SUBTRACTIVE SCHOOLING

U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

> "Listen," [I told my class] "you don't have to be here if you
> don't want to be here. No one is forcing you."
> —Algebra teacher, Juan Seguín High School

> "If the *school* doesn't care about my learning, why should *I*
> care? Answer me that. Just answer me that!"
> —Ninth-grade student, Juan Seguín High School

When teenagers lament that "Nobody cares," few adults listen. Whether it is offered as an observation, description, explanation, or excuse, the charge that "Nobody cares" is routinely dismissed as childish exaggeration. But what if it were *not* hyperbole? What if each weekday, for eight hours a day, teenagers inhabited a world populated by adults who did not care—or at least did not care for *them* sufficiently?

This book is a field guide to just such a world. It presents the findings of my three-year ethnographic investigation of academic achievement and schooling orientations among immigrant Mexican and Mexican American students[1] at Juan Seguín High School (a pseudonym) in Houston, Texas. Rather than functioning as a conduit for the attainment of the American dream, this large, overcrowded, and underfunded urban school reproduces Mexican youth as a monolingual, English-speaking, ethnic minority, neither identified with Mexico nor equipped to function competently in America's mainstream. For the majority of Seguín High School's regular (non-college-bound) track, schooling is a *subtractive* process. It divests these youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure.

The progressive nature of academic underachievement among U.S.-born Mexican students has been documented by comparing their grades, test scores, dropout rates, and so on with those of immigrant youth. Studies show that among Mexican and Central

American students, generational status plays an influential role in schooling experiences; first- and often second-generation students academically outperform their third- and later-generation counterparts (Vigil and Long 1981; Buriel 1984; Buriel and Cardoza 1988; Ogbu 1991; Matute-Bianchi 1991; Suárez-Orozco 1991; Steinberg et al. 1996). These findings, based primarily on small-scale ethnographic studies, are similarly evident in national-level data (Portes and Rumbaut 1990; Portes and Zhou 1993; Kao and Tienda 1995; Zsembik and Llanes 1996). Rather than revealing the upward mobility pattern historically evident among European-origin groups, research on generational attainments points to an "invisible ceiling" of blocked opportunity for Mexican people (Chapa 1988, 1991; Gans 1992; Bean et al. 1994).

Most scholars have sought to explain the observed generational decline in achievement by comparing the attributes/attitudes of immigrants to those of their later-generation counterparts (Vigil and Long 1981; Matute-Bianchi 1991; Portes and Zhou 1993; Buriel 1984, 1987, 1994). This approach has three major drawbacks. First, it accepts the differences among youth as a priori, rather than as linked to a larger project of cultural eradication in which schools play an important part (Bartolomé 1994). Race/ethnicity are not mere stock that individuals possess, manipulate, and bring to bear on institutional life. Instead, this study of the nexus between generational dynamics and institutional life shows that the latter significantly influences the direction and form that ethnic identities take.

Secondly, generational comparisons that fail to acknowledge schools as key sites for the production of minority status risk an invidious comparison. Contrasting the so-called optimism of immigrant youth with the "antischool" and "subcultural" (Matute-Bianchi 1991; Portes and Zhou 1993, 1994) attitudes of their later-generation counterparts results in a view of U.S.-born youth as "deficient," fundamentally lacking in drive and enthusiasm. DeVillar (1994) cogently argues that U.S.-born, minority youth are seen by schools and society as lacking the linguistic, cultural, moral, and intellectual traits the assimilationist curriculum demands. These students are perceived as requiring ever more cultural assimilation and resocialization—as if the potency of initial treatments somehow systematically fades. This study proposes

that the alleged "deficiencies" of regular-track, U.S.-born youth from a low-income community are themselves symptomatic of the ways that schooling is organized to subtract resources from them.

Thirdly, the interrelatedness of immigrant achievement and non-immigrant underachievement gets obscured. Since the framework advanced herein assumes that achievement is a social process whereby orientations toward schooling are nurtured in familiar contexts among those with similar dispositions, then any "politics of difference"—as McCarthy (1994) theorizes—are highly consequential. That is, when immigrant and non-immigrant youth produce invidious "we–they" distinctions, the achievement potential of the entire group gets compromised as windows to the "other's" experience are closed.

Before dismissing urban, U.S.-born youth as lazy underachievers, it behooves researchers and practitioners to first examine the school's role in fostering poor academic performance. Bringing schools into sharper focus, as my study does, reveals that U.S.-born youth are neither inherently antischool nor oppositional. They oppose a schooling process that disrespects them; they oppose not education, but *schooling*. My research suggests that schools like Seguín High are organized formally and informally in ways that fracture students' cultural and ethnic identities, creating social, linguistic, and cultural divisions among the students and between the students and the staff.

As a direct consequence of these divisions, social relationships at Seguín typically are often fragile, incomplete, or nonexistent. Teachers fail to forge meaningful connections with their students; students are alienated from their teachers, and are often (especially between groups of first-generation immigrants and U.S.-born) hostile toward one another, as well; and administrators routinely disregard even the most basic needs of both students and staff. The feeling that "no one cares" is pervasive—and corrosive. Real learning is difficult to sustain in an atmosphere rife with mistrust. Over even comparatively short periods of time, the divisions and misunderstandings that characterize daily life at the school exact high costs in academic, social, and motivational currency. The subtractive nature of schooling virtually assures that students who begin the year with only small reserves of skills, as do most regular-track, U.S.-born youth, will not succeed; and conversely,

those who come with more positive orientations or greater skills, as do Mexico-born students, are better equipped to offset the more debilitating aspects of schooling. Thus, what is commonly described as a problem of "generational decline in academic achievement" is much more accurately understood as a problem of *subtractive schooling*—a concept I introduced and developed elsewhere (Valenzuela 1997, 1999).

This chapter briefly describes the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study I undertook at Seguín (see appendix for a complete description of the research methodology); reviews the literature on immigrant and nonimmigrant achievement; and explains the theoretical framework of the present study. The notion of subtractive schooling that forms the core of my work combines insights from social capital theory (especially Coleman 1988, 1990) and from the academic achievement and educational attainment literature comparing immigrant and U.S.-born youth (i.e., "subtractive assimilation" literature [Cummins 1984; Skutnabb-Kangas and Cummins 1988; Gibson 1988, 1993]). This general orientation is further enriched by existing research on caring and education (Noddings 1984, 1992; Fisher and Tronto 1990; Noblit 1993; Courtney and Noblit 1994; Danin 1994; Prillaman et al. 1994), much of which originally developed out of a concern for the alienating consequences of comprehensive, overcrowded, and bureaucratic schools like Seguín High (Noddings 1984, 1992).

The importance of caring/not caring in the present study also reflects the emphasis accorded to this factor by both students and teachers: explanations for the negative quality of life and schooling at Seguín often involved teachers and students each charging that the other "did not care." Taken together, these three bodies of literature—caring and education, subtractive assimilation, and social capital theory—enable the construction of a more nuanced explanation of achievement and underachievement among immigrant and U.S.-born youth than currently exists.

