Although some Mexican Americans on the border are descended from colonial Spanish-Mexican families, most trace their presence in the region to the waves of immigrants from Mexico that began at the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1910. Those who arrived after 1940 are particularly numerous because of the much heavier migration flow during the half-century of extraordinary economic expansion in the U.S. Southwest that was initiated by World War II. Physical proximity to Mexico has assured strong adherence to Mexican cultural norms and the maintenance of the Spanish language. The overwhelming predominance of Spanish speakers on the border is indicated in data gathered by the U.S. census (see Table 4.1). In 1980 the proportion of Hispanics who spoke a language other than English at home ranged from 73.3 percent in San Diego to 96.3 percent in the Brownsville–Harlingen–San Benito area. At the same time, the need to function effectively in American society has supported fluency in English and familiarity with the ways of the mainstream Anglo culture. In the border areas described in Table 4.1, about three-fourths of the Hispanic population spoke English well. These circumstances, then, predispose border Mexican Americans as a group to be bilingual and bicultural, and to maintain substantial links with their ancestral homeland.

The degree of Mexican American integration into the U.S. mainstream depends on many variables associated with personal and societal circumstances. Generally speaking, people who have lived longer in the United States are more highly assimilated than recent immigrants. Those Mexican Americans who were descended from border pioneer families long ago learned how to function with proficiency outside their own group. Additionally, Mexican Americans descended from immigrants who arrived several generations ago have had the advantage of time and experience to ease the adjustment to U.S. society. By contrast, newly arrived immigrants are just beginning to acquaint themselves with U.S. society, and it will take them many years to become assimilated.
TABLE 4.1 Socioeconomic Characteristics of Hispanics in Three Border SMSAs, * 1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Brownsville-Harlingen-San Benito</th>
<th>El Paso</th>
<th>San Diego</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent foreign-born</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent who speak a language other than English (i.e., Spanish) at home</td>
<td>96.5</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>73.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent who do not speak English well or at all</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent who resided in a different SMSA in 1975</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income distribution, by household Less than $14,999</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>53.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000—$24,999</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000—$34,999</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,000 or more</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of families below poverty level</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The ever-present opportunities to function in the various social environments of the border.

Using as the main criterion the degree of interaction with the Mexican side and with Anglo society, Figure 4.1 presents a typology of Mexican American borderlanders, and Figure 4.2 gives an indication of the approximate relative size of each group and its location on the borderlands milieu—periphery continuum. A small proportion of the Mexican American population is classified as national borderlanders, with one subgroup referred to as assimilationists and the other as newcomers. Those classified as transnational borderlanders, who constitute the vast majority within the whole cohort, include disadvantaged immigrants, advancing immigrants, commuters, biculturalists, and binationalists. Binational consumers are part of both the national and transnational sectors but tilt toward the latter. As Figure 4.2 shows, newcomers and assimilationists, located on the periphery of the borderlands milieu, make up relatively small categories, and immigrants and biculturalists, in the core region, comprise the largest subgroups. Figure 4.3 provides a comparative overview of the cross-border links and influences in the lives of the nine Mexican American borderlands types. Relevant socioeconomic data from the 1980 census in three major Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas on the border appear in Table 4.1.

National Mexican Americans

Assimilationists

As a nation of immigrants, the United States has historically played host to millions of individuals from many nationalities who have given up much of their own culture as they assimilated to another. Such individuals have been present in the Mexican American border community as well, although to a lesser degree than other ethnic groups because of the constant strong reinforcement of the native culture from nearby Mexico. Nevertheless, recent socioeconomic advances in the U.S. borderlands have made it possible for increasing numbers of Mexican Americans to be absorbed into the Anglo mainstream, resulting in a significant loss of Hispanic cultural traits. These people may be referred to as Mexican American assimilationists. One measure of assimilationist tendencies in the group is provided in Table 4.1, which indicates that 3.5 percent of the Hispanic population on the Texas side of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 6.2 percent in El Paso, and 26.7 percent in San Diego speak English (as opposed to Spanish) at home. These percentages may be taken as rough estimates of the size of the assimilationist sector in each locality.

Perhaps the most common Mexican American assimilationists are people who wish to master the English language and obtain a thorough understanding of Anglo society in order to succeed economically and achieve social "respect-
ability" for themselves and their children. In pursuing higher social status, they gradually distance themselves from their own culture, and with time their way of life becomes highly Angloized. Opportunities to speak Spanish or be involved in Mexican-related activities diminish, and ties with Mexico become very weak. These people are essentially pragmatic assimilationists.

At the other end of the assimilationist spectrum are people who, in striving to achieve the American Dream of material comfort, status, and acceptability in U.S. society, consciously and overtly reject their Mexicanness because they see it as an impediment to personal progress. They are embarrassed by the poverty and other social problems that prevail in the Hispanic community and by the negative publicity that Mexicans constantly receive in the U.S. media. They are often very critical of their cultural background and the land of their forebears, and they work hard at shedding their “negative” baggage. Thus, the mind-set of these eager assimilationists is not conducive to carrying on substantial cross-border relationships.

The case histories that follow typify the assimilationist syndrome among young Mexican Americans highly exposed to the Anglo way of life. The first individual, Juan Hinojosa, reports that his parents have consciously steered him in the direction of the dominant society and away from Mexican culture. The second, Daniel Fisher, represents a growing segment of the population along the border, people of Mexican-Anglo extraction. Fisher has faced strong pressures to “be” Anglo because of the influence of his Anglo father and his close association with members of the mainstream society.

Juan Hinojosa: Assimilatcionist / John Hinojosa is a twenty-year-old U.S.-born university student who attended predominantly Anglo public schools in a major U.S. border city. He has little in common with the mass of Mexican American young people in the borderlands, who are strongly bilingual and bicultural. While physically he looks very Hispanic, his mind-set, mannerisms, and speech strongly reflect Anglo culture. His command of the English language is impressive, and he speaks without an accent. Conversely, his Spanish is extremely weak and his understanding of Mexican American and Mexican cultures is very shallow.

Hinojosa traces the loss of his native culture to the day he started kindergarten. At that time he knew only Spanish and had a hard time understanding what was happening in class. Sensing his predicament, his parents, both U.S.-born Mexican Americans, decided to speak only English to him. Since that time he himself has spoken very little Spanish, although he has heard it spoken around him. The strategy followed by his parents worked well, and he was able to become highly proficient in English and a very successful student.

