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Chapter 6

PERMANENT WORKING CLASS
MEXICAN AMERICANS

They are the only ones who understand me. I am the only one who understands them. Four skinny trees with skinny necks and pointy elbows like mine. Four who do not belong here but are here. . . . When I am too sad and too skinny to keep keeping, when I am a tiny thing against so many bricks, then it is I look at trees. When there is nothing left to look at on this street. Four who grew despite concrete. Four who reach and do not forget to reach. Four whose only reason is to be and be.

—Sandra Cisneros

Introduction

This chapter will examine the three types of working-class Mexican Americans who live permanently in Middlewest: seasonal workers, factory workers, and the working poor.

The family histories of permanent Mexican Americans in Middlewest show that most families first came to Idaho as migrant workers. Only three generations of Mexican Americans have lived in Idaho. I asked local Mexican Americans how and why they exited the migrant stream. Most migrant parents responded that a life of migration had a negative effect on their children’s education. They recognized that their children missed significant periods of school at both the beginning and the end of the school year. One Anglo myth contends that Mexican Americans do not value education, but I found that the goal and dream of most Mexican American parents is that their children will not have to work in the fields. Other migrants said that they just got
exhausted migrating and felt they could not continue the migrant lifestyle. Several migrant families said they had no choice—they did not have the money to return to Texas.

Many subjects said that the key factor in establishing permanent residency is finding full-time employment. For many migrants, finding steady work occurred as the consequence of having family and relatives who had already “settled-out.” A Mexican American’s relatives are a valuable resource because they may provide their homes as temporary housing and assist their migrant relatives in securing work. When necessary, resident Mexican Americans provide the necessities of life to their exiting relatives.

**Seasonal Workers**

The seasonal farm worker has not left field work, but the family now lives year-round in Middlewest or in a labor camp. The men often work nearly year-round for one farmer, participating in many types of farm labor and working closely with the Anglo farmer. This work includes repairing farm equipment, driving tractors, and irrigating the land. Sometimes the farmer provides these workers with a pickup truck and a modest house.

Seasonal workers usually still face a period of unemployment during part of the winter. Only the larger farms require seasonal workers, but Farm County has many of these among its more than 3,300 farms. The income for seasonal workers on these farms ranges from $8,000 to $15,000 a year. Many have worked for the same farmer for ten to fifteen years, yet their wages remain only slightly above the minimum wage standard. Considering the fact that many Mexican Americans have large families, most seasonal workers’ incomes do not rise above the government’s poverty category. Most seasonal workers have no health insurance or retirement benefits.

Rolando Salinas has been a seasonal worker for many years. He first came to Idaho in the 1950s in a large canvas-covered truck with twenty-five other men to work in the beet fields. His family was among the first Mexican Americans to settle permanently in Middlewest. Rolando works for one farmer about ten
months a year for $10,000. His wife Carmen works part-time for a seed company; she earns $6,000 a year. The couple has nine children, whose ages range from nine to thirty years old.

Rolando’s son Ruben was born in Middlewest. He claimed that his junior high school teachers told him and his friends to stop coming to school. Ruben said that most of the teachers think Mexican Americans are not intelligent. In junior high school many Mexican American children do drop out of school. Both the father and son believe that racism is a serious problem in Middlewest. As an example, Ruben said that he and his friends got into a fight with some Anglo boys. He reported that he and his Mexican American friends had to go to court, where they were placed on probation, but the Anglo boys did not receive any punishment. Ruben has had several part-time jobs, including working in the fields. He also works for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for eight to ten weeks in the summer fighting fires. Ruben feels that he only earns a decent wage when he is working as a fire fighter.

Rolando dislikes the government’s program to bring H2A workers from Mexico, because he thinks it reduces his wages. These H2A workers are brought in from Mexico with government assistance, by the request of farmers, when local workers are not available. He adamantly opposes the English language bill. He says, “My brother was killed in World War II and they [Anglos] think we are not loyal to America unless we speak English.”