THE STUDY

My decision to pursue a modified ethnographic approach, one that combined collecting and analyzing both quantitative and

qualitative data on generational differences in academic achievement among Mexican youth, was guided by several considerations. First, an exclusive dependence on quantitative data would have precluded my arriving at an in-depth understanding of the meaning of schooling for the study participants. Second, my emergent interest in the quality of interpersonal relationships as well as student groupings and grouping behaviors required my active involvement in the life of the school. Finally, the difficulties of surveying a student population with a large, disaffected segment—many of whom refused to fill out my questionnaire—were overwhelming.

I quickly realized that if I wanted to succeed in my goal of producing a rich, multilayered account of the relationship between schooling and achievement, I would need to gather data from as many sources and through as many means as I could fashion. The key mode of data collection became participant observation, augmented by data gathered from extensive field notes and informal interviews with students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members and leaders. I did not abandon quantitative measures, however. In addition to questionnaires, I used quantitative data extracted from school and district documents. This kind of information helped direct my attention to important dimensions of schooling, most notably orientations toward school and achievement.

The qualitative component of my study of Mexican youth at Juan Seguín High School began in early fall of 1992. This involved informal, open-ended interviews with both individual students and groups of students, as well as with teachers, and observations at the school site. These encounters alerted me to the importance of human relations to students' motivation to achieve. Relations with school personnel, especially with teachers, play a decisive role in determining the extent to which youth find the school to be a welcoming or an alienating place. Youth, especially the U.S.-born group, frequently expressed their affiliational needs in terms of caring. Each time I reviewed my field notes, I would be struck by how often the words "care," "caring," and "caring for" seemed to leap off the pages, demanding my attention. This naturalistic discourse on caring led me toward the caring literature and a more focused examination of the meanings and uses of caring.

My early qualitative data collection also made clear that how youth group themselves (especially along immigrant/non-immigrant, Spanish-speaking/non-Spanish speaking axes) and the kinds of activities they undertake in those groups (e.g., school-related or non-school-related) bear directly on academic achievement. Students were invested in schooling if their friends were invested in it, or if their teachers were invested in them. In following up on this observation, I found the literature on social capital and on education and caring to be most useful.

I decided that a ground-level, inside look at students' affiliational needs in their schooling context was the optimal approach through which to examine the extent to which school orientations among immigrant and U.S.-born youth were conditioned by affiliational concerns. My interest in teacher-student relations, as well as in student grouping behaviors, translated into consciously seeking out students at times and places where they were likely to congregate. This meant talking to students in groups during their lunch hour, in the halls between classes, in the school library, in the bathroom (girls), during their Physical Education (P.E.) classes, in front of school buildings before and after school, and under the stairwells and in other hiding places favored by students who preferred to skip classes. I also attended numerous school and community functions (see appendix).

I began the quantitative component of my study with a survey of Seguín's entire student body (N = 2,281) in November, 1992. I was primarily interested in determining the extent to which generational status helped explain the varying levels of achievement. Analyzing the data on grades reported in this survey allowed me to establish some basic facts. First, students from Seguín High conform to the general pattern observed elsewhere among first-generation Mexican immigrants and U.S.-born Mexican American youth. The record of achievement among Seguín's immigrant youth is significantly higher than that of their U.S.-born, second- and third+-generation counterparts. Among the generations of U.S.-born youth, however, differences were not statistically significant.[2] Moreover, this difference in achievement is only evident among youth in the regular, non-college-bound track. In other words, as one would expect, being in the college-bound track erases these differences. Romo and Falbo (1996) and Olsen (1997) similarly underscore the

importance of track placement as a highly consequential variable that structures the schooling experiences and achievement outcomes of immigrant and Mexican American adolescent youth.

Second, females in every generational group tend to outperform their male counterparts. However, this gender difference is again only evident among youth in the regular, non-college-bound track. Thus placement in the college-bound track has a leveling effect, erasing these differences, as well. Though she did not control for tracking, Matute-Bianchi (1991) reported similar findings on gender in her study of Mexican immigrant and non-immigrant youth. Her statistical analyses pointed not only to females' higher levels of aspirations and hours dedicated to homework, but also to this group's more positive rating of school climate. These findings, coupled with my survey data, led me to consider ways in which gender intersects with generational status to influence schooling orientations and outcomes.

Third, as Matute-Bianchi (1991) found, immigrant youth—regardless of either gender or track placement—experience school significantly more positively than their U.S.-born counterparts. That is, they see teachers as more caring and accessible and they rate the school climate in more positive terms, as well.[3] These students' attitudes contrast markedly with those of their second- and third+-generation counterparts whose responses in turn are not significantly different from one another. Data gathered from interviews and participant observation corroborate this finding of a schooling experience that distinguishes immigrant from U.S.-born youth.

Fourth, the survey showed the students' parents' educational levels to be extremely low, with a "high" average of around nine years attained by the third generation.[4] This information alerted me to the ninth grade as a watershed year, as well as to the idea that parents had little educational "advantage" to confer (Lareau 1989). Accordingly, I tried to talk to as many ninth graders as possible and to incorporate their voices and experience into this ethnographic account. I also pondered the implications of the parents' limited formal education as I recorded the criticisms teachers leveled at students, parents, and the community.

Combining quantitative evidence with my deepening role as a participant-observer helped generate the overarching conceptual frame for this study. I came to locate "the problem" of achieve-

ment squarely in school-based relationships and organizational structures and policies designed to erase students' culture. Over the three years in which I collected and analyzed my data, I became increasingly convinced that schooling is organized in ways that subtract resources from Mexican youth.[5]

For theoretical guidance in tracing out the ways in which the schooling experiences and orientations of Mexican high school students affect the range of their schooling outcomes, from achievement through disaffection, psychic withdrawal, resistance, and failure, I turned to the large volume of literature on immigrant/non-immigrant achievement. I review the most relevant aspects of that literature below. To address the issues that my research with Seguín's students identified as most salient, however, it was work in the specific areas of subtractive assimilation, social capital, and caring that proved the most useful. These combined perspectives help explain why schooling is a more positive experience for immigrant than for non-immigrant, U.S.-born youth. They bring to light the ways in which mainstream institutions strip away students' identities, thus weakening or precluding supportive social ties and draining resources important to academic success.

MEXICAN IMMIGRANT AND MEXICAN AMERICAN ACHIEVEMENT

Explanations for differential academic achievement among immigrants and non-immigrants are many and varied. Most offer insights that help explain the gap I observed at Seguín High, but all leave important questions unanswered. Below, I begin by reviewing this literature and noting where it converges with and diverges from my findings. Then, in the theoretical framework section, I discuss the subtractive assimilation, social capital, and caring and education studies that inform and frame my subtractive schooling explanation of underachievement.