His mother was especially instrumental in directing him toward Anglo cul-

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**FIGURE 4.1** Typology of Mexican American borderlanders. The binational consumers category is composed of individuals from all subgroups.

**FIGURE 4.2** The relative size of subgroups of Mexican American borderlanders and their location on the borderlands milieu core–periphery continuum. Binational consumers are not included here because they constitute a category composed of members from all subgroups, particularly those in the transnational sector.
ture. She wanted him to learn the English that is spoken in the eastern United States. A college graduate with training in English and journalism, she worked diligently with him on building vocabulary skills and insisted that he read classic works of U.S. and English literature, which he loved. Titles he readily remembers include Emily Bronte’s Wuthering Heights, Pearl Buck’s The Good Earth, Thomas Hardy’s The Return of the Native, Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World, and John Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath. He also recalls discussing these books with his mother.

Hinojosa explains that as a second-generation American his mother lost effective contact with Mexico. Despite growing up in a disadvantaged Mexican American neighborhood, she early developed a strong orientation toward Anglo society and away from her Mexican roots. Further, she was determined that her children would become well-educated, obtain white-collar jobs, and lead middle-class lives. To do that they would have to master the English language. Other relatives on her side of the family reflect that orientation as well. He does not recall much being said about Mexico or about Hispanic culture by members of his mother’s family.

His father’s family, on the other hand, identify strongly with their Mexican heritage, and this has created problems for his mother and for him. They accuse her of being aloof and too Anglo-oriented. They are always making snide remarks about the middle-class neighborhood in which they live and the predominantly Anglo schools her children have attended. They assume that John has mostly Anglo friends and that his Hispanic friends are as Anglicized as he is.

Hinojosa has traveled throughout Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, and he would like to visit the northeastern United States, especially Boston and New York City. His firsthand knowledge of Mexico is confined to brief visits to the city on the other side of the boundary. He relates that his mother has discouraged him from crossing the border, fearing that he will be assaulted or
get in trouble with the Mexican police. Thus the land of his ancestors remains a mystery to him. He has a vague impression that the Mexican government is corrupt, undemocratic, and cares little for the poor. He is embarrassed by the pervasive poverty he has seen in the neighboring Mexican city. Hinojosa seems unperturbed by the fact that he knows little about his Mexican heritage. He understands that his circumstances have put him in the position where he is today. In this sense he appears to be a well-adjusted assimilatist.

Daniel Fisher: Mexican American – Anglo Assimilationist / Daniel Fisher is a twenty-seven-year-old university student who is culturally Anglo, although his mother is a native of Mexico. His father is a retired Anglo army sergeant who feels positively toward Mexican culture but who has paid little attention to the task of cultivating a dual heritage in his children. His mother, on the other hand, has adhered strongly to Mexican values, but Fisher has always resisted her attempts to Mexicanize him. Thus, throughout his life Fisher has sought to be like other mainstream Americans, shunning his Mexican identity.

When he was a child, his mother spoke Spanish to him and he understood her, but he never developed the ability to speak it. What’s more, he had a fear of speaking Spanish because he was inclined to identify with people who spoke English. His father spoke English to him, as did all his friends. “I wanted to Americanize,” he says. “There was a lot of pressure everywhere around me to speak English.” He relates that the kids at school considered English superior to Spanish and Americans superior to Mexicans. The teachers discouraged students from speaking Spanish, criticizing and even punishing them when they did not speak English. Mexico was also the object of much criticism. It was said that Mexicans were poor by choice, that they were lazy, and that they wanted to remain backward. He recalls jokes and insults hurled at Mexicans, and he grew up believing much of what he heard. The presence of chelos (poor Chicano kids who ran around in gangs) at school made it worse for Fisher because they seemed to personify what Mexicans were. “I did not want to be associated with them,” he says.

Thus he felt very ambivalent about his Mexican background. His Anglo last name gave him an advantage, because others assumed he was not a Mexican. He deliberately associated with Anglo children or with Anglicized Mexican Americans. One of his lifelong apprehensions has been that other Mexicans will find out he is half Mexican and consequently assume he will tend to think like them. At that point they will discover how different he is, creating an uncomfortable situation for him and for them. So he avoids settings in which that might happen and continues to associate predominantly with Anglos and assimilated Mexican Americans.

Looking back, he regrets viewing Mexico so negatively and rejecting the Spanish language. He now sees speaking Spanish as an asset and plans to study it. However, he remains steadfast about his commitment to being a mainstream American, and that is how he plans to raise his children. He is strongly opposed to certain Mexican cultural values, and he has had disagreements with his mother over them. His main problem is Catholicism. As a child he went to church with his mother, taking the teachings of the Catholic church at face value, but he gradually became confused and alienated. By the time he was in high school he had stopped going to church, and his mother reluctantly accepted his decision.

Fisher also believes that certain values in Mexican culture hold people back. For example, he believes that the closeness of families makes family members “too dependent on each other.” This keeps the children from developing a “sense of independence,” and from venturing “out on their own.” Fisher is particularly critical of machismo (male dominance). He sees Mexican women being placed at a great disadvantage because of it. He attributes the academic and job success of his three sisters to the absence of a macho environment when they were growing up.

Newcomers

Like other sectors of borderlands society, the Mexican American community includes individuals from the U.S. interior who are new to the border region and who, despite their ethnic affinity with Chicano/Mexican borderlanders, lack the experience and ability to engage in a substantial way in transnational processes. Such newcomers typically come from U.S. urban communities where their families settled permanently when they immigrated from Mexico. Having grown up and lived far from the border, their level of assimilation into U.S. society is relatively high. Many of them, for example, are not very proficient in the Spanish language. Mexican Americans from places like Chicago, Kansas City, and Denver may be found in the large border cities. Most tend to be professionals or businesspeople who have relocated to the borderlands because of job changes or advancement opportunities. Data in Table 4.1 confirm the small size of the Mexican American newcomer sector on the border: approximately 6 percent in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 5.5 percent in El Paso, and 13.6 percent in San Diego.