Rolando’s younger children speak more English than they do Spanish. They go to Sunday mass less frequently and think that some Mexican American traditions are “old-fashioned.” Nevertheless, Rolando thinks his younger children retain their ethnicity and that the family still has close ties. They gather almost every weekend for dinner. Rolando has served on the board of the IMC and also has served on the Middlewest school board.

Raul Soto, another seasonal worker, has worked for the same farmer for twenty years and in 1990 earned $12,000 with no benefits. Raul said that his family has kept their traditional Mexican way of life—they speak Spanish at home and they mostly
eat Mexican food. Raul said, "God made the man the head of the household." The family of one of Raul’s married daughters lives with Raul’s family. Juanita met her husband in the fields. He came to Idaho as a migrant worker from Mexico and he speaks little English. Most of Raul’s family works in the fields; he has one daughter, Maria, who commutes to Boise to work for a computer company. Maria said she misses the fields because she likes being able to work with the whole family. Eva, Raul’s youngest daughter, talked about her school experience: "I graduated with one of the highest grade averages in school. My favorite teacher said I would be receiving several awards at the awards assembly. I was very anxious during the ceremonies. I waited and waited; I never got an award. It was the saddest day of my life.... I attended the university last year, but I knew I could never be somebody; so I dropped out."

Arnold Cordova is a seasonal worker; his wife, Carol, works as a teacher’s aide. In 1990 they earned $13,000 combined. At fourteen years of age Arnold quit school and got married. During the months when Arnold and Carol are unemployed, they have to live with Arnold’s parents. Carol dislikes the frequent moves. She claims that Anglos intimidate Arnold. As an example, Carol mentioned that the farmer for whom Arnold works has him working in fields recently sprayed with pesticides. Arnold has been coming home with a terrible rash but refuses to talk to the farmer about this problem.

Carol’s family has lived in Middlewest for much longer than has Arnold’s family. She has a higher degree of assimilation, whereas Arnold prefers to speak Spanish and eat Mexican food. Carol received assistance from the Idaho Migrant Council to obtain her GED (high school equivalency diploma) and CDA (Child Development Associate) certificate. Her first employment, as is the case with many young Mexican American women, was as a teacher’s aide with the IMC. Carol wants her family to have better jobs and become economically successful. She says that she intends to enroll in college when Arnold obtains a factory job. The Cordovas have one daughter and do not plan to have more children because they want their daughter to have a better chance to become successful.
At the time of my interview, the hospital had garnisheed Arnold's check because he had not paid his daughter's bill for having her appendix removed. The spring farm work had not begun and, consequently, the family had not made its past two car payments. Carol and Arnold believe that Mexican Americans face a harsh racial climate in Middlewest. As an example, Carol said that a school bus driver kept their daughter, but not the Anglo children, on the bus after school for being noisy. The driver then inadvertently left the girl on the bus in the garage. When Carol and a school administrator found her several hours later, she was crying and had urinated on herself. The school principal did not take any disciplinary action against the bus driver. The school never offered an apology and the family had no money to hire a lawyer. Carol is a teacher's aide in a local elementary school. She reported that some Anglo youth call Mexican Americans names and that some Anglo teachers do not like Mexican American children. "They don't say it, but you can just tell, they talk to and help the Anglo kids more."

Carol concluded her remarks on race relations as follows: "It's hard not to dislike Anglos. The way they look at us, the way they treat our children in school. The newspapers just give the Anglos a reason to dislike us and look down on us. The police see us as troublemakers. They pull you over to see if they can get you for anything."