Immigrant Achievement

Linguistic and anthropological studies of immigrant academic "success" evident at Seguín point to cognitive and psychocultural factors, respectively, that enhance their adaptability to new school settings.[6] The linguistic literature, in particular, underscores the importance of academic competence in one's own language as a precondition to mastery in a second language (Cummins 1984; Hernández-Chávez 1988; Montaño-Harmon 1991; Lindholm and Aclan 1993; Merino et al. 1993).[7] Immigrant students who possess essential skills in reading, writing, comprehension, and mathematics in their own language (or those who acquire these skills through a bilingual education program) outperform their U.S.-born counterparts. Immigrants' academic competence is further confirmed by findings that students schooled in Mexico tend to outperform Mexican American youth schooled in the United States (Vigil and Long 1981; Buriel 1984, 1987; Buriel and Cardoza 1988; Ogbu 1991; Matute-Bianchi 1991; Steinberg et al. 1996). Findings from my study corroborate the importance of entering cognitive skills to student achievement, often acquired from their previous schooling experiences in Mexico.

The psychocultural domain is a broad category that emphasizes patterns of adaptation and qualities that immigrants possess as explanations for the academic success of immigrant youth. Children from Mexico and other parts of Latin America are strongly driven to succeed and they adhere to traditional enabling values like familism, respect for teachers, and a strong work ethic in their quest for upward mobility (Buriel 1984, 1987; Abi-Nader 1990; Portes and Rumbaut 1990). Valenzuela and Dornbusch (1994) and others (e.g., Buriel 1984; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995) add that loyalty to one's homeland culture provides important social, cultural, and emotional resources that help youth navigate through the educational system.[8] Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) point out that a bilingual/bicultural network of friends and family helps youth to successfully cross sociocultural and linguistic borders. This in turn may allow them entree to multiple, potentially supportive community and institutional settings.

At Seguín, immigrant students' school-going aspirations are strongly related to their academic achievement, affirming the imagery of their inordinate drive. Qualitative evidence suggests that these aspirations are connected to an esprit de corps achievement orientation coupled with their prior schooling experiences

in Mexico that they mostly view as having prepared them well for schooling in the United States. This finding of collectivist orientations resonates with findings from research among adult immigrants (Rodriguez and Nuñez 1986; Keefe and Padilla 1987) and Mexican children (Madsen and Shapira 1970; Kagan and Madsen 1972; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995).

An increasingly important topic among scholars of Latino immigrant and non-immigrant youth is the influence of students' peer group associations on their orientations toward school (Mehan et al. 1986, 1994; Matute-Bianchi 1991; Olsen 1997; Vigil 1997). Matute-Bianchi (1991) addresses this concern in her much cited ethnographic study of Mexican immigrant and U.S.-born Mexican youth attending Field High, a school located in a central coast California agricultural community. Corresponding roughly to the generational statuses investigated herein, students fell into one of the five following categories: "Recent Arrivals (or *recien llegados*)," "Mexican-Oriented," "Mexican American," "Chicano," and "Cholos." Whereas the first two categories refer to the immigrant student population, the latter three reference the U.S.-born. Beginning with "Recent Arrivals" and "Mexican-Oriented" students, I address in this and the next section their similarities and differences from the students I came across at Seguín.

At both Seguín and Field High, a key distinction drawn within the immigrant population by school officials and the students themselves is whether one is recently arrived. Having typically arrived in the past three to five years, typical recent arrivals are classified at both schools as "Limited English Proficient" and placed in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program. Most have also attended school in Mexico and they tend to make high grades. A caveat worthy of mention, however, is whether youth emanate from urban centers or rural regions of Mexico (or other rural places in Latin America). A special category of student at Seguín that was not observed in the Matute-Bianchi study is a burgeoning segment of "preliterate" youth, lacking in formal academic training and literacy skills. Socially, these students face difficulties forming friendships among students located outside of their preliterate classes. Because Seguín is ill-equipped to serve these youth, they are at greatest risk among all students of dropping out. These difficul-

ties help sustain their very low representation within the school's immigrant population.

"Mexican-oriented" students at Field High were born in Mexico and came to the United States as small children. They experience U.S. schooling for most of their young lives. They are bicultural and bilingual, often preferring Spanish, and unlike their recently arrived counterparts, they tend to participate in mainstream school activities (like athletic teams, band, choir, etc.). As fluent biculturals, their culturally assimilated status combines with their pride in their Mexican heritage to makes these youth accessible to both their Spanish-dominant and English-dominant peers.

Distinguishing Seguín from Field High is that many such students I met were located in the regular, non-college-bound track.[9] Though ambitious and capable, they often lacked the kind of mentoring that would secure their representation in the privileged rungs of the curriculum; at Seguín, these consist of either honors, magnet, or upper-levels of the Career and Technology Education (CTE) vocational program.[10] Findings from other research (Romo and Falbo 1996; Olsen 1997) suggest that such problems are commonly faced by immigrant youth. Indeed, cross-national data point to a higher dropout rate among first-generation immigrants (National Center for Education Statistics 1992; Rumberger 1995). Notwithstanding these caveats and limitations, immigrant youth still tend to enjoy greater academic success than their U.S.-born counterparts—referred to as "Mexican Americans," "Chicanos," and "Cholos" in the Matute-Bianchi study.

Although Matute-Bianchi did not specifically focus on relationships between the students and their teachers, she infers from her interviews with youth that immigrants' higher success rate is in great part related to their respectful, obedient, and deferential comportment (also see Suárez-Orozco 1991). Students who display these appealing behaviors are rewarded by their teachers. Moreover, Matute-Bianchi suggests, this kind of demeanor may be rewarded because it is consistent with mainstream teachers' expectations of culturally appropriate "Mexican" behavior.

Discussions I had with immigrant youth about their attitudes toward school suggest a need to reconsider the bases of their purported "politeness." While cultural values like respect (*respeto*)

encourage deference and docility, a sense of powerlessness or a belief that they are not "entitled" to openly defy school authority just as powerfully explains their comportment, especially for the more recently arrived. Seguín's immigrant students often share their U.S.-born peers' view that learning should be premised on a humane and compassionate pedagogy inscribed in reciprocal relationships, but their sense of being privileged to attend secondary school saps any desire they might have to insert their definition of education into the schooling process.

A final enabling quality highlighted in anthropological research is immigrants' dual frame of reference that allows immigrant youth to compare their present status and attainments to their typically less favorable situation "back home." Because these children's families experience upward mobility at the onset of immigration, a payoff to living in this country is immediately evident (Bean et al. 1991). Thus their interpretation of their deprivation in relative terms undergirds their motivation to succeed in U.S. schools (Ogbu 1991; Suárez-Orozco 1991; Matute-Bianchi 1991). Oppressive economic or political conditions in the homeland make present sacrifices in the United States tolerable (e.g., Suárez-Orozco 1989, 1991; Gibson and Ogbu 1991).

