

# Oppositional Youth Sub-Culture and the Second Generation of Mexican Transmigrants

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 6

FALL 2010

STUDENT  
RESEARCH  
SERIES

INSIDE  
THIS ISSUE:

Central Focus 2

Theoretical 2-  
Foundation 3

Economics of 4-  
Opposition 5

The School 6

The Street 8

The Criminal 10  
Justice System

Outlook on 12  
Change

La Casa de 13  
Amistad

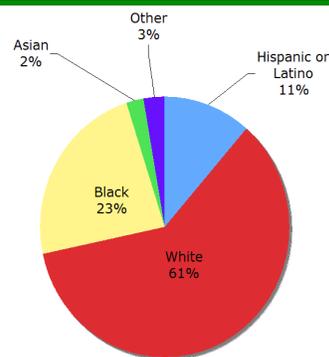
Take Ten 13

Further 14-  
Information and 15  
Bibliography

## Second Generation and Beyond

Oppositional youth sub-culture is by no means a recent emergence of deliberate resistance to the mainstream, nor is it a cultural experience unique to the second generation and beyond of Mexican transmigrants in the United States. It is, however, important to focus on this subpopulation because of the great and increasing impact Mexican transmigrants have and will have: The fate of the U.S. may very well be tied up in the fate of transmigrants and their children and grandchildren, particularly those of Mexican descent. According to research conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center, there are currently 29,189,000 Mexicans residing in the United States, of which 39.9% are foreign born. This translates to mean that 17,542,589 Mexicans residing in the United States are native born – members of the second generation and beyond (Pew

Fig. I South Bend Population by Race and Ethnicity, 2006.  
(Source: ACS 2006)



Hispanic Center). In South Bend specifically, there are approximately 11,324 Latino residents, of which 40% are foreign born (Tavarez, Adsit, Prot). This means that 6,794 of South Bend's Latino residents are members of the second generation and beyond.

Overall, demographic studies supported by the Pew Hispanic Trust, a member organization of the Pew Charitable Trusts, predict that by the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Latino immigrants and their children and grandchildren will account for more than one-third of working-aged adults in the United States. Latinos or Hispanics (of which Mexicans constitute nearly 65%) are the "majority minority" in

the United States, currently accounting for 15.8% of the total population (Pew Hispanic Center). Research pertaining to this more and more numerous demographic group can be used to shape effective public policy and community organization, resulting in a more peaceful, prosperous incorporation of Latino transmigrants. Oppositional youth sub-culture is perhaps the antithesis of peace and prosperity; increased comprehension through research may be groundwork needed to affect change.

## Research Questions and Methodology

This research brief will attempt to describe, interpret, and understand oppositional youth sub-culture among Mexican transmigrants in the second generation and beyond. In particular, throughout my research with Mexican transmigrants in the second, third, fourth, etc. generation, I delve into the challenge of articulating the association of structural violence and individual agency. The following three research questions guided my inquiry: (1) What form of oppositional youth sub-culture exists in the Mexican transmigrant community among second generationers? (2) Why and how do sub-cultures develop and what needs are met by participation in this phenomenon? (3) What is the role of gangs and violence in oppositional youth sub-culture? It is important to note that throughout this project I constrained my investigation to male youth. This is not to say that female

youth take no part in oppositional youth sub-culture, but rather, the female gender was simply not the subject of research or an element of analysis in this project.

Methods included extensive secondary research, an interview with Rita Kopczynski of Saint Adalbert's Catholic Church, an interview with Professor Jaime Pensado of Notre Dame, interviews with four second generation Mexican transmigrants currently detained at SBJCF – two of whom were from Elkhart and two from South Bend, an interview with Tony Cunningham of SBJCF, and informal conversations with two additional security guard employees of SBJCF.