Coco and José Gómez are both in their forties. Coco grew up in Texas and José in Mexico. They have lived twenty-two years in Middlewest. Coco and José feel pride knowing that they own their home. They said the Idaho Migrant Council has been a blessing. The IMC weatherized their small home with insulation and new windows. José is not a United States citizen; he cannot read or write English. He has always worked in the fields. Coco has worked for seventeen years for a seed company where she earns $18,000 a year. She has had several promotions; most of the company's Mexican American women earn far less. Coco and José perceive racism to be a problem in Middlewest. Coco claims that her company hires and promotes Anglos first. The Gómez children have had problems in school. The high school suspended a son and a daughter; the school authorities claimed
that the son stole school property and that the daughter had a knife at school. Coco said they took the school to court and won in both cases. She said that her brother-in-law had recently lost his job with a seed company because the supervisor maintained he came to work under the influence of drugs; Coco claimed that her brother-in-law has never taken drugs, however.

José works seasonally for a prominent farmer who has related agricultural businesses and whose family has a high profile in Republican party politics. José earns less than minimum wage and works six days a week. He claims that the Anglo workers receive turkeys and beef as gifts, but the Mexican Americans do not, and he thinks the bosses consistently treat the Anglo workers better.

A subset of seasonal workers can be classified as temporary/seasonal workers. These workers have an unstable work life; they work periodically in the fields, but for no one farmer. They also try to obtain work in the packing sheds and in the sugar factory. Both jobs last approximately four months. Some summers they fight fires for the Bureau of Land Management. These workers generally have long periods of unemployment. Thus their incomes seldom rise above the poverty level. Many temporary/seasonal workers live in the farm labor camps.

I interviewed Jesse and Carlota Ortego in the Middlewest labor camp in the early spring. The apartment was freezing cold though Carlota had turned on all the gas burners on the stove. We sat with our coats on. Sally, the couple’s youngest daughter, had just come home from the hospital, where she had been treated for pneumonia. The apartments at the labor camp have no insulation and inadequate heat. I wondered if the doctor would have released Sally if he was aware of her housing situation.

Jesse once had five jobs in one year. At the time of the interview he did not have a job but anticipated returning to the fields later in the spring. He receives $180 a month in unemployment compensation and the family receives $370 in food stamps each month. In 1990 their combined income was less than $11,000. The Ortegos have little money to pay their bills. A Middlewest loan company required additional payments
beyond the contract period because of late payments on their loan; the Ortegos had made payments for seven months longer than stated in the original contract. They did not know the name and address of the local legal aid office.

The police arrested Jesse twice in 1990 on DUI (driving under the influence of alcohol) charges. He no longer had a valid driver’s license and he had just completed a rehabilitation program. Carlota had recently pled guilty to a charge of shoplifting. I interviewed several other young Mexican American families in similar circumstances. The bleak and painful effects of poverty became all too real for me. As I left the labor camp, I wondered what would happen to the Ortegos and their three small children. None of the local politicians seem to be talking about finding a solution to this problem.

**Factory Workers**

During my field research I interviewed fifty working-class Mexican American families in Middlewest. Most worked in food processing plants that employ large numbers of Mexican American workers. Their salaries ranged from $9,000 to $25,000 a year. The local Mexican American male factory worker’s salary averages $15,000; the Mexican American female factory worker’s salary averages $9,000. In many Mexican American families both the husband and wife work in a factory, which means that some working-class families have a combined income of $25,000. Most of the factory families have four or five children and own modest homes.

A few of the Mexican American factory workers have become supervisors and two have achieved management status. Most Mexican American workers think that Mexican Americans have not received promotions to supervisory positions or management positions in anywhere near the proportion as have Anglo workers.

José Medina has worked in a food-processing plant for twenty-one years. He has the responsibility for production on the night shift and earns $33,000 a year. His wife also works in the plant; she earns $12,000. José said his job involves
supervising the foremen and making sure production remains as efficient as possible. He has a high school education and has learned everything on the job. He said he obtained his position by working harder than anybody else and by having common sense.