The dual frame of reference also discourages immigrant youth from correlating being Mexican with underachievement or with the social pathologies often ascribed to Mexican Americans and other U.S. minorities. Unlike Mexican American youth, immigrants have had the experience of knowing high-status professionals (e.g., doctors, lawyers, and engineers) who are Mexican. In fact, their key influences were often individuals they had known in Mexico who were themselves professionals. Thus, *Mexicanidad* (or "Mexican-ness") as a *national*, rather than *ethnic minority* identity, contributes to the self-fulfilling expectations evident in both positive school orientations and high academic performance.

Discussions I held with immigrant students at Seguín confirm the reality of a dual frame of reference that contributes to their academic achievement. They noted, for example, that life in Mexico is much more difficult financially than it is in the United States; tight economic conditions make it impossible for most people to pursue schooling beyond the sixth-grade level (the Mex-

ican government subsidizes education through the sixth grade). Evidence from group interviews further reveals a nuance in the concept of the dual frame. It not only informs their aspirations, but also mitigates their critique of schooling since the opportunity for a public education in the United States is "free," however unequal. While their motivation to achieve in U.S. schools appears to win them favor in their teachers' eyes, social pressures to disclaim their critique and express deference also exist.

A peek into the subjective world of immigrant youth at Seguín reveals another paradox. While the quantitative evidence suggests that immigrant youth enjoy more support from their teachers, the qualitative data fail to substantiate this finding. Teachers were scarcely mentioned as pivotal people in their lives. Though this may reflect a limitation of open-ended interviews, another possibility is that this, too, reflects their dual frame of reference that leads them to positively evaluate their situation, including their perceptions of support. This possibility is raised by Stanton-Salazar and Bressler's (1997) quantitative study of adolescents in a southern California high school and Olsen's (1997) ethnographic study of a northern California high school.

Stanton-Salazar and Bressler (1997) find that Spanish-speaking youth score high on perceived measures of support from teachers. However, their low scores on help-seeking behaviors (i.e., the number of times they sought help from a teacher) distinguish them from bilingual and English dominant youth for whom a positive association between the two exists. Since for all other students, help-seeking signals their actual integration and involvement in schooling, immigrant youth appear to infer high levels of support from teachers even against evidence to the contrary.

Olsen (1997) found that despite a lack of trained teachers and a weak academic curriculum for immigrant youth, the latter still had a stronger sense of attachment to school than their U.S.-born peers. Criticizing the school for its limitations was felt as inappropriate and impolite. The combined evidence speaks to the unique subject position of immigrant youth. More generally, they fail to see schooling as subtractive though it begins in earnest with their generation.

In summary, linguistic and psychocultural factors play important roles in the academic progress of immigrant youth at Seguín

High. My data suggest that this list should include other factors, as well: gender and collectivist orientations toward schooling experiences emerge as important factors undergirding a pro-school ethos in the ethnographic account. Qualitative data not only highlight the importance of social ties as enhancing academic performance; in addition, females emerge as key purveyors of social support.

Expanding the list of contributors provides only fleeting satisfaction, however; the longer the list, the more pressing the need to determine the relative weight of each factor. Or are they all equally influential? Existing research provides little guidance. Rather than attempting to evaluate the role of every factor deemed pertinent to immigrant achievement, I offer a ground-level perspective of how schools themselves are organized to perpetuate inequality. This approach broadens the focus to include structural aspects of schooling, such as academic tracking; a curricular bias against Mexican culture, the Spanish language, and things Mexican; and a legacy of (at best) ambiguous relations between the school and the community it serves. Layering upwardly, this study builds on the aforementioned research by developing the view that peer group associations and the schooling orientations that develop within them are themselves influenced by the organization of schooling. Widening the analysis to examine the ways in which schools promote cultural and linguistic subtraction enhances our understanding of why regular-track, immigrant youth tend to outperform their U.S.-born counterparts.

U.S.-Born Underachievement

To date, anthropologist John Ogbu (1974, 1978, 1987, 1991, 1994) has provided the most robust explanation for the underachievement of U.S. minorities, including Mexican Americans. Ogbu's (1991) cultural-ecological framework emphasizes the role of historical racism and institutional oppression in shaping ethnic minorities' opposition to the conventional routes to success available to the dominant group. Ogbu (1991, 1994), Fordham and Ogbu (1986), and Matute-Bianchi (1991) find that African American, as well as "Chicano" and "Cholo" youth adapt strategically to these forces of exclusion in ways that preserve (what remains of) their cultural identities. A chief strategy these scholars have identified involves youth rejecting schooling and underachieving because they correlate academic achievement with "acting white," and because they infer minimal payoff to effort in schooling.[11]

Citing the impact of exclusionary and discriminatory forces in society, Ogbu further argues that a shift from primary to secondary cultural characteristics occurs upon extended contact with, and opposition to, the dominant culture. He categorizes groups with primary and secondary cultural characteristics into the following ideal types: immigrant and involuntary minorities, respectively. The latter group is viewed through the historical lens of their forceful incorporation experience into U.S. society through either slavery, conquest, or colonization.

This discussion on how groups are incorporated into U.S. society is important because it notes the inapplicability of the dominant model of assimilation to the experiences of historically subordinate groups like Mexican Americans. However, because his framework then centers on the differences in perceptions and the adaptational coping strategies that each group uses to negotiate the barriers they face to achieve their goals, the analytical focus gets shifted away from the school site. This analytical move preempts exploration into the interrelatedness of immigrant achievement and non-immigrant underachievement. Ironically, the historical weight he accords to minorities' mode of entry also distances him from the U.S.-Mexican educational experience for whom "forceful incorporation" is arguably an everyday affair.[12]

Bringing the institution of schooling more fully into the analysis of minority achievement, as I do in this work, not only amplifies the concept of oppositionality—as originating in, and nurtured by, schools themselves—but also clarifies the diverse responses to schooling among a group that has historically straddled Ogbu's immigrant and involuntary minority typology. For want of a more dynamic interpretation of students' minority identity development, I turn to McCarthy's (1994) exploration into the "politics of difference" (see chapter 5). That is, immigrant and U.S.-born youth participate in the construction of "otherness" even as they are collectively "othered" by institutional practices

that are ideologically invested in their cultural and linguistic divestment. The development of "we-they" distinctions in their social world reinforce achievement patterns and schooling orientations manifest in cross-generational analyses.

Of special relevance is Ogbu's (1991) discussion of societally objectionable secondary cultural characteristics when explaining many of the tensions I observed between students and teachers at Seguín. Urban youth, including Mexican American children, frequently choose clothing and accessories that their teachers interpret as signaling disinterest in schooling. These students also tend to combine withdrawal or apathy in the classroom with occasional displays of aggression toward school authorities. In other words, youth engage in what Ogbu calls "cultural inversion" whereby they consciously or unconsciously oppose the cultural practices and discourses associated with the dominant group (Fordham and Ogbu 1986). As Matute-Bianchi (1991) and others (e.g., Olsen 1997) have similarly observed, appearances do count in the relational dynamics of schooling.