Fig. II Breakdown of Foreign Born and Native Born Population  
(Source: Pew Hispanic Center and ACS 2006)

<b>United States Mexican Population</b>
29,189,000 total
39.9% foreign born meaning <b>17,542,589</b> native born
<b>South Bend Latino Population</b>
11,324 total
40% foreign born meaning <b>6,794</b> native born

## Central Focus

Juan and I had met three or four times for our weekly tutor/mentor session at South Bend Juvenile Correctional Facility (SBJCF) before he opened up to me and shared the circumstances surrounding his current incarceration. Carrying a metal bar and a knife, Juan determinedly approached a particular member of a rival gang. A one-on-one confrontation ensued followed by a brutal fistfight. The rival gang member soon fell to the sidewalk concrete and Juan

began to hit him repeatedly with the metal bar. After a few minutes, the rival gang member ceased moving; his body lay flaccid. Juan walked away, assuming him dead. However, the rival gang member did not die; he was picked up and taken to the emergency room where he identified his assailant – Juan – to the South Bend Police Department. A warrant was issued for Juan’s arrest and several days later ‘Juan’ was pulled over by the police for speeding and identified as the suspect. Several grams of marijuana were also found upon search of his vehicle.

I was completely in shock after hearing Juan’s account:

I could not possibly imagine how or why the quiet juvenile offender sitting next to me committed such a brutal, interpersonal violent crime. He had acted with the intent to kill, and I would postulate that this was not the first time. I would further infer that comprehension of Juan’s story requires an appreciation of his individuality in conjunction with the structural factors of economics and environment.

Inspired by my experiences at SBJCF, ethnographic and secondary research and analysis have led me to develop the following thesis:

**The second generation of Mexican transmigrants is at a distinct risk to assimilate downward into as well as creatively proliferate oppositional youth sub-culture. Relation and tension between structural violence and individual agency construct and determine an oppositional youth sub-culture, which resists education and perpetuates poverty. Consideration of economics, the school, the streets, and the criminal justice system are critical aspects of the description, interpretation, and understanding of such a sub-culture.**

## A Theoretical Foundation: Defining the Term

### “Oppositional Youth Sub-Culture”

What is meant by the term *oppositional, resistive youth sub-culture*? The anthropological theory is that of cultural production. In the words of Paul Willis:

*Cultural production is the process of the collective creative use of discourses, meanings, materials, practices, and group processes to explore, understand, and creatively occupy particular positions, relations, and sets of material possibilities. For oppressed groups this is likely to include oppositional forms (Willis 109).*

The production of a sub-culture is, in its essence, the process of meaning making and the creative action of social agents in disrupting or differentiating mainstream ideology and structure. Willis’ ethnography of working class ‘lads’ during the 1970s in England and their production of an oppositional, counter-school culture is the foundational literature on this subject. His main argument is

that there is an element of self-damnation in the taking of subordinate roles in Western capitalism that is experienced as “true learning, affirmation, appropriation, and as a form of resistance” (Willis 3). The young men are in fact exercising agency by choosing to fail. In doing so, they produce a culture that in turn reproduces their class position in society.

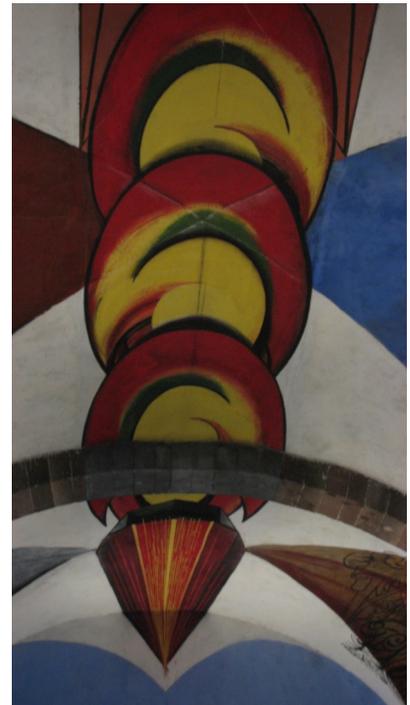


Fig. III and IV Siquieros Murals in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico (Source: Caroline Hawes, photographer)

## A Theoretical Foundation (Cont.)

Since the 1970s, the work of Paul Willis has been built upon, updated, contested, and applied to a wide range of cultures and circumstances. Philippe Bourgois, for example, spent several years during the 1990s living in 'El Barrio' of East Harlem – a predominantly Puerto Rican community. He explored the informal economy of this impoverished inner-city neighborhood – a complex, thriving drug manufacture, sale, and distribution enterprise. His description of street culture is worth noting:

