington 2004; Telles and Ortiz 2008). However, as others have pointed out, analysts should proceed with caution when drawing inferences about *contemporary* assimilation processes from incorporation outcomes reported for the so-called "third-plus" Mexican-origin generation (Alba 2006). Uncertainty about the extent to which such results tell us anything meaningful about contemporary assimilation processes grows out of the fact that the socio-economic profile of third-plus generation Mexican-Americans has been shaped by a number of distinctive historical effects and population processes that are difficult to measure in existing data. We turn now to a discussion of these factors.

Historical-Regional Effects

Adult members of todays third- and later-generations of the Mexican-American population are the grandchildren of first-, second-, and third-generation immigrants who came of age in the United States well before the Civil Rights Era (Alba 2006). This is crucial on several fronts. First, the forebears of today's third-plus generation were in their schooling years at a time when the American public schooling system was less developed,

and when there existed substantial regional variation in the development and formalization of this system, than is the case today (Richardson 1980). This means that the public school system overall was less capable of meeting one of its fundamental motivating objectives, ensuring equality of educational opportunity, especially in Southern states, including Texas, where the majority of the Mexican-origin population was concentrated prior to 1960, and where the development and formalization of a public schooling apparatus was particularly slow to develop (Montejano 1987).

Educational orientations and attainments among children are determined in large part by those of their parents (Mare and Chang 2006). The educational legacy inherited by third-plus generation Mexican-Americans was forged well before the Civil Rights Era, at a time when strong, equality-promoting institutions that might counterbalance the virulent racism endured by Mexicans in the American Southwest were largely absent. Access to educational opportunity was especially limited for Mexican-origin children residing in Texas during the first half of the twentieth century (Black 1997; Montejano 1987). The Progressive Movement, which sought the "Americanization" of the nation's diverse immigrant ethnic groups through increases in public school enrollments, was influential and intertwined with the rapid development and formalization of public schooling in Northeastern, Midwestern states as well as in California (Sanchez 1993). Progressives, however, had little influence in Southern states, including Texas, which were, as a result, far slower to develop a formalized public schooling system (Black 1997; Montejano 1987; Richardson 1980).

In 1940, 41 percent of the nation's 512,000 school-aged U.S.-born Mexican-origin children resided in Texas. At that time, the second largest concentration, 27 percent, lived

in California. Recent work by Bachmeier (2013) suggests that today's third-plus generation Mexican-origin population has inherited a disadvantaged educational legacy growing out of their grandparents' experiences in Texas. He finds that among U.S.-born Mexican-origin women, aged 35-47 in 1970, those born in Texas averaged just 6.8 years of schooling, a mere half-a-year of schooling more than similarly aged Mexican immigrant women (6.3 years). By contrast, their Mexican-origin peers born in California averaged 9.7 years of schooling. Moreover, Bachmeier finds that fertility among Texas-born Mexican-origin women was substantially *higher* than among similarly aged Mexican immigrant women (5.57 births per woman among Texas-born Mexican-American women compared to 5.12 births among Mexican immigrants). Thus, a disproportionate share of today's third-plus generation traces its U.S. origins to Texas-born grandparents whose educational attainments failed to surpass those among Mexican immigrants.

The implication is that the third-plus generation Mexican-origin population has inherited an educational legacy shaped by historical and regional forces that are largely absent from the contexts of reception for today's Mexican immigrants and their children. Such legacy effects must be considered when interpreting cross-sectional comparisons in Mexican-American educational attainment across immigrant generations, because unlike nearly every other contemporary immigrant group in the United States, large proportions of the Mexican-origin population has been subjected to historical forces that pre-date the Civil Rights Era.

Ethnic Attrition

A second legacy related process that may bias educational attainment of later-generation Mexican-Americans is that of ethnic attrition (Alba and Islam 2008; Duncan and

Trejo 2011). Over time, persons with Mexican ancestry may no longer identify as having Mexican origin or ethnicity in surveys and Censuses. While the rate of such attrition is largely unknown, research by Duncan and Trejo (2011) suggest that it is substantial, and crucially, positively related to educational attainment. Thus, the selectivity of ethnic attrition will bias the observed educational attainments of later-generation Mexican-origin persons downward.