While diverse with respect to their degree of fluency in English and in Spanish, as well as their interests, the majority of regular-track, U.S.-born youth at Seguín fall into Matute-Bianchi's (1991) "Chicano" rubric.[13] As in her study, these students are underachieving, predominantly English-speaking, later- (i.e., second-, third- or fourth-) generation youth. While some do refer to themselves as "Chicano" or "Chicana," more popular self-referents are "Mexican," "*Mexicano*," and "Mexican American." Comparable to their Chicano counterparts at Field High, these youth are marginal to Seguín's curricular and extracurricular program, and culturally and socially distant from immigrant youth.

The primary distinctions they draw amongst themselves are based on the following, frequently overlapping, categories: race or national origin (e.g., "Black," "White," "Mexican," "Chicana/o," or "Salvadoreño [Salvadoran]"), Spanish or English fluency ("Spanish-speaking," "English-speaking," or "bilingual"), and shared interest (e.g., "Rappers," "New Wavers," "Kickers," "Jocks," "Gangsters" [or "gang-bangers"], or "Wannabes" [i.e., Wannabe gangsters]). "Gangsters" and "Wannabes" come closest to the "Cholo" category identified by Matute-Bianchi (1991).

Like the "Cholos" at Field High, "Gangsters" and "Wannabes" at Seguín are the most disaffected and academically unsuccessful segment of the student body and are identified through their attire by school officials as "gang-oriented." In contrast to the Matute-Bianchi study, however, this group is a quite sizable and growing segment of Seguín's student body, especially among ninth- and tenth-graders for whom gang attire is fashionable (see chapter 3). At Seguín, the lines between "Chicanos," "gangsters," and "Wannabes" are often blurred.

Appearances aside, that Mexican American youth at Seguín High do not equate achievement with "acting white" invites another modification to Ogbu's framework which may better characterize a segment of the African American youth population (Fordham and Ogbu 1986). A strong achievement orientation at Seguín is simply dismissed as "nerdy" or "geeky," suggesting that cultural inversion has greater explanatory value in the realm of self-representation than in attitudes toward achievement. Indeed, the great majority of underachieving, regular-track Mexican Americans at Seguín manifest greater emotional distance from whites than the current literature would predict (Mehan et al. 1994). U.S.-born youth I observed do not oppose education, nor are they uniformly hostile to the equation of education with upward mobility. What they reject is *schooling*—the content of their education and the way it is offered to them.

Unassessed in current scholarship are the academic consequences to many Mexican youth who "learn" perhaps no stronger lesson in school than to devalue the Spanish language, Mexico, Mexican culture, and things Mexican. These biases in turn close off social and linguistic access to their immigrant peers, many of whom possess greater academic competence in this study.

I watched this poisonous cycle play itself out over and over at Seguín High School. U.S.-born and Mexico-born youth routinely mistrust, misunderstand, and misuse one another. The more recent immigrants at Seguín report being appalled by the attire and comportment of their roguish U.S.-born counterparts. They view this group as *americanizados* (Americanized), while the more culturally assimilated youth shun their immigrant counterparts as "un-cool," subdued, and "embarrassing" for embodying characteristics they wish to disclaim (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-

Orozco 1995; Olsen 1997; Vigil 1997). Moreover, they often feel resentful toward immigrants, since the latter frequently outperform or outshine them with their bilingual and bicultural abilities.

These politics of difference are regarded in the existing research literature as incidental to schooling rather than, as I argue, strong evidence of the cultural subtraction that schooling promotes. Besides fueling misunderstandings and intolerance between first and later generations of Mexican youth, the systematic undervaluing of people and things Mexican erodes relations among students, as well as between teachers and students. Cultural distance produces social distance, which in turn reinforces cultural distance.

For additional insight into the effects of schools' structured denial of *Mexicanidad* [Mexican-ness], I consulted the cultural assimilation literature in general, and the subtractive assimilation research in particular. The latter confirms the reality of coercive cultural assimilation but is more concerned with learning than with schooling. Social capital theory and the literature on caring and education, and specifically the work on school-based relationships, provide valuable clues about how cultural subtraction actually occurs in school settings. All three perspectives underpin my explanation of underachievement among Mexican American students.

THE SUBTRACTIVE ELEMENTS OF
CARING AND CULTURAL ASSIMILATION

School subtracts resources from youth in two major ways. First, it dismisses their definition of education which is not only thoroughly grounded in Mexican culture, but also approximates the optimal definition of education advanced by Noddings (1984) and other caring theorists. Second, subtractive schooling encompasses subtractively assimilationist policies and practices that are designed to divest Mexican students of their culture and language. A key consequence of these subtractive elements of schooling is the erosion of students' social capital evident in the presence and absence of academically oriented networks among immigrant and U.S.-born youth, respectively. In other words, within a span

of two generations, the "social de-capitalization" of Mexican youth becomes apparent (Putnam 1993, 1995).

Presented below is an optimal definition of caring derived from three sources: caring theory, Mexican culture (embodied in the term, *educación*), and the relational concept of social capital. Although all three share the assumption that individual "progress," loosely defined, is lodged in relationships, their rootedness in diverse perspectives make for differential emphases. Caring theory addresses the need for pedagogy to follow from and flow through relationships cultivated between teacher and student. Although *educación* has implications for pedagogy, it is first a foundational cultural construct that provides instructions on how one should live in the world. With its emphasis on respect, responsibility, and sociality, it provides a benchmark against which all humans are to be judged, formally educated or not. Social capital, on the other hand, emphasizes exchange networks of trust and solidarity among actors wishing to attain goals that cannot be individually attained. The composite imagery of caring that unfolds accords moral authority to teachers and institutional structures that value and actively promote respect and a search for connection, between teacher and student and among students themselves.

Caring and Education

How teachers and students are oriented to each other is central to Noddings's (1984) framework on caring. In her view, the caring teacher's role is to initiate relation, with engrossment in the student's welfare following from this search for connection. Noddings uses the concept of emotional displacement to communicate the notion that one is seized by the other with energy flowing toward his or her project and needs. A teacher's attitudinal predisposition is essential to caring, for it overtly conveys acceptance and confirmation to the *cared-for* student. When the *cared-for* individual responds by demonstrating a willingness to reveal her/his essential self, the reciprocal relation is complete. At a school like Seguín, building this kind of a relationship is extremely difficult—for both parties. Even well-intentioned students and teachers frequently find themselves in conflict. At issue,

often, is a mutual misunderstanding of what it means to "care about" school.