These newcomers are able to function effectively in the Anglo and middle-class Mexican American communities, but they have little in common with poor border Chicanos or with Mexican nationals. Thus their interaction with the latter two sectors is limited. Mexican American newcomers generally have little understanding of how things work on the Mexican side. Those who are interested in increasing their bilingual and bicultural proficiency take advantage of oppor-
tunities to do so, and if they stay at the border long enough, they become more like standard Chicano borderlanders. Many even make an effort to visit the Mexican side regularly, and in time they may even become true transnational borderlanders. Greg Rocha, whose newcomer status is described below, appears headed in that direction. A fair number of Mexican American newcomers, however, will likely never transcend their status as national borderlanders.

Greg Rocha: Newcomer / A native of Iowa, forty-year-old Greg Rocha has lived in a major U.S. border city for almost four years. He is a highly educated professional who finds the border environment substantially different from the interior United States, especially from the perspective of a Chicano who grew up in an Anglo world. Rocha’s family migrated from Guanajuato, Mexico, to Iowa during the Mexican Revolution. His grandfather wanted to get as far away as possible from the violence that was engulfing his country. His father was a sheet-metal worker who raised four sons in a working-class community outside of Des Moines. To lessen the possibility of discrimination against them for their lack of language skills, his father and mother spoke only English to the children. Rocha relates that his mother in particular experienced discrimination at different times in her life. Inevitably Rocha became Anglicized, but constant visits from relatives kept alive his feeling of Mexicaness. Even though he had nothing in common with his relatives and could not communicate with them in Spanish, he saw them as his link to the land of his ancestors. He maintained a curiosity about Mexico, wanting to visit there sometime.

When he arrived at the border, two things overwhelmed him. One was the great number of Chicanos. Having grown up in a small circle of Mexican American relatives and friends and surrounded by Anglos, he had never seen anything like it. All of a sudden he felt a part of a majority group rather than a minority person. For the first time in his life he could just “melt” into the population, no longer subjected to “those looks” from people (Anglos in Iowa) who made him feel different. His world seemed completely turned around. He was overcome with different emotions, for the most part centered on a feeling of great satisfaction. He was also startled by the many Mexican American businesses all over town. Back home, the only Chicano businessmen he had seen were barber shop and restaurant owners. Having grown up with ubiquitous stereotypes about “lazy” Mexicans, this was a pleasant surprise. There were prosperous-looking Mexican Americans everywhere.

1 On the negative side, the poverty on the border bothered him greatly. He was especially struck by the undocumented migrants who crossed the Rio Grande in such great numbers. As he drove by the river every day, he saw many people desperately making their way into the United States. The sight of families making a “dash for it” across the highway stunned him. In time he came to

know some of these people, and he was impressed with their simplicity and friendliness.

The first time he crossed into Mexico he had the feeling that he was returning home, but he quickly realized that he was very much a stranger in a foreign country. He was a U.S. citizen and culturally an American, but not a Mexican, or even a “Mexicanized” Chicano. He knew relatively little Spanish, and his behavior and clothes were different. Because he looked Mexican, some people would initially treat him as one of them, but then they would quickly find out that he was an American. His inability to communicate easily in Spanish would create awkward and uncomfortable situations. He resolved this problem in his own mind and heart by accepting the reality of his predicament. When the need arose, he would let others know right away that he was a Mexican by ancestry but that his roots and cultural formation were in the interior of the United States. He reports that this approach has worked well in his dealings with Mexicans, whom he describes as very accepting.

While at first Rocha had to make some big adjustments to his new surroundings, he now feels very comfortable on the border. He has taken a “180-degree turn” in his life. Whereas once he believed that getting away from his Mexican heritage was the thing to do, living on the border has changed his thinking. He now identifies strongly with his ethnicity and is making an effort to learn more Spanish.

Transnational Mexican Americans

Disadvantaged Immigrants

Most Mexican immigrants who have recently arrived in the United States may be classified as underprivileged because they reach their adopted country with little education, limited employment skills, and a lack of knowledge of how things function in the United States. Furthermore, numerous hurdles built into U.S. society block their path toward rapid upward mobility, and they usually remain in the lowest economic sector for many years. Clues about the size of the disadvantaged immigrant population on the border can be found in Table 4.1. The Brownsville–Harlingen–San Benito, El Paso, and San Diego SMSAs have large proportions of foreign-born Hispanics, most of whom are poor. Additionally, the percentage of people who speak little or no English ranges from 25.8 to 29.3 percent in the three areas.

Historically, the U.S. border region has served as a major destination for masses of immigrants. There they find employment in the agricultural fields or in low-paying occupations in the cities. For example, the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, the West Texas–southern New Mexico region, the Yuma–San Luis portion of Arizona, and the Imperial Valley of California have large num-
bers of poor immigrants whose main occupation is picking crops. Major border urban areas such as Brownsville, El Paso, and San Diego have sizable concentrations of immigrant laborers who work as maids, gardeners, busboys, and janitors.

Educated and unable to speak English well, these immigrants function on the margin of U.S. border society. They live in poor neighborhoods that often lack basic services such as water, and their life is a constant struggle. The schools attended by their children are often substandard, diminishing the chance for improvement among members of the second generation. Under these conditions, absorbing U.S. cultural norms is very difficult. Conversely, interaction with the Mexican side remains strong.

Despite the pervasive deprivation, however, some underprivileged immigrants somehow beat the odds and escape to better environments, enhancing their opportunities for achieving success in the world of the dominant society. Although not large in number, such upwardly mobile immigrants illustrate the possibility of making the transition in a short time from the bottom of the social order to the middle class. In general, underprivileged immigrant children are in the best position to experience such rapid social change.

The success of disadvantaged but upwardly mobile immigrants springs above all from unusually favorable economic or educational circumstances, but other important factors include hard work, a drive to succeed, and luck. In contrast to other underprivileged immigrants, upwardly mobile persons are able to overcome obstacles in their adoptive society quickly, improve their living standard, and diminish the marginality inherent in their immigrant status. In many cases they are fortunate enough to receive assistance from relatives or friends at crucial points in their lives. Such success stories are usually found in urban centers where opportunities exist to obtain a good education, well-paying jobs, and beneficial interaction with people from the mainstream. Immigrants who are trapped in poor, segregated barrios (neighborhoods) lack access to these things, and rural areas present even fewer possibilities for socioeconomic improvement. Residents of such disadvantaged communities face the prospect of long-term isolation and deprivation.