DATA & METHODS

We simulated the percentage attaining more than a high school education in 2010 among Mexican-origin women ages 25-40 by generational status. Each simulation projects the U.S. Mexican-origin female population from 1940 to 2010 using an elaboration of the cohort-component method (Rowland 2006). The standard cohort component method uses age-specific probabilities of mortality, fertility rates, and net migration to project populations forward in time. We elaborate on this approach by breaking down the results by educational attainment, generational status, and state of residence, and by accounting for ethnic attrition, intergeneration mobility in education, and variations in mobility by state of residence. To simplify the simulations, we restricted the projections to females living in Texas or California, and we ignore interstate migration. Across multiple simulations, we modified various inputs (e.g., the level of ethnic attrition, or the percentage living in California) to estimate the effects of these factors on generational differences in educational attainment in 2010. We describe the inputs used in the simulations below.

<u>Baseline Population (1940)</u>.

The baseline population for our simulations was the Mexican-origin female population enumerated in the 1940 Census by five-year age group, educational attainment, and generational status. Educational attainment was categorized as less than high school, high school degree, more than high school. Generational status was based on place of birth and parent's place of birth, with the 1st generation defined as those born in Mexico, the 2nd generation as the U.S. born with at least one foreign-born parent, and the 3rd+ generation as the U.S. born with U.S. born parents. All census data, including data from 1940, were obtained from the IPUMS website (Ruggles et al. 2010).

Survivors.

The number of survivors was estimated for each five-year projection period by multiplying the population in each five-year age group by the five-year survival ratios. Survival ratios were obtained from female life tables from 1945-2005 for the United States from the Human Mortality Database (2013). We selected life tables from the mid-point of each decade for each projection period (e.g., we used the 1945 life table for the 1940-1949 projection periods).

Fertility.

We estimated fertility as the average number of children ever born among Mexican-origin women ages 45-64 by educational attainment and nativity (foreign-born versus U.S.-born), based on the 1940-1990 Censuses and 2010 American Community Survey (Ruggles et al. 2010), and interpolated the estimate for 2000 since the 2000 census did not collect data on children ever born. We converted children-ever-born to age-specific female fertility rates by distributing the number of births according to a standard Mexican-American fertility schedule obtained from NCHS, and dividing by 2 (to obtain fertility rates

for girl births only). Some simulations assume that there is no educational gradient in fertility. For those simulations, we applied the average fertility to women across all educational categories.

Net Immigration.

Net immigration was estimated using the residual method. At the end of each decade, we estimated net migration by subtracting "the expected" Mexican-born female population had no migration occurred during the decade, from the enumerated population. The expected population was the population at the beginning of the decade minus the estimated number of deaths. We distributed the number of net migrants by age, educational attainment, and state according the distributions observed among the foreign born in the censuses for each decade. Some simulations assume that immigration did not change over time, or that the educational attainment of immigrants did not change since 1940. For those simulations respectively, we applied a constant immigration level across all decades (the average from 1940-2010), and we distributed immigrants according to the 1940 educational distribution for all decades.

Educational Mobility Tables.

We distributed all births into educational attainment categories (signifying the child's eventual attainment) by applying probabilities obtained from intergenerational educational mobility tables. A mobility table is a cross-tabulation of parent's educational attainment by the child's. For example, contemporary data sources suggest that among Mexican-American women with mothers with less than a high school education, 17.8% attain less than high school, 27.1% complete high school, and 56.4% go beyond high school. In our simulations, we therefore distributed births of women with less than a high school

degree according to the same proportions. In Texas in the pre-civil rights era (before 1960), there are several reasons to think that mobility was very low among Hispanics (even lower than among African Americans at the time) as outlined in this chapter. Therefore, for Texas before 1960, we used a mobility table that averaged that observed for African American women at the time (Mare 1997) and a table representing no mobility. For all other states and time periods, we used the average of two mobility tables obtained for U.S.-born Mexican-Americans for the post-civil-rights era. One was generated from IMMLA data (discussed in this volume) and the second was generated from data collected by the Mexican-American Study Project (Ortiz and Telles 2011). The mobility pattern was so similar between these two data sources that we decide to use the average of the two.