All of the local factories have special categories of work for most of the women. They do the lighter work, which they commonly describe as being boring, mundane, and unskilled. They have much less opportunity for promotion to higher paying jobs. I interviewed several Mexican American women who had worked fifteen years for their companies and still earn less than $12,000 dollars a year.

**Drive to Success**

Approximately 25 percent of the Mexican American factory workers I interviewed want to own a business or advance into managerial positions despite their limited opportunities. Several of these workers have two jobs. Roberto Ramos and his brother-in-law both are blue-collar workers at a local potato-processing plant. They work different shifts to allow them to manage their restaurant. Their wives and older children also work at the restaurant, which has succeeded to the point that the brothers can anticipate becoming full-time businessmen. Roberto’s wife, Sara, has enrolled in a business-management program at a vocational school. She has learned computer and accounting skills that will enhance the management of the restaurant. Roberto went to night school to obtain his GED. The Ramos families told me they work as hard as possible because they want their children to attend college.

Both Roberto and Sara believe that Midwest has a horrendous race problem and that their three children have suffered from discrimination at school. They moved their son to another school because they believe his teacher had systematically discriminated against him. The final incident occurred when this teacher took a picture of each child for the bulletin board; she did not take their son’s picture.

Emilda Sota projects an intense demeanor. Emilda shared
with me her work strategies that led to her promotion to a supervisory position at a local factory. She wants to advance further but she only has a high school education. This young woman radiates enthusiasm and intelligence. I could not help but speculate on the career she might achieve if she is given the opportunities.

A third example of the drive for economic success comes from Tino Ruiz. He works days as a factory worker and remodels houses in the evenings and on his days off. He and his wife buy inexpensive run-down houses and remodel them. They then sell the homes for a profit. They are making good money and intend to expand this work into a full-time business. Tino said, “Yes, there is prejudice in Middlewest, but I am too busy to worry about it.”

**Dual-Income Factory Workers**

Joe and Juanita Cedano are in their late thirties; they both arrived in Middlewest as children of migrant workers. Their combined income approaches $40,000 a year. Joe works in a local factory and Juanita works as a government examiner. They each have worked for their present employers for more than fifteen years. Their lifestyle resembles that of Anglos to a greater extent than does the lifestyle of most other local Mexican American families. They have more Anglo friends and they live in a Anglo neighborhood. Joe plays golf and softball; Juanita likes to go out to dinner and to the movies. They are members of the Catholic church, but they seldom attend mass. They recognize that not many Mexican American families can afford their lifestyle; however, they believe that it is the parents’ fault for taking their kids to the fields. Their own parents made sure they graduated from high school. They think that some Mexican Americans cause their own problems.

The Cedanos take pride in the fact that their oldest son is a college student. They recognize that their children have become assimilated more than have most Mexican American children. The youths’ grandparents dislike the fact that the youngsters do not speak fluent Spanish. The oldest boy encountered
resentment from his fellow Mexican Americans in high school because of his good grades and Anglo friends.

The Cedanos do not perceive as high a level of racism as do most Mexican Americans in Middlewest. They also do not participate as much in the Mexican American culture of Middlewest; however, they do know the Mexican American leaders. They voted for the Mexican American candidates to the state legislature and they make contributions to Mexican American organizations. In spite of their success, this family has not been able to avoid some racist experiences. Juanita works for a government agency where some Anglos refuse to be assisted by a Mexican American. The police arrested their youngest son at a football game for fighting. Joe said: "There was this hassle between the Anglo boys and the Mexican American boys. The police just arrested the Mexican American boys. They handcuffed my son like a common criminal. I can tell you we were pretty upset parents. They think all Mexicans are criminals."

Ricardo and Sara Núñez have both worked at a food-processing plant for more than fifteen years. Together, they earn $38,000 a year. They live in a middle-class Anglo neighborhood and drive a Volvo. They and their children have mostly Anglo friends. They have fretted over the arrest of a relative because they believe it gives the whole family a bad name. Ricardo says that the family spends most of its leisure time participating in sports: the boys participate in several sports and Ricardo coaches baseball. They attend most of the high school and college games in Middlewest.