Upwardly mobile immigrants with access to opportunity and a determination to make the best of it make the transition from Mexicans to Mexican Americans relatively soon after their arrival in the United States. They strive to learn English and to become participants in their new surroundings. They see the United States as their new home; Mexico quickly becomes the "old country." To illustrate the phenomenon of relatively rapid rise to middle-class status among some immigrants, the case of an upwardly mobile person follows the case of a more typical disadvantaged individual who has lived at the lower end of the economic order all her life.

Juanita Vargas: Disadvantaged Immigrant / Born in Sinaloa in 1920, Mrs. Juanita Vargas migrated northward with her mother and brothers and sisters following the death of her father. The family first settled in Mexicali and then Tijuana, where Mrs. Vargas attended school through the fourth grade. She dropped out because she was needed to help out at home and because she had no transportation to attend the nearest school, located some five miles from where she lived. When she was sixteen, she attempted to finish elementary school but considered herself too old and felt out of place. In 1940 Mrs. Vargas married Leonardo Vargas, a U.S.-born Mexican who had settled in Tijuana with his family following their repatriation from San Diego during the Depression. Mr. Vargas recalls very difficult times in Tijuana when he was a young man. He worked at odd jobs, including serving as a helper in his brother's small grocery store. In time Mr. Vargas got a permanent job with a small egg company on the U.S. side and worked for thirty years as a foreman making modest wages.

The Vargases have four children, which Mrs. Vargas helped to support by working in a fish cannery in San Diego. Like her husband, she crossed the border every day until the family moved permanently to San Diego in 1955. Life became a little easier after that, but circumstances required that she continue to work. She eventually retired in 1982 at the age of sixty-two. Mrs. Vargas remembers that the work at the cannery was very demanding, but there were opportunities to make extra money by doing piecework rather than working by the hour. Since the plant was unionized, employees also enjoyed some protection. When workers went on strike, however, there was no income. She recalls one strike that lasted for four months. During that time she worked at a chile cannery to maintain some income.

Today Mr. and Mrs. Vargas live in a modest home in Chula Vista in a predominantly working-class Hispanic area. They are satisfied with the way their lives have turned out, and they are especially pleased that their children are gainfully employed. One is an accountant, another is a personnel administrator, another works in a gun shop, and the fourth is a maintenance worker. Mrs. Vargas is proud that their children are bilingual, something she strived to develop in them at an early age. She recalls she spoke Spanish to them at home, although they answered in English. Mrs. Vargas herself speaks English but is not completely fluent; she is much more comfortable speaking Spanish. Her life has revolved around her family, her work, and her church. Both she and her husband are active in their parish, assisting with a variety of chores and participating in many church activities. Living close to Tijuana and having friends and relatives there have helped them maintain continuous contact with Mexico.

Elena Matthews: Upwardly Mobile Immigrant / Elena Matthews is a thirty-six-year-old woman who immigrated to the United States in the mid-1970s fol-
lowing the marriage of her mother to an American who adopted her children. Today Ms. Matthews is making the transition from Mexican immigrant to Mexican American. She reports that she does not feel like a genuine Mexican anymore because of her residence in the United States for over a decade, but she does not see herself as a Mexican American yet. She still does not speak English fluently enough, nor has she mastered U.S. culture sufficiently. She finds herself at an "in-between" stage, but there is no question she is experiencing profound cultural and social change.

Life in Mexico was very difficult for Ms. Matthews and her seven siblings since their mother, who was raped and abused at an early age, was abandoned by a number of men with whom she had her children. Ms. Matthews suffered many privations when she and several of her brothers were left in the care of her grandmother in a small town in their native Coahuila while their mother worked on the border, where she eventually met her American husband in a brothel during her first day on the job.

The tragic and poverty-stricken life she led in Mexico has made Ms. Matthews deeply grateful for the family's good fortune in being able to immigrate to the United States. She has taken advantage of educational and other opportunities in her adoptive land to become a journalist and community activist. Her case is unusual in that in a relatively short time she has risen from destitution in a Third World country to middle-class status in the United States. Once the family immigrated to the United States, she attended college while holding a full-time job and helping to raise her younger siblings. Now married to a retired Anglo educator who is very supportive of her quest to improve herself, she has been able to participate in many career-enhancement activities, including attending international conferences and studying abroad.

She is ecstatic about her life in the United States. She says she has adapted well to U.S. culture. In her view, this is largely due to her natural interest in other cultures and her ability to accommodate to whatever conditions she encounters, whether in the United States or in other countries. "I adore the United States," she says. "I love Anglo Americans and their culture. I have learned many things from them. I could never return to Mexico. I would not be able to fulfill myself there like I can here." Her fondness for U.S. culture has not eroded her deep affection for Mexican culture, which she practices continuously: "I thrive on Mexican art, music, dance. . . . The parties I enjoy the most are Mexican parties. They leave me with a great deal of satisfaction." Like many other Mexican immigrants, what she dislikes about her homeland is the harshness of the life of the poor and the oppression of the government and those who have economic power. "I feel sad about Mexico," she says. "It is a very difficult world. The more power a person has there, the more he squashes those beneath him. To survive, you need to know the system very well. Being a woman pre-

ents special problems. Mexican men are tough to deal with because of their feelings of domination toward women."

Ms. Matthews and her husband currently reside in a major U.S. border city. Her parents are deceased. She has an older brother whom she has not seen since his disappearance in Mexico at age sixteen. Her remaining three brothers and three sisters are all married and have children. One of the brothers lives in Monterrey, Mexico, where he has "three wives and lots of kids." The others live in the United States with their families.

Advantaged Immigrants

Mexicans from the "advantaged" sectors of society who have relocated to the United States have received relatively little attention from scholars. Perhaps the reason is that these immigrants constitute a relatively small proportion of the overall Mexican immigrant community, which historically has been dominated by people from the working class. Nevertheless, the flow across the border has always included middle, upper middle, and upper class people who left Mexico for economic, political, or personal reasons. During the period of the Mexican Revolution, for example, thousands of affluent Mexicans fled the chaos in their homeland and settled in U.S. border cities. Although some returned to Mexico after the Revolution, others stayed permanently in the United States and eventually became part of the Mexican American community.

In the 1980s another crisis, this time an economic one, again drove affluent immigrants into the United States in significant numbers. Mexico faced bankruptcy as a result of a massive foreign debt and a drastic drop in the price of oil, the nation's most important export. Suddenly the Mexican people confronted a drastically devalued national currency, scarce investment capital, business failures, massive unemployment, and galloping inflation. In their desperation to protect their shrinking assets, many wealthy Mexicans deposited huge sums in U.S. banks, while others purchased real estate or invested in business enterprises in the U.S. border region. Many also bought homes in exclusive neighborhoods in select cities. For example, between 1982 and 1985 an estimated 600 wealthy Mexican families settled in San Diego, many of them in the plush La Jolla area.