Ethnic Attrition.

Not all daughters of Mexican-origin mothers grow up to identify as Mexican, a phenomenon referred to as "ethnic attrition". Importantly, ethnic attrition increases across generations and educational attainment (Duncan and Trejo 2011). We estimated ethnic attrition as the average of two sets of estimates. First, we estimated attrition from the 2008-2011 Current Population Surveys as the percentage of persons who *did not* identify as Mexican among those who were born in Mexico or who have at least one parent who was born in Mexico. Second, we estimated attrition from the 1979 cohort of National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79). At the first interview, the NLSY asked respondents (then aged 14-21) to list up to six different ethnic identities, and those who listed more than one were asked which ethnicity they identified with most. We defined attrition as those who *did not* indicate Mexican as their only or preferred ethnicity among those who listed Mexican as any of their ethnicities. Ethnic attrition rates were higher when based on

the NLSY survey responses than the CPS. We suspect this stems from the fact that the NLSY respondents were younger than the CPS respondents; as adolescents, they were in a life course stage during which identities are more fluid. The difference may also stem from different definitions of ethnic attrition; the CPS measure is restricted to those with objective indicators of Mexican ancestry while the NLSY measure is more subjective because it includes anyone who ever identifies as Mexican. Because a case could be made for both the CPS and the NLSY measure, we opted to use the average of the two in our simulations.

RESULTS

In order to approximate empirically the degree to which historical legacy effects and ethnic attrition have impacted the observed educational attainments of the Mexican-American third-plus generation, we present in Table 2, the results from our demographic simulations. The simulation exercise is limited to Mexican-origin women completing levels of education beyond high school, and assumes that the Mexican-origin population lived in two states, California and Texas. The first row of Table 2 reports the percentages observed among such women, aged 25-40, in the 2010 March Current Population Survey (CPS), by immigrant generation. Thus, 23 percent of Mexican immigrant women had more than a high school education, and the figure climbs by 30 percentage points to reach 53 percent in the second generation. Evidence of the type of "decline" that has been observed in previous research appears in these data for third- and later-generation women, among whom 50 percent complete education beyond a high school diploma, a decline of three percentage points relative to second-generation women.

Row 2 of the table presents the results from our baseline simulation, which demonstrates that the inputs used in the simulation are able to match the inter-generational educational profile of the Mexican-origin population that is actually observed in the 2010 CPS. In the third row of the table, we assume that the entire Mexican-origin population in 1940 faced the particularly limited access to educational opportunity in pre-Civil Rights Texas. Under this scenario, an even smaller percentage of third-plus generation women, 47.8, would have proceeded beyond high school, and as a consequence, the decline from the second- to third-plus generation would have been substantially greater (5.3 as opposed to 3.2 percentage points). Moreover, the final column in the table indicates that the gap in college attendance between third-plus generation Mexican-Americans and third-plus generation whites widens by about two percentage points from 22.7 to 24.9.

Conversely, the simulation in the fourth row indicates that no third-plus generation decline would exist today if the entire Mexican-origin population in 1940 resided in California, where education policies influenced by the Progressive Movement were effective in ameliorating Mexicans' relative inequality in educational opportunity. In this scenario, the third-plus generation makes modest improvement over the second with respect to educational attainment beyond high school, increasing from 53.7 to 55.7 percent. And, if the entire Mexican-American population came of age in California, the disadvantage in college attendance vis-à-vis whites would shrink considerable from 22.7 to 17.0 percentage points.

The fifth row of Table 2 indicates that the observed third-plus generation decline can also be explained by ethnic attrition. If there was no attrition from the Mexican-origin

population observed in 1940, 55.6 percent of the simulated third-plus generation would have progressed beyond high school in 2010 compared to 53.8 percent of the second generation, a similarly modest inter-generational gain to the one observed in Row 4. Similarly, ethnic attrition accounts for a substantial share of the gap in college attendance between third-plus generation Mexican-Americans and whites, which drops from 22.7 to 17.1 percentage points.