When the discussion turns to Mexican American ethnicity and racism, the family recognizes that their family has become assimilated more than most. The children do not speak fluent Spanish and they do not attend mass regularly. However, the family does participate in most of the regular socials with their relatives. They donated money to Juan Celedón's political campaign and voted for him.

The Núñez family has had its share of racist encounters. Ricardo reported that Anglo parents sometimes hurl racial comments at him when he is coaching baseball. At work, his employers hire Anglos first and he has to work twice as hard
because the supervisors think all Mexicans are lazy. During breaks at work, the Mexican American and Anglos workers stay segregated by race. Ricardo likes living in Middlewest because all of his family and relatives live in Middlewest. He summed up his sense of race relations: "It is OK if you [a Mexican American] succeed as long as you don't get beyond the Anglos. If you do, you are not a good Mexican."

Economically successful Mexican Americans almost always are those who have lived and worked longer in Middlewest. Their parents and relatives generally have stable employment. More successful Mexican Americans commonly graduate from high school. They perceive less racism than do most Mexican Americans; they speak less Spanish at home and they have more Anglo friends. They have fewer children on average, and their children have a higher degree of assimilation. They seldom live in the barrio district. They usually attend church less frequently and they often have contacts with people who work in personnel offices for companies and government employment agencies—which enables them to be apprised of the job market. They are more likely to enter interracial marriages. They also often speak English without an accent.

**Accounting for Economic Success**

The ethnic literature (Feagin 1989; Schaefer 1991) reveals that when a minority remains small, the dominant community feels less threatened and therefore the minority group faces less racism and has increased employment opportunities. The Mexican Americans who first settled in the Middlewest area generally have the most secure and highest paying factory jobs.

Does the employment success described above mean that any Mexican American can succeed if he or she only tries? Unfortunately, not necessarily. First, the success of Mexican American factory workers has limitations—most factory-worker families have an income that would classify them as lower working class. Their lack of access to educational opportunities means that they also lack access to most middle-class professions. Also, most Mexican Americans in and near Middlewest do not have factory
jobs, and their incomes barely rise above the poverty line. Critical factors in the local economy are the lack of good jobs and the overabundance of workers.

The interviews I conducted do not easily illuminate the causes of economic success for Mexican Americans. Does the more economically successful Mexican American person participate in assimilative behavior that leads to a better job, or does the better job enable the person holding it to assimilate? Obviously, the two factors are interrelated and reinforce one another. Children whose parents have better jobs and a higher degree of assimilation undoubtedly have a higher probability for success.

If a Mexican American has been successful in school and has a better job then he or she will have increased social interaction with Anglos, which will increase assimilation. The assimilation under discussion has limitations, because most Mexican Americans retain an "ethnic loyalty," as Keefe and Padilla (1987) found in their research. How much does Mexican American ethnicity impede economic success? I think that Anglo racism is a critical variable, and it helps explain the high level of poverty of Mexican Americans in Middlewest. The vast majority of resident Mexican American adults work in the secondary job market for low wages and part-time employment.

I interviewed several Mexican Americans who had dropped out of school but later attended an alternative school in order to obtain their high school equivalency diploma. Many Mexican American youths have attended the Center for Employment Training, the Idaho Migrant Council training programs, and/or the local vocational training school. Mexican Americans in Middlewest have received training as welders, secretaries, teacher's aides, bookkeepers, and mechanics, to name some of the popular programs. The fact that they obtained these credentials indicates the high motivation and determination of some Mexican Americans, since most of the Mexican Americans that I interviewed completed these programs while working and maintaining their family responsibilities.