Less privileged but still affluent persons such as professionals also immigrated in higher than normal numbers during the 1970s and 1980s. For instance, many Mexican physicians left their country for better opportunities north of the border. Such was the case with Dr. Salvador Montes, who decided it would be best for himself and his family to stay permanently in the United States following a long temporary residence there in connection with his work. Cristina Montes, his wife, relates how the family has adjusted to life in the United States. Contrary to the prevailing pattern, in which adult immigrants, especially affluent ones, seek integration into U.S. society in a passive manner at most, she has actively
pursued it. This is not to say, however, that she has abandoned her traditional lifestyle. She and other members of the family maintain strong ties with relatives and friends in Mexico, frequently crossing the border. What is more, Mrs. Montes closely follows political developments south of the border.

Cristina Montes: Advantaged Immigrant / Mrs. Montes is a housewife in her early forties and is married to a physician with a very successful practice in a major U.S. border city. They first came to the United States in the 1970s when Dr. Montes, who had received his medical training in Mexico, got an "exchange visitor" permit from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service to do his residency in a hospital in Minnesota. Two years later, the family moved to Chicago, where Dr. Montes continued his residency, and that was followed by a year at Baylor University Medical School, where he received specialized training. They then spent some time in Houston, followed by a move to the Texas border, where they made the decision to apply for permanent U.S. residency. By then the family included three U.S.-born children.

In the early 1980s it became very difficult for foreign physicians to obtain U.S. immigrant visas, but an immigration judge who knew the family advised them to persevere until the law was modified. Following a long struggle to become legal U.S. residents, including periods when they had no legal status, Dr. and Mrs. Montes finally managed to get Green Cards in 1984. Mrs. Montes explains that initially she and her husband intended to return to Mexico at the end of his medical residency. At home they had always had a very secure lifestyle, as both came from wealthy Mexican families. As their stay north of the border lengthened, however, their desire to go back weakened as they became accustomed to American life. Dr. Montes realized that if he returned home he would have to start all over again because all his professional experience was in the United States. He would also not be able to utilize fully all the advanced training he had received outside Mexico. Furthermore, conditions greatly deteriorated in his homeland with the onset of the devastating economic crisis of 1982, and the prospects for establishing a good practice and living a comfortable lifestyle looked very unpromising. "It was a great relief when we finally legalized our status," recalls Mrs. Montes. "You cannot believe the feeling. We had been in limbo for so long." She explains that years before they became permanent residents she had already begun to feel that she belonged in the United States. She had developed a love for the country. "Once at a baseball game in Chicago I felt very emotional when they played the national anthem," she says. "I also would cry when I would see Vietnam veterans go unappreciated. I would get angry because nobody seemed to care about them."

Mrs. Montes feels very happy about the way things have turned out. Her husband has a fulfilling and lucrative career, and the family lives well. "It is just like a miracle," she says. "We are very fortunate and feel very grateful. The United States has given us great opportunities. Here, if you want to make it, you can do it. Unlike Mexico, here your success is not dependent upon who you know or who you bribe. It is up to you." Mrs. Montes became a U.S. citizen in 1989 as soon as she became eligible to apply. She was anxious to be a participant in U.S. society, especially to be able to vote. She feels her voice will be better heard in her adopted country, in contrast to her experience in Mexico, where she felt the system made little allowance for participation by ordinary citizens. "We are now Americans," she says. "My kids are not Mexicans. Sometimes we even feel that we are not liked in Mexico. So this is our home now. We will make our stand and fight our battles in the United States."

Binaural Consumers

Attracted by bargains, Mexican Americans along the border do a considerable amount of shopping on the Mexican side, purchasing items such as food, shoes, and clothing, and patronizing service establishments like barber shops, beauty parlors, tailor shops, and upholstery shops. Special occasions such as weddings or quinceañeras (debutante parties) often include activities south of the border, like taking group photographs in a Mexican studio or holding a dance in a Mexican hotel or hall. When the price of gasoline is cheaper in Mexico than in the United States, filling up at the PEMEX service stations is also popular. Finally, recreation provided by Mexican movie theaters, dance halls, discotheques, taverns, and other establishments attracts many Mexican Americans to the Mexican side on weekends.

Consumer patterns vary according to class status, with poor Mexican Americans being attracted in particular by the low prices of certain Mexican foodstuffs, and middle-class Mexican Americans lured especially by inexpensive gasoline, services, and recreation. Among many Chicanos, eating in Mexican restaurants and partying in Mexican night spots are favorite activities. Such trips across the border provide language and cultural reinforcement for Mexican Americans. However, because the establishments visited by consumers tend to be concentrated at or near the tourist districts, little substantial acculturation to Mexican mainstream values and institutions actually takes place. Nevertheless, consumer-motivated border crossings remain culturally significant for many Mexican Americans because they are the only real links they have with the land of their forebears. The case that follows illustrates how superficial such a link can be when the consumers are young Chicanos interested only in the "good times" Mexico can offer them.

Joe Maldonado: Mexican American Binaural Consumer / Joe Maldonado is a twenty-year-old college student who resides in Chula Vista, California, and
who regularly frequents the discotecas of Tijuana. He believes the nightlife on the Mexican side is much better than on the U.S. side because “the atmosphere is much more relaxed, there are more women, and I can drink” (California’s legal drinking age is 21). Apart from crossing the border to party, Mr. Maldonado sometimes does some shopping and eats in restaurants in the tourist district. On occasion he also has his car serviced and washed. Over the past three years he has visited Tijuana an average of twice a month, usually on Saturday nights.

Mr. Maldonado feels his Mexican background and knowledge of Spanish give him an edge on the Mexican side over gringo tourists and partygoers. “The waiters are nicer to me because I can speak some Spanish to them,” he says. “I can also communicate with Mexican women.” Mr. Maldonado recognizes that his knowledge of Mexico and Mexican culture is very superficial, since his only exposure to the land of his parents is the border area. He also realizes that Tijuana is different from the rest of Mexico, but at least his weekend forays give him a chance to speak some Spanish and mingle with Mexicans even if it is in an environment heavily influenced by the United States.