The fertility gradient (i.e., the association between educational attainment and fertility) accounts for very little of the observed third-plus generation decline (Row 6). If the fertility rate was the same for women of all educational levels, the percentage of women simulated to have more than a high school education in 2010 would increase slightly among both second- and third-plus generation women, which results in roughly the same magnitude of inter-generational decline as observed in the baseline simulation.

In Row 7 we simulate the educational attainments of Mexican-origin women assuming a constant rate of immigration between 1940 and 2010. This would have resulted in a slight decrease in the proportion proceeding beyond high school in the second generation (from 53.4 in baseline to 52.7 in Row 7) and a slight increase in the percentage doing so in the third-plus generation (from 50.2 at baseline to 51.6 in Row 7). As a result, the degree of third-plus generation decline is reduced by more than half, from 3.0 to 1.1. And in Row 8, we assume that there was no increase in the educational attainment of immigrants arriving from Mexico between 1940 and 2010. This of course has no impact on the simulated third-plus generation because no one in this population would have descended from an immigrant arriving from Mexico after 1940. This adjustment reduces the percentage achieving beyond high school in the second-generation by 2.8 percentage

points from 53.4 percent at baseline to 50.6 percent in Row 8, and thus all but erases the estimated decline from the second- to third-plus generation (-0.4 percentage points).

Finally, in the ninth row of Table 2 we adopt all of the assumptions made individually in Rows 4 through 8, and thus simulate a female Mexican-origin population raised entirely in California, absent any ethnic attrition, with no fertility gradient, and who experienced a constant flow of immigration from Mexico with no educational upgrading among immigrants. Adopting all of these assumptions simultaneously dramatically improves the educational attainment of the simulated third-plus generation, as the percentage obtaining beyond a high school diploma increases from just 50.2 at baseline to 65.4 percent in the final row. Thus, had all of these scenarios obtained simultaneously, instead of a third-plus generation decline of 3.2 percentage points, we would have observed an improvement from the second- to the third-plus generation of 14.2 percentage points. Moreover, had all of these occurred in combination, the college attendance deficit among third-plus generation Mexican-Americans, vis-à-vis whites is would have been only one-third as large as that actually observed in the 2010 CPS (just 7.3 percentage points versus 22.7 percentage points in the CPS).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on a growing body of research evidence, social scientists and policy makers have reached a broad consensus holding that the integration of the Mexican-origin population has proceeded at a far slower pace than many other ethnic groups (e.g., the Asian ethnic groups), and, based on the results of some studies, appears to have stagnated altogether (Camarota 2001; Duncan et al. 2006; Grogger and Trejo 2002; Telles and Ortiz

2008). In response to this finding, debate has ensued as to the underlying mechanisms of third-generation decline as well as over how it is to be best remedied through policy. This debate, however, has largely failed to consider an equally important question: To what degree should the appearance of third-generation decline serve as the basis for drawing inferences about the nation's *current* integrative capabilities (Alba 2006; Bean et al. 2013)?

Commonly held interpretations of third-generation decline make at least two implicit assumptions. The first is that the economic position of later-generation Mexican-Americans is unaffected by the social and political contexts of reception during the first half of the twentieth century that relegated their immigrant ancestors to the very bottom of the ethno-racial hierarchy of the American Southwest, and the particularly virulent racism directed at Mexicans in the state of Texas. The second implicit assumption underlying the concern expressed over third-generation decline is that the Mexican-American population growing out of the first half of the twentieth century has remained relatively static with respect to the maintenance of a Mexican ethnic identity. Existing research, however questions the viability of these assumptions, by suggesting that the economic position of today's later generation Mexican-Americans is influenced to a considerable degree by their ancestors' pre-WWII Texas origins (Bachmeier 2013), and that the likelihood of "opting out" of Mexican ethnicity is positively associated with educational attainment (Duncan and Trejo 2011).