Noddings (1984, 1992) and others (Gilligan 1982; Prillaman et al. 1994; Courtney and Noblit 1994; Eaker-Rich and Van Galen 1996) contend, and this study confirms, that schools are structured around an *aesthetic* caring whose essence lies in an attention to things and ideas (Noddings 1984). Rather than centering students' learning around a moral ethic of caring that nurtures and values relationships, schools pursue a narrow, instrumentalist logic. In a similar vein, Prillaman and Eaker (1994) critique the privileging of the *technical* over the *expressive* in discourse on education. Technical discourse refers to impersonal and objective language, including such terms as goals, strategies, and standardized curricula, that is used in decisions made by one group for another. Expressive discourse entails "a broad and loosely defined ethic [of caring] that molds itself in situations and has proper regard for human affections, weaknesses, and anxieties" (Noddings 1984, p. 25).

Thus, teachers tend to be concerned first with form and nonpersonal content and only secondarily, if at all, with their students' subjective reality. At Seguín, they tend to overinterpret urban youths' attire and off-putting behavior as evidence of a rebelliousness that signifies that these students "don't care" about school. Having drawn that conclusion, teachers then often make no further effort to forge effective reciprocal relationships with this group. Immigrant students, on the other hand, are much more likely to evoke teachers' approval. They dress more conservatively than their peers and their deference and pro-school ethos are taken as sure signs that they, unlike "the others," do "care about" school. Immigrant students' seeming willingness to accept their teachers' aesthetic definition of caring and forego their own view of education as based on reciprocal relationships elicits supportive overtures from teachers that are withheld from Mexican American students.

When teachers withhold social ties from Mexican American youth, they confirm this group's belief that schooling is impersonal, irrelevant, and lifeless. Mexican youths' definition of caring, embodied in the word *educación*, forms the basis of their critique of school-based relationships. *Educación* has cultural roots that help explain why authentic, as opposed to aesthetic, caring is particularly important for Mexican youth (Mejía 1983; Reese et al. 1991). *Educación* is a conceptually broader term than its English language cognate. It refers to the family's role of inculcating in children a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility and serves as the foundation for all other learning. Though inclusive of formal academic training, *educación* additionally refers to competence in the social world, wherein one respects the dignity and individuality of others.

This person-, as opposed to object-, orientation further suggests the futility of academic knowledge and skills when individuals do not know how to live in the world as caring, responsible, well-mannered, and respectful human beings. Accordingly, Quiroz (1996) finds that Latino students' sentiments toward schooling are strongly related to experiences with teachers. Darder (1995) also finds that Latino teachers' expectations tend to focus strongly on the notions of repect, discipline, and social responsibility. *Educación* thus represents both means and end, such that the end-state of being *bien educada/o* is accomplished through a process characterized by respectful relations. Conversely, a person who is *mal educada/o* is deemed disrespectful and inadequately oriented toward others.

Non-Latino teachers' characteristic lack of knowledge of the Spanish language and dismissive attitude toward Mexican culture makes them unlikely to be familiar with this cultural definition of *educación*. Thus, when teachers deny their students the opportunity to engage in reciprocal relationships, they simultaneously invalidate the definition of education that most of these young people embrace. And, since that definition is thoroughly grounded in Mexican culture, its rejection constitutes a dismissal of their culture as well. Lost to schools is an opportunity to foster academic achievement by building on the strong motivational force embedded in students' familial identities (Suárez-Orozco 1989; Abi-Nader 1990; Valenzuela and Dornbusch 1994).

Misperceptions about caring are not confined to the student-teacher nexus. Immigrant and Mexican American youth at Seguín, despite a shared understanding of the meaning of *educación*, define their own schooling experiences differently. For example, despite feeling "invisible" in mainstream, regular-track

classrooms, immigrant students rarely share U.S.-born youth's perception of U.S. schooling as fashioned to promote the ascendancy of some students more than others. Immigrants experience more overt discrimination—including at the hands of many insensitive Mexican American youth—than any other group in this Mexican-origin community. Nevertheless, their sense of progress and family betterment and their commitment to a pro-school ethos propel them onward. Whatever complaints they might have about their schooling experiences in the United States, these are blunted and silenced by their appreciation of the opportunity to pursue an education beyond what would have been available to them in Mexico. U.S.-born youth, in contrast, demonstrate their sense of entitlement to *educación* when they demand, either with their voices or their bodies, a more humane vision of schooling. Most often, school officials fail to interpret these challenges correctly, partly because they are unaware that despite their acculturated, English-dominant status, Mexican American students at Seguín retain an understanding of education that is eminently Mexican in orientation.

Differences in the ways in which Mexican American and immigrant students perceive their schooling experiences color each group's response to the exhortation that they "care about" school. Immigrant students acquiesce. Their grounded sense of identity combines with their unfamiliarity with the Mexican minority experience to enable them to "care about" school without the threat of language or culture loss, or even the burden of cultural derogation when their sights are set on swiftly acculturating toward the mainstream. U.S.-born youth, who hear in the demand to "care about" school an implicit threat to their ethnic identity, often withdraw or rebel.

Thus, an obvious limit to caring exists when teachers ask all students to care about school while many students ask to be cared for *before* they care about. With students and school officials talking past each other, a mutual sense of alienation evolves. This dynamic is well documented in thinking about caring and education. Less obvious to caring theorists are the racist and authoritarian undertones that accompany the demand that youth at places like Seguín High "care about" school. The overt request overlies a covert demand that students embrace a curriculum that

either dismisses or derogates their ethnicity and that they respond caringly to school officials who often hold their culture and community in contempt.

Misunderstandings about the meaning of caring thus subtract resources from youth by impeding the development of authentic caring and by obliging students to participate in a non-neutral, power-evasive position of aesthetic, or superficial, caring. The widespread disaffection with schooling among U.S.-born youth should thus be attributed to their experience of schooling as subtractive or as an implicit threat to ethnic identity that accompanies the demand that youth care about school. Rather than building on students' cultural and linguistic knowledge and heritage to create biculturally and bilingually competent youth, schools subtract these identifications from them to their social and academic detriment.

Conceptualizations of educational "caring" must more explicitly challenge the notion that assimilation is a neutral process so that cultural- and language-affirming curricula may be set into motion. The definition of authentic caring that evolves in this work thus expands on caring theory to include a pedagogical preoccupation with questions of otherness, difference, and power that reside within the assimilation process itself (Portes and Rumbaut 1990; Darder 1991; Spring 1997). In such a world, "difference is seen as a resource, not as a threat" (Flores and Benmayor 1997, p. 5). While issues of class, race, and gender are of increasing concern to caring theorists (e.g., Webb-Dempsey et al. 1996), the curriculum, and its subtractive elements therein, remains a sacred cow, powerful and unassessed.