Commuters

In comparison to Mexicans who commute to jobs in the United States—whose numbers are sizable—there are relatively few Mexican Americans who hold jobs in Mexico. The explanation is relatively simple: on the Mexican side there is an abundance of labor and wages are relatively low. Thus there is no demand for unskilled Mexican American workers. However, in some sectors of the Mexican border economy, such as business, education, health, and the maquiladoras, the services that can be provided by educated, bilingual/bicultural Mexican Americans are needed and sought after. Perhaps the most prevalent types of Mexican American commuters are managers, supervisors, and engineers who work for maquiladoras. In the case study below, however, I have chosen a more unusual type of commuter, a teacher who held on to her job in Mexico for many years. Because of the considerable time they spend in Mexico, Mexican American commuters are strong transnational borderlanders. They must function in the Mexican environment, speak Spanish much of the time, and interact socially with Mexicans. Thus the commuting experience considerably strengthens their biculturalism and their understanding of Mexican society.

Gloria Sandoval Caples: Commuter  /  Ms. Sandoval Caples is a forty-two-year-old former elementary school teacher in Mexico who lives on the U.S. side with her Anglo husband and four children. Since she moved to the United States in the late 1960s, she has been in a state of cultural transition, but her ties with Mexico have remained very strong. She continues to think of herself as both Mexican and Mexican American but sees her children as definitely Mexican Americans.

Ms. Sandoval Caples’s parents migrated to the Mexican border city where she grew up when she was six years old. Two years later her father passed away, leaving her mother and the four children in some financial difficulty. She eventually became a teacher and taught school for more than twenty years. She met her Anglo husband under casual circumstances on a shopping trip to the U.S. side. Following several friendly conversations, one day he walked back to Mexico with her and her mother to help with some home repairs. At the time he worked in construction. After that Ms. Sandoval Caples and her new friend saw each other frequently, enjoying each other’s company even though she spoke almost no English and he spoke almost no Spanish. They married in 1967 and established their home in the United States. She immediately became a legal, permanent U.S. resident.

Despite the problems crossing the border on a daily basis and earning a salary paid in constantly devalued pesos, she kept her teaching job on the Mexican side, commuting from one country to the other during the ensuing two decades. As she began to have children, the trips across the border became more problematic, but being able to drop them off at her mother’s house (on the Mexican side) for day care helped considerably. When the children were of school age, Ms. Sandoval Caples simply enrolled them in the school where she taught, figuring that she could be physically close to them. Further, attending a Mexican school would allow the children to learn Spanish well and to establish a strong Mexican identity. Her husband supported her in that decision. In order to avoid legal or bureaucratic problems with Mexican officials, who would surely object to a teacher living in the United States and working in Mexico and having her U.S.-born children in the same school, she never notified the authorities of her change in address. As far as they were concerned, she continued to reside on the Mexican side and her children were Mexican-born. Only the principal at the school and a few teachers who were close friends knew that she resided in the United States and that her children were U.S. citizens.

Like many other Mexicans who had moved across the border, Ms. Sandoval Caples considered life much easier in the United States. She was glad to have the conveniences that are often difficult to find in Mexico. She had been especially bothered by shortages of basic commodities in the stores and frequent interruptions in utility services. Erratic water service had been especially troublesome. In the United States, utility services were very dependable and shopping was easy and convenient, and that made a big difference to her as a working mother. Ms. Sandoval Caples left her teaching job in 1987 when the value of the Mexican currency plunged so low that her earnings became minuscule, given that she had to convert the pesos into dollars for spending on the U.S. side. She
felt great sympathy for her fellow teachers who could not quit as easily as she
could, especially those with families who were forced to take second and third
jobs to survive. Many teachers wound up working evening and night shifts in
maquiladoras.

Ms. Sandoval Caples is generally happy with her life in the United States. She
loves Mexico for its beauty and great culture, but she is saddened by the
many problems the Mexican people have to confront. She sees no genuine de-
mocracy in the political system. For Mexicans, she says, “democracy is only a
dream.” At the same time, she is concerned about certain deficiencies in U.S.
society. She does not like some U.S. values and customs, especially as they
pertain to family life. “Families are badly neglected,” she says. “Parents are too
liberal. There is too much divorce. There is little unity among parents and chil-
dren. Children need more attention.” With respect to Mexican Americans,
Ms. Sandoval Caples believes they need to develop more pride in their cultural
heritage and their native language. They also need to overcome feelings of infe-
riority and social problems within the group. They need to “incorporate” them-
selves better into the national system, avoiding behavior that keeps them on the
fringes of U.S. society.

Biculturalists

The typical Mexican American who lives in the border environment is by de-

dinition a bicultural person, given that she or he has a firm grounding in Mexican
culture and, through long-term residence in the United States, has become sub-
stantially Americanized. The Mexican American biculturalist maintains that bi-
culturalism through constant interaction with others of similar background and
through frequent trips to Mexico as a shopper, tourist, or family visitor. At one
end of the biculturalist spectrum is the economically disadvantaged person who
knows both Spanish and English but because of limited education lacks mastery
over either one and because of his or her marginal status does not have the ability
to interact effectively with either affluent Mexicans or Anglos. In many instances
the disadvantaged biculturalist lives in a world of isolation, material deprivation,
and cultural alienation. The opposite is true for the versatile biculturalist at the
other end of the spectrum, typically a middle-class person with sufficient formal
education and knowledge of U.S. and Mexican culture to function comfortably
in both, enriching his or her own Mexican American lifestyle by picking and
choosing from what the Mexican and Anglo worlds have to offer. Some parents,
for example, enroll their children in private schools on the Mexican side to assure
they will learn Spanish well and become familiarized with Mexican culture at an
early age.

Most Mexican American biculturalists take their biculturalism for granted,
accepting it as a normal feature of life in the region. There is a feeling that border
society has always functioned this way and there is no reason to believe that
things will change. There are some, however, who feel that the group cannot
afford to take the extran climate for granted. They see real danger in the activities
of U.S. groups that seek to safeguard the “purity” of American culture and the
English language. The response of many Mexican American biculturalists to
English Only movements and attacks on bilingual education is to promote mul-
ticultural awareness and understanding while strengthening the biculturalism of
the Mexican American community by disseminating knowledge about Mexican
history and culture.