*The anguish of growing up poor in the richest city in the world is compounded by the cultural assault that El Barrio youths often face when they venture out of their neighborhood. This has spawned what I call 'inner-city street culture': a complex and conflictual web of beliefs, symbols, modes of interaction, values, and ideologies that have emerged in opposition to exclusion from mainstream society. Street culture offers an alternative forum for autonomous personal dignity. In the particular case of the United States, the concentration of socially marginalized populations into politically and ecologically isolated inner-city enclaves has fomented an especially explosive cultural creativity that is in defiance of racism and economic marginalization. This 'street culture of resistance' is not a coherent, conscious universe of political opposition but rather, a spontaneous set of rebellious practices that in the long term have emerged as an oppositional style. (Bourgois 8).*

**"The young men are in fact exercising agency by choosing to fail."**

Bourgois parallels the logic of Paul Willis who also emphasized the way in which cultural production is an active response, never specifiable in advance, by humans to what formed and forms them.

In addition, immigration scholars have recently taken into consideration the existence of such oppositional youth sub-culture as it relates to downward assimilation among contemporary transmigrants. Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou define assimilation today as a segmented occurrence. One of these segments is the process of downward assimilation into the permanent poverty of the underclass and an oppositional culture already established by native, marginalized youth (Portes and Zhou). Joel Perlmann and Roger Waldinger further describe oppositional youth sub-culture – particularly among the children of transmigrants, a 'second generation revolt' – as a means of protecting self-worth. It is a response to mainstream society's rejection by in turn, outright and often violently rejecting the values and culture of the mainstream. In oppositional youth sub-culture, it is considered a betrayal of one's ethnic group to succeed in the 'white' mainstream. Solidarity can thus be a leveling mechanism that prevents educational and economic advancement and a better standard of living (Perlmann and Waldinger 235).

Two final side-points need to be made before moving on from theory and definitions to a discussion of economics, the school, the streets, and the criminal justice system in connection to oppositional youth sub-culture. First, as I was cautioned during

my interview with Professor Jaime Pensado, the terms 'opposition' and 'oppositional culture' are not to be used lightly, nor do they apply to every form of youth sub-culture. All types of young people of different class, culture, ethnicity, and geography develop their own sub-cultures that are often propagated from above, by larger societal institutions such as the media. Such sub-cultures may or may not be in deliberate opposition to the mainstream. Second, a focus on the self-defeating rebellion among youth who participate in an oppositional cultural form obscures the reality that the majority of Mexican transmigrants and their children and grandchildren are 'making it' as law-abiding residents. Moreover, when the problems of poverty and violence and suffering overwhelm, it is important to remember the certain and sustainable probability of positive outcomes.

## The Economics of Opposition

Since the work of Paul Willis in the 1970s, the question of economics and oppositional youth sub-culture has become – what happens to the working class when work disappears? During the later parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, structural conditions of capital have shifted dramatically, relocating to free trade zones and Third World countries (Dolby and Dimitriadis 7). The United States is now, for the most part, a post-industrialized country. Unfortunately, such deindustrialization and globalization of the United States' economy has resulted in the disappearance of intermediate opportunities to fill the growing gap between minimum wage jobs at the bottom of the service sector economy and high-tech or professional jobs occupied by the college-educated elite. The term 'hourglass economy' describes the current state of the economy in which the poor and working class are in a 'race' against the narrowing middle class (Portes and Zhou).

Today's working class in the United States is most often employed in low-wage service sector jobs that offer little opportunity for advancement. The population working such jobs is overwhelmingly African American and Latino immigrant. More so than other immigrant groups, Mexican transmigrants occupy the bottom-most rungs of the economy. Research conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center as well as the publication of Joel Perlmann and Roger Waldinger indicate meager improvements in education (high school completion and attainment of higher education) and higher-paying jobs manifest in the second generation as compared to the first

generation of Mexican transmigrants. Currently, the median household income for Mexicans in the United States is \$40,274 and 20.8% of Mexicans/Mexican-Americans are living in poverty (Pew Hispanic Center). In South Bend, the median income of Latinos is significantly lower, at \$30,000, and this number has increased only approximately \$5,000 in the past fifteen to twenty years (Wilkinson and Yergler).