José Pardo, for example, came to Middlewest for many years as a son of a migrant family. Eventually he married, but he
remained on the migrant trail. He finally settled-out because he wanted his children to obtain an education. The IMC enrolled José in a local vocational-technical welding program. He now is earning $18,000 in a machine shop. He also works part-time, training Mexican American welders in a program sponsored by the IMC. José remarked, "The IMC changed my life; I serve on their board now, I do all I can to support them."

**Working Poor**

Another group of Mexican Americans work in a variety of jobs. The common characteristic of these families is that their income barely exceeds the poverty level. The working poor frequently slip into poverty. The most common economic situation involves the wife working as a paraprofessional and the husband having a low-income factory job.

Norma and Lorenzo Cortez represent this type of family. Norma started her work career in the fields after she dropped out of high school. Norma later completed her GED and a secretarial program with the assistance of the Idaho Migrant Council. Upon graduation Norma worked for the IMC, but since then she has had several jobs. Her low income stimulated her to enroll in a vocational program to become a medical assistant.

Lorenzo has also held many working-class positions. His work record indicates that he often has been laid off because he lacks seniority. He currently works at a food-processing plant, but the company wants to fire him because they think he drinks on the job. Lorenzo says his life has become miserable; because of the harassment of the Anglo supervisor and Anglo workers, he does not know how much longer he can continue this work. Lorenzo receives the worst job assignments at the plant. He plans to quit and enroll in a vocational training program once Norma has a job.

Isabel Jiménez works part-time in the fields and her husband, Abel, works for a local seed company. Abel often goes several months a year without work. Their combined income for 1990 was less than $15,000. They live in a broken-down trailer in
the Chicago district of Middlewest. Isabel does not like living in the Chicago district. One of her neighbors sold drugs, which led to a police raid on the house. She fears letting her girls walk to school because some single migrant Mexican Americans have been harassing girls. The couple has five children; the two oldest dropped out of school when the junior high school vice-principal told them they would not graduate because they engaged in disruptive behavior at school. Isabel began to cry, “We stopped migrating from Texas, for the kids, [so they] would have a better life. Now I am afraid to let them go outside because of the gangs. And my kids—we wanted better—are going to end up in the fields.”

Amalia Vásquez and her husband believe that they both lost their factory jobs because of their Mexican heritage. They think the employers always favor Anglo workers. Amalia had several jobs the year following the loss of her factory job. She worked as a cook, a laborer in an apple shed, and as a teacher’s aide. Her husband worked four months at the sugar factory and then had a series of minimum-wage jobs. Their combined income for 1990 was $17,000—counting their unemployment money.

The couple has nine children. She said that most of her kids hate going to school because the teachers think they cannot do the assignments. Amalia reported that Jesse, the third-oldest son, came home crying from school and said he never wanted to go back because the teacher made fun of him. His parents made him go back, but he quit school in the eighth grade. Amalia said she could not blame her son. However, Jesse could not find work because of his age. Amalia said that he started running around with the wrong crowd, and that led to his imprisonment.

Amalia reported that her daughter Victoria also had problems at school. She failed all her courses and had a baby by the time she was fifteen years old. Amalia takes care of her granddaughters while Victoria attends a vocational school. Amalia laments the long hours she and her husband must work, which diminishes their parental guidance. Amalia shared her frustration: “When they expelled my son, the principal threw him on the floor.... I went to the other mothers, but the other mothers were afraid—if you put wood on the fire you will only get a
bigger fire. . . . We all had younger children that had to go to the junior high school. I was mad; but what can you do?"

Amalia believes that Mexican Americans face a hard life in Middlewest. She said that an Anglo neighbor thinks Mexican Americans want to take over the town, because of their increasing number. Amalia claims that Anglos complain about everything Mexican Americans do. Her Anglo neighbors have called the police to complain about noise. She feels that any time Mexican Americans get together, Anglos fear disruptive behavior. Amalia said that the particular disruptive behavior consisted of a family barbecue with two relatives playing guitars. The police came by to tell them to keep the noise down.