Subtractive Assimilation

As advanced by Cummins (1984, 1986) and Gibson (1993), the concept of "subtractive assimilation" is predicated on the assumption that assimilation is a non-neutral process and that its widespread application negatively impacts the economic and political integration of minorities.[14] Even bilingual education programs that explicitly attend to the linguistic needs of minority youth can be, and typically are, subtractive if they do not reinforce students' native language skills and cultural identity (Cum-

mins 1988). The very rationale of English as a Second Language (ESL)—the predominant language program at the high school level—is subtractive. As ESL programs are designed to transition youth into an English-only curriculum, they neither reinforce their native language skills nor their cultural identities.[15] Although there are many other aspects of schooling that are subtractive (see chapter 5), it is important to emphasize how the organization of schooling has been historically implicated in the devaluation of the Spanish language, Mexico, Mexican culture, and things Mexican (Lopez 1976; Hernández-Chávez 1988).

Merino and coworkers (1993) note that American institutions have responded *additively* to immigrant groups who come to the United States either as members of an educated class or as speakers of high-status languages. For newcomers who speak a nonstandard linguistic variety, emanate from rural backgrounds, or are nonliterate, U.S. society has been much less welcoming (see Sanchez [1993] and Galindo [1992] for a discussion of linguistic varieties of the Spanish language in the Southwest). While possessing an accent in a high-status language is perceived positively and may even constitute an advantage, the same does not hold true for members of historically subordinate groups. Working similarly to color and personal appearance, Lopez (1976) notes how language is a marker for ethnicity that can serve as a basis for exclusion or even "de-ethnicization" through the schooling process (see Lucas et al. 1995, for counterexamples in non-mainstream schools and classrooms).

Conveying a meaning similar to that of Lopez's (1976) "de-ethnicization," Spring (1997) characterizes the political context in which U.S. minorities have had to struggle for educational equality as one of "deculturalization." Spring notes correctly how struggles over educational policy reflect deeper ideological debates about cultural forms that define, or should define, America. Though short of opening the "black box" of schooling, Spring's historical framework nevertheless underscores its politicized nature in the case of minority youth.

Because of its focus on how immigrants and non-immigrants *learn* rather than how they are *schooled*, the subtractive assimilation literature accords insufficient attention to how the organization of schooling can be just as consequential to the academic progress of minority youth. To communicate this broader structural principle, I use the term "subtractive schooling." This brings the school into sharper focus and suggests that schools may be subtractive in ways that extend beyond the concept of subtractive cultural assimilation to include the content and organization of the curriculum. Subtractive schooling thus widens the analytical scope to examine other ways that schools subtract resources from youth. One critically important route that the cultural assimilation literature does not address involves school-based relationships. Research into the effects of caring and the role of social capital provide guidance in evaluating the significance of social ties at school.

Social Capital

Emanating from an exchange theory perspective in sociology, social capital is especially appropriate for addressing the structure of relationships among immigrant and non-immigrant youth, as well as highlighting the effects of breakdowns or enhancements in the flow of school-related information and support. In contrast to other forms of capital (i.e., human, physical, and cultural), social capital is neither a single entity nor reflective of individuals' attributes. Social capital is defined by its *function* in group or network structures. Coleman (1988) posits an interaction between human and social capital variables to communicate the view that social capital is not an intrinsic feature of social networks. Rather, *it comes into being* whenever social interaction makes use of resources residing within the web of social relationships. Exchange relationships thus constitute social capital when they enable the attainment of goals that cannot be attained individually. In this view, academic achievement is best understood not as an individual attribute but as a collective process; and, specifically, one that issues from nonrationalistic, emotional commitments among individuals who are embedded in supportive networks.

Coleman's (1988, 1990) formulation reveals the extent to which school and socioeconomic success are predicated on constructive social ties characterized by reciprocal relationships (also see Valenzuela and Dornbusch 1994; Stanton-Salazar 1995,

1996). Positive social relations at school are highly productive because they allow for the accumulation of social capital that can then be converted into socially valued resources or opportunities (e.g., good grades, a high school diploma, access to privileged information, etc.). Beyond helping individuals attain such human capital as education and skills, social capital fosters the development of trust, norms, and expectations among youth who come to share a similar goal-orientation toward schooling. Exchanges of various kinds—like having access to another's homework or word-processor, or belonging to a study group—enable youth to create and recreate a pro-school ethos.

At Seguín, the scholastic support networks that generate social capital are most often associated with immigrant youth. Such networks may consist of two or more students who share school-related information, material resources, and school-based knowledge. These groups may or may not continue over time and they often shift in composition from one semester to the next. Though uncommon, especially for youth who are peripheral to the school's academic program, these groups may also include school personnel. Immigrants' collective achievement strategies, when combined with the academic competence their prior schooling provides, directly affect their level of achievement. Academic competence thus functions as a human capital variable that, when marshaled in the context of the peer group, *becomes* a social capital variable. This process is especially evident among females in Seguín's immigrant student population. The qualitative data reveal that females' higher average levels of academic competence enables them to contribute significantly to their friendship networks as purveyors of social capital and academic support. Evidence that male friends and boyfriends often exploit young women's social skills and resources is also provided.

The acquisition of social capital is not automatic, however, nor is its accumulation over time assured. The productive potential of social relationships may be undercut in a variety of ways. Although Coleman notes that ideology and social structure may work against or even destroy the formation and maintenance of social capital, he does not address the most significant ways in which social capital may be offset or eroded at the microlevel.

From an ideological standpoint, a pro-school ethos among socially capitaled youth is no match against an invisible system of tracking that excludes its vast majority. Strategizing for the next assignment or exam does not guarantee that the exclusionary aspects of schooling will either cease or magically come to light. So while an esprit de corps among immigrant youth may bode well for specific achievement goals within the regular track, immigrants' ascendancy into the privileged rungs of the curriculum does not automatically follow (Olsen 1997). Conversely, the lack of an esprit de corps among U.S.-born, regular-track youth signifies not only their "socially de-capitalized" status—evident in a paucity of academically oriented networks among them—but also their disaffection from a highly unequal system of rewards and privileges.

Under conditions of institutionalized oppression, Ogbu (1991) observes that students' ethnic minority identities become collective expressions that help buffer them against the potentially psychologically damaging elements embedded within the dominant, individualistic model of mobility. Willis's (1977) ethnography of working-class, British youth similarly finds that students defy the dominant achievement ideology by producing contrary ways of being that oppose dominant cultural practices and discourses. Hence, Seguín students' de-identification from Mexican culture meshes with an experientially rooted understanding of their own prospects for mobility to make "be[ing] like an immigrant," as one Seguín school official admonished, an undesirable, if not impossible, alternative for most U.S.-born youth.