The second generation of Mexican transmigrants, then, seems to be losing the race against the ever-narrowing hourglass economy. The second generation is frustrated by the lack of economic progress of their parents and the lack of career choices to match their aspirations, having been exposed to higher wage and consumption standards from the start of their lives in the United States. (Portes and Zhou). These frustrations, along with outright discrimination from the 'white' mainstream, motivate members of the second generation to assimilate downward into the oppositional youth sub-culture already established by native, marginalized youth and proliferate their own forms of resistance. Rather than work nine to five minimum wage jobs in restaurants, retail, construction, cleaning, fields, or factories, the second generation of Mexican transmigrants may be more inclined to work in the informal economy selling drugs or guns. Such illegal activities provide the material means for oppositional youth sub-culture.

Philippe Bourgois expressed surprise at the number of young men and women who remain in the legal economy:

*Millions of dollars in business takes place within a stone's throw of the youths growing up in East Harlem tenements and housing projects. Why should these young men and women take the subway to work minimum wage jobs or even double minimum wage jobs in downtown offices when they can usually earn more, at least in the short run, by selling drugs on the street corner in front of their apartment of school yard?*  
(Bourgois 4)

In interviewing four young men detained at SBJCF, I asked about their parents' jobs as well as whether or not they had ever held a formal job and what kind of jobs they perceived to be available to them. Two of the four had fathers who were in prison and mothers who worked in a nursing home, in a hotel, or in a restaurant. The other two had at least one parent who worked full time in a factory while the second parent stayed home or worked part time. None of the four young men, aged sixteen and seventeen, had ever held a formal job, but all of them had participated in the informal economy, accumulating monetary or material income through theft or drug and gun sales.

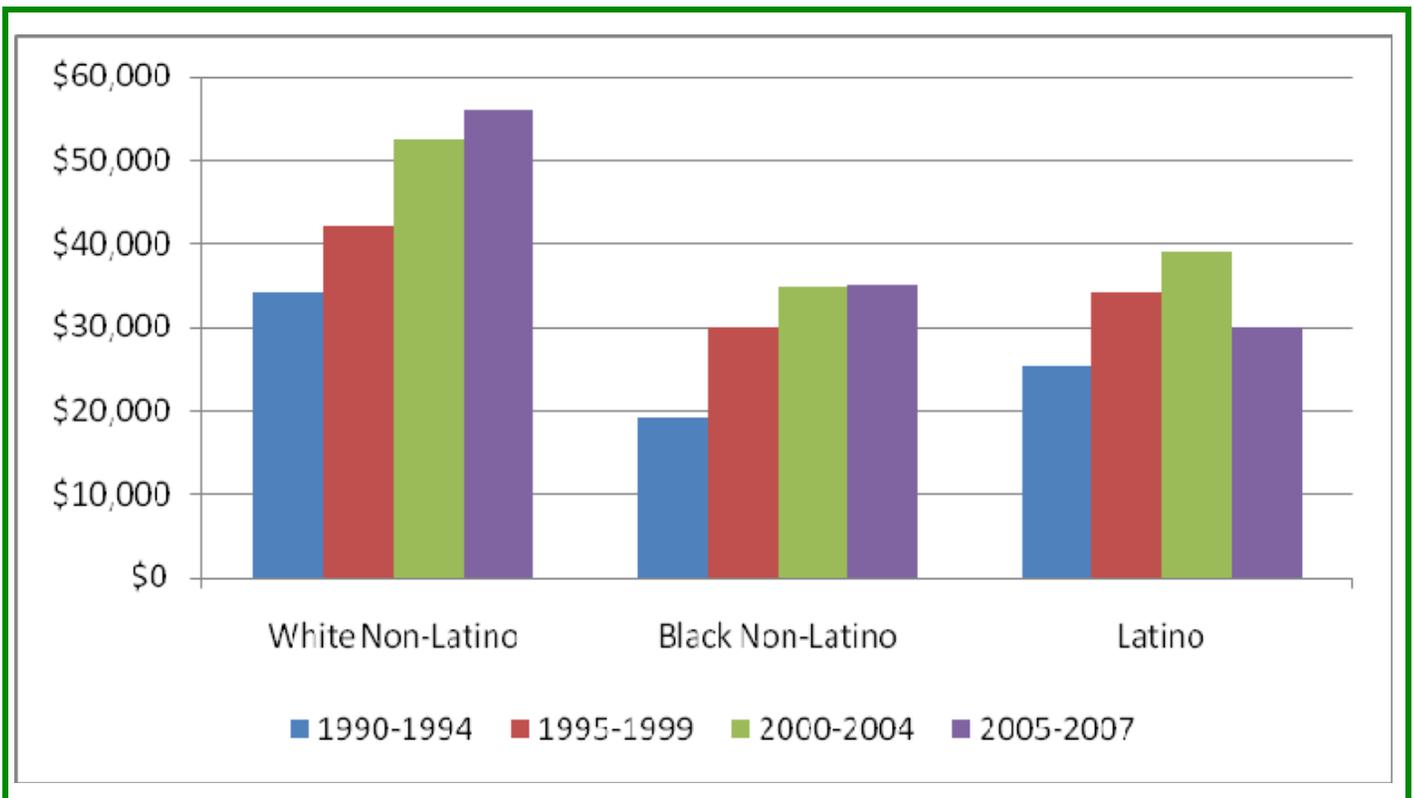
## Economics (Cont.)