Maria Alimeda obtained assistance from the IMC after her divorce. She attended a vocational school and graduated with secretarial training. She works for a local government agency as a deputy clerk. Her income places her just above the poverty level. Maria does not like her work environment—she is the only Mexican American worker in the office. The other women do not talk to her and office communications frequently bypass her desk. Maria claimed that her supervisor had tried to get her fired. By chance, I had interviewed the manager of the office. She considered herself a liberal and a supporter of Mexican Americans, but she was not aware of Maria's problems.

Maria presented me with many examples of racist experiences she has faced in Middlewest. The worst experience happened to her son at school. "My son drew a picture of a woman. The art teacher said it was very good. My son never got his picture back; they said it was lost. Later, an Anglo boy had a similar picture . . . my son said it was a copy of his drawing. . . . The Anglo boy got an award and a scholarship . . . . My son loved to paint, but he quit his art classes."

**Critique of the Pluralistic Model**

Mexican Americans in Middlewest seem to have become less assimilated, had less occupational advancement, and achieved less education than would have been predicted by the pluralistic
model of Keefe and Padilla (1987). Mexican Americans in Middle­west appear to maintain their culture and language, and they have not become assimilated as a group. The different goals of Anglos and Mexican Americans produce a situation with considerable social conflict. The Anglos of Middlewest want Mexican Americans to become assimilated while the Mexican Americans want employment and the right to retain their ethnicity.

I believe that the major weakness of the Keefe and Padilla study results from their discounting of their subjects' accounts of discrimination and racism. They fail to examine the relationship of Mexican Americans to Anglo-controlled social institutions. The present study attempts to overcome this deficiency by examining Anglo attitudes and by listening to the Mexican Americans describe what they believe to be their racist encounters with Anglos. The data of this research reveals that the pluralistic/assimilation model fails, and indicates that only a theory that includes elements of the exploitive model can explain its findings.

Conclusions

This chapter has revealed four major features of the Mexican American community in Middlewest. The first is that many second- and third-generation Mexican Americans still work in the fields. Many young Mexican American adults in Middlewest have grandparents who were born in Texas and migrated annually to Idaho. Many of these young Mexican American adults were born in Middlewest, yet most of these second- and third-generation Mexican Americans have incomes below or close to the poverty level. The low-income jobs and poverty of the Mexican Americans' derives from the structure of the economy, which limits their opportunities.

Second, the stereotype of Mexican Americans as being lazy and lacking in motivation cannot be supported, because of the significant number of working-class Mexican Americans who have attempted to establish a business or who have attended a vocational school.
Third, the interviews with working-class Mexican Americans demonstrate that they face a considerable amount of racism. The extensive racism described by permanent Mexican Americans living in Middlewest rebuts the position held by some sociologists who use the concept of cultural capital deficiency as the cause of the under-class position of some minorities (Stolzenberg 1990; Reimer 1985). These sociologists contend that the major problem facing minorities is the changing nature of the American economy and that race discrimination only plays a small role in maintaining minorities in the under class.

The fourth important finding is the fact that many of these families have children who have dropped out of school, seriously jeopardizing their employment opportunities. Chapter Nine will examine in detail how the Middlewest high school seems to be organized to educate middle-class Anglos but not lower-class Anglos and Mexican Americans.

Many Mexican Americans I met had completed a vocational or technical training program and still could only secure employment in the fields. Maggie González, a young Mexican American woman, successfully completed a medical vocational program and felt relieved that she obtained employment at the district health department. Maggie has two brothers and several Mexican American friends who have successfully completed vocational programs but remain unemployed.

Mexican Americans, because of their own personal experiences or from the experiences of relatives and friends, soon learn that they have limited opportunities to secure employment that pays a decent wage. Faced with this negative employment situation, some Mexican Americans stop searching for employment.
Migrant workers topping onions near Middlewest.

Scene in the Middlewest Labor Camp. One myth that many Anglos believe is that migrant workers drive new cars.