The goal of this paper has been to assess the degree to which the profile of third-plus generation Mexican-Americans suffers from biases stemming from historical/contextual factors and population-related processes evolving over time. Moreover, the paper has sought to determine whether such biases, to the extent that they

exist, are substantial enough so as to alter research and policy-related interpretations and inferences drawn from evidence of third-generation decline in the educational mobility of Mexican-Americans. The results of the simulation exercises presented here suggest that a number of historical factors and population processes – most notably, Mexican-American roots in pre-WWII Texas and selective ethnic attrition – yield two notable findings. First, lacking a disadvantaged educational legacy, the effects of ethnic attrition, and a combination of several other population-related trends, simulation models suggest that third-plus generation Mexican-Americans would have made substantial improvement in the rate of post-secondary educational enrollment over the Mexican second-generation. Moreover, these same factors explain more than two thirds of the college enrollment gap observed today between third-plus generation Mexican-Americans and whites.

These results imply that analysts need to proceed cautiously when confronted with evidence of Mexican-American third-generation decline. To a considerable degree, this decline appears to "exist" for two primary reasons. First, today's third-plus generation Mexican-American population remains burdened by a disadvantaged educational legacy forged in Texas prior to WWII, where Mexican-origin children were all but excluded from accessing educational opportunities. The educational deficits forged in this context have been transmitted inter-generationally to today's third- and later-generation Mexican-Americans, and while today's second-generation faces no shortage of obstacles to their upward mobility – most notably the legal status of their parents – the institutionalized exclusion from the public schooling system is not one of them. Second, the observed educational profile of today's third-plus generation is biased downward to a substantial degree due to the fact that ethnic attrition from Mexican-American ethnic identity is

positively related to educational attainment. Thus, upwardly mobile Mexican-Americans are the most likely to "opt out".

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TABLES

Table 1. Percentage of Working-Age Mexican-Americans and Non-Hispanic Whites Completing Education Beyond High School, by Immigrant Generation and Age Group: 2010

	Mexican-Americans			*Non-Hispanic Whites*
Age	1st	2nd	3rd+	3rd+
25-34	15.7	45.0	48.0	68.6
35-44	17.4	52.4	46.4	65.9
45-54	16.7	54.0	42.1	60.4
55-64	15.6	39.7	41.4	62.1

Source: Authors' tabulation of the 2010 March Current Population Survey

Table 2. Simulated Percentage With More than a High School Education, Among Mexican-origin Women Age 25-40 by Generational Status, 2010

	Generational Status			2nd minus 3rd+ Generation	Difference from Baseline Simulation	Whites minus 3rd+ Generation
	1st	2nd	3rd+			
(1) Observed (2010 CPS)	23.0	53.0	50.0	3.0	---	22.7
(2) Baseline Simulation (Realistic Conditions)	23.6	53.4	50.2	3.2	---	22.5
(3) If everyone lived in Texas	23.6	53.0	47.8	5.3	2.0	24.9
(4) If everyone lived in California	23.5	53.7	55.7	-2.0	-5.2	17.0
(5) If there were no ethnic attrition	23.6	53.8	55.6	-1.8	-5.0	17.1
(6) If there were no fertility gradient	23.6	54.6	51.6	3.0	-0.2	21.1
(7) If there were constant migration (average level)	23.3	52.7	51.6	1.1	-2.2	21.1
(8) If there were no change in the educational attainment of migrants since 1940	1.0	50.6	50.2	0.4	-2.8	22.5
(4), (5), (6), (7), & (8) If everyone lived in California and there were no ethnic attrition, no fertility gradient, constant migration, and no change in education of migrants	1.0	51.2	65.4	-14.2	-17.5	7.3

Note: The observed results are based on the author's analysis of the March 2010 Current Population Survey. The simulated results are based on simulations that project the Mexican population in the United States from 1940 to 2010, while varying assumptions about state of residence, ethnic attrition, the educational gradient in fertility, and the level and educational attainment of immigrants.