I include in the biculturalist category militant Chicanos who may speak out
against assimilation into the U.S. mainstream and who may also promote the
idea of the creation of a Chico “nation.” This type of rhetoric was common
among the youth in the borderlands during the Chicano Movement of the 1960s,
especially in California. Since then such talk has almost disappeared, and few
Chicanos actively pursue separatist agendas. In reality, the great majority of
those who have advocated separatism have used the issue primarily to attract
media and government attention to community problems. Ironically, some Chi-
cano leaders (especially in the interior borderlands) have been highly assimilated
individuals who have often had limited command of the Spanish language and
have not practiced Mexican culture in a substantial way. Their rage originates in
large measure from their feeling cut off from their own heritage because of per-
vasive anti-Mexicanism in Anglo society, especially within educational institu-
tions. In short, the only difference between typical Mexican American bicultu-
ralists and Chico militants is that the former follow a rather low-key approach
to group issues, while the latter aggressively advocate on behalf of their com-

Ana María Osante Zubia: Bicultural / Ana María Osante Zubia is a U.S.-
born Mexican American secretary in her fifties who has lived in the U.S. border
area most of her life. Her parents were immigrants who instilled pride in her
Mexican heritage and made sure she learned Spanish well. Ms. Osante Zubia
exemplifies the Mexican American biculturalist who is able to function very
effectively in her own group as well as among Mexicans and Anglos. She reports
that she speaks English half the time and Spanish the other half, and that about
three-fourths of her friends and acquaintances are Mexican Americans and the
rest about equally divided between Mexicans and Anglos. She enjoys both Mexi-
can and U.S. pop culture from television to music and dancing.
As a young woman, Ms. Osante Zubia married a wealthy Spanish engineer who lived in the United States. Shortly thereafter he took her to Mexico City, where they lived for five years. After they returned to the United States, they got a divorce. The marriage produced two daughters. Following her divorce, Ms. Osante Zubia began working as a secretary in a university but later worked in the private sector and in a civil-service position. Eventually she returned to the university, where she remains employed.

A politically and community minded citizen, Ms. Osante Zubia was active in one of the councils of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) for ten years. She served in several positions, including Secretary and Council President. She has also been active in a Spanish-speaking chapter of Toastmaster’s International, rising to be president of the group. Her other community activities include membership in a state commission for women and in Hispanic women’s organizations.

Ms. Osante Zubia is very fond of Mexico because of the positive attitudes passed on by her parents and because of her direct experience of living in that country. Her father used to tell her, “Don’t forget who you are.” As a child she used to spend summers with relatives in a Mexican city a few hundred miles from the border. Her years in Mexico City during her marriage also left positive impressions about the people and the culture. She believes Mexicans are generally happier than Americans, that they express more love within the family, and that they are more generous. But Ms. Osante Zubia is highly critical of Mexico’s political system and social structure. She believes that the government does terrible things and that many in the upper classes live hypocritical lives. When she lived among the affluent in Mexico City, she noticed a hypocritical attitude among many women. They criticized the pocho (culturally corrupted) lifestyle of Mexican Americans but in many ways lived like that themselves. For example, they preferred U.S. products and took vacations abroad. Many of them also drank excessively and had lovers.

Ms. Osante Zubia likes her life in the United States and believes that Anglos are not terribly different from Mexican Americans. Most are good people. She sees U.S. culture as a mixture of many cultures, a melting pot that nevertheless allows her to enjoy her own culture. She also believes that, with all its faults, the United States has the best political system in the world, and she feels very patriotic toward her country. Her political allegiance to the United States is revealed in two incidents in which she was involved. Once when she was at a party in Mexico City, a young Mexican activist arrived from an anti-U.S. demonstration with a torn-up U.S. flag. The guests seemed to relish the young man’s anti-U.S. rhetoric and demonstrated disdain for the U.S. flag. She was offended by their behavior and asked how they would feel if they found themselves in the United States and someone walked into a party with a torn Mexican flag. She then left the party. On another occasion in the United States she saw some Chicano demonstrators carrying the Mexican flag. She told them they were wrong to do that, that they should carry the U.S. flag instead because they were Americans.

Despite her strong identification with and support of the United States, Ms. Osante Zubia does not feel fully integrated into U.S. society. She sees herself as a person of Mexican descent who resides in the United States. She has experienced an inner struggle because of her different ethnic background and cultural dualism. At times she has wondered who she really is. Her ambivalence is illustrated by her lack of enthusiasm for some American holidays, such as Thanksgiving. “I cannot relate to a big table with a turkey and all the trimmings, but I can relate to mole, tamales, and champurrado because that is what we would have on Thanksgiving Day when I was a child. My father did not like turkey, so my mother fixed Mexican dishes. We went to mass on that day. It was just like a Sunday. My parents were not anti-Anglo. That is just the way they celebrated Thanksgiving.”

She considers her daughters fortunate for having grown up totally in the U.S. milieu without any direct personal connection with Mexico. This has spared them the insecurities and confusion she has often felt, knowing that she is neither a Mexican nor a “mainstream” American. She sees her daughters living a life just like other young people in the United States. They speak English fluently and practice the dominant culture, including listening to Anglo music almost all the time. One daughter is engaged to a young Anglo man, and Ms. Osante Zubia has gotten to know her future in-laws and likes their lifestyle. She has even celebrated a traditional Anglo Thanksgiving with them.

**Binationalists**

Mexican American binationalists have deep cross-border roots and strong, intense, and constant interaction with people from both countries. These individuals are usually of a middle class or higher background and have business interests, investments, or property in both countries, and their families straddle the border. In many cases, the extended family includes Anglos who have intermarried with family members. Mexican American binationalists live on the U.S. side, but they spend much time on the Mexican side—including frequent overnight stays in connection with business or personal matters—that Mexico provides a secondary residence and/or place of business or employment.

By definition, Mexican American binationalists are also biculturalists, and in many cases, business or professional commuters as well. As consumers of goods and services from both nations, they are also binational consumers. In short, Mexican American binationalists, more than members of other categories, per-
sonify in the widest range possible the process of transnational interaction and transculturation. They are truly major bridges of cultural bonding and of understanding and cooperation across the border.

Lillian González: Bilingualist / Ms. González is a thirty-six-year-old professional who has held a variety of jobs on both sides of the border related to language training, social work, and health care. Currently she works for an international health organization as a coordinator and trainer in preventive care pertaining to venereal diseases, including AIDS. She spends most of her working time on the Mexican side while maintaining a residence on the U.S. side. At the personal level, she splits her time between one side of the border and the other, since some family members and friends live and work in the United States and others in Mexico.