Finally, students' social capital may get thwarted through subtle yet pervasive forces of exclusion lodged in divergent perspectives in human relationships (Stanton-Salazar 1997). Differences in the meaning of caring at Seguín alongside the social and cultural distance that characterizes most relations embody this concern. Finally, the maintenance and elaboration of students' social capital is jeopardized by institutional policies and practices which subtract resources from them. The concept of "social de-capitalization" invites a more historical application of the concept of social capital to more accurately convey the experience of schooling for U.S. minorities. In the school setting, the social and cultural distance that characterizes most relations combine with subtractive schooling to call into play all of these aspects of social ties.

UNMASKING BARRIERS TO PROGRESS

Combining the concept of subtractive assimilation with Coleman's (1988) concept of social capital and the caring literature produces a revised theoretical formulation. The subtractive assimilation and social capital frameworks cover the "blind spot" in the caring and education literature that overlooks the connected issues of race, power, and culture. Merging insights from all three perspectives explains variation in schooling experiences between immigrant and U.S.-born youth by directing attention to the ways in which the formal and informal organization of schooling divests Mexican students of essential resources. The operant model of schooling for acculturated, U.S.-born youth structurally deprives them of social capital that they would otherwise enjoy were the school not so aggressively (subtractively) assimilationist. Stated differently, rather than students failing schools, schools fail students with a pedagogical logic that not only assures the ascendancy of a few, but also jeopardizes their access to those among them who are either academically strong or who belong to academically supportive networks.

While relationships with teachers exert a tremendous impact on the kinds of schooling orientations that develop in school, the social capital embedded in youths' networks also play a clear, productive role. Productive relations with teachers and among students make schooling worthwhile and manageable. In so doing, the potential for higher academic achievement increases. However as mentioned above, whether real educational mobility occurs, remains a nagging concern.

To the extent that relationships with teachers affect students' schooling orientations and achievement, this study provides new information on barriers to progress that are lodged in assumptions about education. To the extent that relations among youth affect their schooling orientations and achievement, differing levels of social capital between immigrant and U.S.-born youth are presented here as an artifact of subtractive schooling. Academic success and failure are presented more as products of schooling rather than as something that young people do.

Schools wishing to embark on a project of authentic caring would do well to consider the "social de-capitalization" or lim-ited presence of academically oriented networks among U.S.-born youth as, in large part, a creation of current configurations of schooling. The social and linguistic cleavages that develop among youth become yet another overlay to the major institutional cleavage already engendered by curricular tracking. At Seguín High, the major cleavage is between the small numbers of college-bound youth (10–14 percent annually) and the overwhelming majority located in the regular track program (86–90 percent annually). This division deprives the regular-track, "middle majority"—as expressed to me by Seguín's career counselor—of the resources and the pro-school ethos that exist among college-bound youth.

The "track" within the regular track program subdivides ESL and non-ESL youth, creating a "cultural track" that separates Spanish- from English-speaking students. Youth in the former program are destined to be shunted into regular-track classes; ESL honors courses do not exist. Thus, after acquiring fluency in the English language, ESL youth typically experience only horizontal mobility. Since many immigrant youth have been schooled in Mexico and they demonstrate extraordinary potential to achieve in school, a system that is insensitive to their cognitive and linguistic competencies unfairly narrows their educational opportunities.

The practice of cultural tracking is consequential to U.S.-born youth, as well. This separation encourages and legitimates, on the one hand, a status hierarchy that relegates immigrant youth to the bottom. On the other, it nurtures in student groups the kind of distinct and distorted identities that sabotage communication and preclude bridge-building. Structural distance and de-identification from immigrants push U.S.-born youth who are not located in the more privileged rungs of the curriculum even further into the academic periphery, where they are deprived of access to social capital manifest in the more academically supportive environment enjoyed by immigrants. The solution is not to deprive immigrants of much-needed language support systems, but rather to restructure academic programs so that they enhance learning opportunities for all (see Valdés 1998 who also makes this argument).

Curricular divisions between student populations not only reinforce each group's misperceptions of the other; they also deprive U.S.-born students of potentially positive school experi-

ences, including enhanced social ties. The pervasive view among U.S.-born youth—that no one around them is genuinely interested in school—underscores the extent to which they are alienated from schooling generally and from the social environment experienced by Spanish-dominant, Mexican-oriented, immigrant youth, specifically. Such alienation involves an impoverished definition of one's social world—a world so narrow and rigidly bounded that it does not include immigrants.[16] Ironically, the stigmatized status that immigrants—especially the more "Mexicanized"—endure vis-à-vis their Mexican American peers enhances their peer group solidarity and protects many from the seductive elements of the peer group culture characteristic of their U.S.-born counterparts.

Disassociation and de-identification with immigrant youth and Mexican culture has no such hidden advantage for Mexican American youth. The English-dominant and strongly peer-oriented students who people this book walk Seguín's halls vacillating between displays of aggressiveness and indifference. They are either underachieving or psychically and emotionally detached from the academic mainstream. While this representation of self is fueled by its compatibility with being in style under conditions of poverty, it also constitutes the basis for teachers' and administrators' negative appraisals and attention. Rather than seeing urban youths' bodies as the site of agency, critical thinking, and resistance to the school's lack of connectedness to them, school officials see hapless, disengaged individuals who act out their defiance through their strut-and-swagger attitude toward school rules (Giroux 1992). As I intend to show, beneath that facade are youth who seek unconditional acceptance and caring relationships as the fundament of the teacher-learning exchange.

This study suggests that differences in school orientation among the middle majority of immigrant/non-immigrant youth located in the culturally fragmented regular track are better read as products of a larger schooling context. Despite ample evidence that U.S.-born youth are achieving at a much lower rate in comparison to their immigrant peers, the theoretical question that emerges from the framework I have elaborated is not whether achievement declines generationally but rather how schooling subtracts resources from youth.

CHAPTER 2

Seguín High School in Historical Perspective: Mexican Americans' Struggle for Equal Educational Opportunity in Houston

Seguín High School is located in the "East End," an inner-city community of Houston.[1] The area spans twenty-five square miles, stretching east from the shadows of downtown to the banks of the turning basin of the city's ship channel. Once virtually all white and middle class, the East End has changed rapidly since the 1970s. Today it is a virtually all-brown (predominantly Mexican), working-class area zoned for both industry and residence. The roads entering the East End closest to where Seguín is located lead to rows of industrial warehouses, junk yards, auto repair shops, wrecked-car yards, trucking businesses, furniture warehouses, liquor stores, and a handful of mom-and-pop convenience stores. Nearby, a colossal industrial plant, Maxwell House Coffee, emits an intense odor of roasted coffee beans that pervades the entire community.

The boundaries of the East End almost fully overlap those for the geographical attendance zone for Seguín; and the high school's student body mirrors the community's demographic transformation. Seguín's predominately white student population shifted to a nearly "all Mexican" composition by 1983–84. As the student body changed, so did the school's academic profile. Once a model institution, Seguín is now one of the poorest-performing schools in the Houston Independent School District (HISD).

Another trend that joins the histories of Seguín and its community is the emergence of an ethnic brand of politics that has