Ms. González's process of becoming a bilingualist began when her grandmother, who was then living in a Mexican border area city, chose to give birth to Lillian's mother in a U.S. border city where medical services were better than those available on the Mexican side, though the family continued to live in Mexico. Years later, Lillian's mother followed her mother's example and had her children in the United States as well, so Lillian became an instant U.S. citizen at her birth. The family remained on Mexican soil, however, and Lillian attended elementary and secondary schools in Mexico. She attended high school in the United States during her senior year, which she remembers as a traumatic experience because the social adjustment proved very difficult for her. Though her knowledge of English was limited, she did well academically because of the good foundation provided by the Mexican private schools she had attended. What proved challenging was getting used to the "barbarian" American students, the football players who almost knocked her down once, the drug users, and the biased individuals who had terribly distorted perceptions of Mexico. Upon graduation, Lillian attended a U.S. border area university but then transferred to the University of the Americas in Puebla, Mexico, and later to William Smith College in New York, where she received her B.A. She also did graduate work in other Mexican and U.S. universities, finally receiving an M.A. in public health from the University of North Carolina.

Her parents moved to the U.S. side in 1981 at a time of great inflation in Mexico when the cost of housing seemed lower north of the border. They lived in a big house in Mexico and wanted a smaller one but could find nothing suitable on the Mexican side. Since her mother was a U.S. citizen, the move did not present any problems for her. Her father, however, had to become a legal U.S. resident, though for some time he lived on the U.S. side without the documentation required by U.S. authorities. In effect, for her parents the move from one country to another meant little more than moving from one neighborhood to another. They still own the big house in Mexico and constantly go back and forth across the boundary.

Unlike her parents, who remain culturally Mexican despite their U.S. residence, Ms. González is thoroughly bilingual and equal effectiveness on both sides of the border. She has been able to obtain grants from the U.S. federal government to conduct health-related projects on the U.S. side and to work for Mexican organizations, carrying on her duties on the Mexican side. Her versatility in being able to function professionally in both environments is remarkable.

In response to questions about her feelings toward the two societies of which she is a part, Ms. González expresses gratification as well as ambivalence. "Mexico," she says, "evokes emotions in me similar to what I feel about my mother. All the nurturing that I have received as a human being has come from Mexico. Thus I feel many things and have many memories, but not all are pleasant. It pains me that Mexico lacks democracy, that a group of people controls the country." Ms. González expresses admiration for the United States because of its democratic system and the freedoms enjoyed by its people. "I feel very comfortable with Anglo culture. I know Mexicans who are antagonistic that way, but they tend to be oversensitive. However, I dislike American values like consumerism, materialism, and preoccupation with social status." She also deplores American interventionism abroad, especially in Latin America, and the discriminatory treatment of ethnic minorities such as African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Indians.

She considers herself a Mexican American, but some of the implications of being identified that way bother her. Her strong cultural identification with Mexico makes it imperative that she not be put in a situation where her personal identity becomes diluted in the great U.S. melting pot. "Sometimes I feel at the margin of Mexican American society," she says. "I find it especially hard to identify with assimilated Mexican Americans. I can't stand someone who rejects Mexican culture. That upsets me because I feel personally rejected, because I am at heart Mexican."

Her binational orientation is most clearly seen in her conscious decision not to become a voter in either Mexico or the United States. Despite her U.S. birth, she wishes to vote in Mexico she could do so because she retains "functional" dual citizenship, arranged long ago by her parents for the purpose of bestowing upon her the widest possible latitude during her life. "I have Mexican papers," she says. "When I was eighteen I thought of turning in my U.S. papers and declaring myself solely as a Mexican citizen, but my parents didn't let me. They thought I was too young to decide." Now she does not feel like a citizen...
of either country, and she has placed her own limit on her political rights. She feels entitled to engage in political activity in both countries, such as attending demonstrations in Mexico and participating in political campaigns in the United States, both of which she has done. But she considers actually casting a ballot too decisive a step to take. “Voting in one country,” she says, “will invalidate belonging to the other, and I want to be a part of both, I am a part of both.” As time passes, however, she feels more and more attracted to U.S. politics, especially as they affect the interests of Mexican Americans and other minority groups. If she does become a voter in the future, she thinks it will be in the United States, both because of her concern with the conditions among U.S. minorities and because “a vote in the United States counts more than a vote in Mexico.”

Conclusion

Mexican American borderlanders are an important segment of the larger Hispanic population that has spread throughout the United States and whose assimilation into the mainstream society is following patterns reminiscent of other ethnic groups. Such trends are clearly evident along the border, but the proximity to Mexico inevitably has slowed the rate of integration for many people, in particular those in the ranks of the disadvantaged.

The most salient characteristic of Mexican American borderlanders is the intensity of their transnationalism, which is not surprising, because powerful historical forces have shaped a profound and enduring relationship with the Mexican side. Of the three major groups discussed in this work, Mexican Americans most closely resemble a transborder population, people whose living space transcends an international boundary. In many ways they are an in-between population, caught between competing ways of life and contrasting worldviews. But long ago they came to terms with their minority status in the United States and their ambivalent relationship with Mexico. Their adjustment to a dual way of life has been eased by direct and substantial participation in the shaping of the transboundary system in which they function, and on the whole they have managed to cope well enough with the challenges posed by cultural marginality.

In seeking a way to summarize in human terms what it means to be a Mexican American from the border, I decided to venture into the realm of poetry, notwithstanding my lack of experience with this medium.

CHICANO BORDERLANDER

A Chicano borderlander,
I am,
Part Mexican, part American.

Two currents feed my soul:
one southern, mestizo, Third World,
one northern, Anglo-Saxon, First World.
Straddling two nations, two cultures,
belonging to both, belonging to neither.
One moment totally sure of who I am,
the next baffled by my duality.
Bilingual, bicultural, binational,
embracing two social systems,
assuming multiple identities,
criss-crossing ethnic boundaries,
negotiating and taming opposing worlds.
Spare me the hellish choice
of taking sides
between the United States and Mexico.
One is my home, the other my nurturer.
On the border,
conflict of the heart or of the nation
has but one cure:
recognition of jointness
and jointness in resolution.