Importantly, each of the four juvenile offenders that I spoke with had a somber outlook on the jobs they perceived to be available to them. Most cited construction, landscaping, or working in restaurants as possible future careers. Most also admitted that they were more than likely to continue selling guns or drugs in order to meet their material needs and those of their families. However, when I asked for 'one thing they would do or be if they could do or be anything,' all four young men described middle-to-upper class jobs including a traveling journalist for a big-name newspaper, an owner of a restaurant, bar, and dance club in New York City, a professional soccer player, and a professional artist such as a painter or musician. The disconnect between aspiration and reality for these young men is blatantly obvious, especially to them. They have big dreams, but have decided not to take these dreams seriously, perhaps out of frustration or hopelessness, confronted by the structural violence of a capitalist system that is bent on maintaining a larger pool of low-wage, easily-exploitable laborers than is actually needed.

Fig.V Mural from Artes Populares in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico  
(Source: Caroline Hawes, photographer)



Fig.VI Median Income by Race and Ethnicity: Indiana 1990-2007  
(Source: Latinos in Indiana)



## School: Resistance and Indifference to Education

The public education system in the United States is predicated on the basis of providing equal, integrated education to all children and youth. Contrary to this Constitutional foundation, the public education system upholds the economic, capitalist need for inequality and reinforces social stratification (Nolan and Anyon 133). Paul Willis points out that students are not passive receptacles of these dominant capitalist and stratified ideologies. He juxtaposes the school as the zone of the formal and the street as the zone of the informal in the lives of working-class youth. The young 'lads' of his ethnography reject school because they reject the myth of meritocracy, which the school broadcasts all around them. These youth know that they are members of the working class and that there is little chance they will enter the middle class, so what makes school relevant, and why try? There is an oppositional youth sub-culture ready to embrace them upon rejection. Thus, schools are in constant competition for the hearts and minds of youth with a powerful oppositional youth sub-culture in which knowledge becomes devalued or worthless. As a result of this rejection of knowledge:

*Authority, stripped of its educational justifications, can appear very harsh and naked. That is why it is opposed. The teaching paradigm is seen more and more in its coercive mode. The total experience of school is some thing 'the lads' most definitely want to escape from" (Willis 77).*

More recently, the public education system has become an expanded version of the free marketplace with increased privatization and 'choice' through vouchers, magnet schools, and privately owned charter schools. The policy initiative of high-stakes standardized tests that students must pass in order to be promoted or graduate fits nicely into a capitalist logic of competition, hard work, and the quantification of 'official knowledge.' In reality, privatization and standardized testing have reinforced social stratification along class and ethnic lines, as impoverished students remain crowded into the poorest schools and testing failure detracts further from already meager funding and encourages dropouts (Nolan and Anyon 141). Currently in the United States, 22.8% of Hispanics between 16 and 24 have the status of high school dropout. Of this percentage, 25.5% or 4,150,00 youth are Mexicans, which translates to mean that one in seven Hispanic youths drops out of high school (Pew Hispanic Center). Even if school is seen as relevant, many Mexican transmigrants and their

children have a difficult time in school because they do not understand the work and are hesitant to ask for help or help is not available. Such misunderstanding may stem from movement from school to school, the use of English as a second language, the lack of a culturally relative curriculum, and large class size, which in turn means little student-teacher interaction. Whatever the reason, the difficulties of misunderstanding may quickly transform relevance into resistance.

This resistance becomes contagious and success in school becomes synonymous with 'acting white' and thus, being disloyal to one's ethnic group. Rita Kopczynski sees this attitude among the youth at Saint Adalbert's parish and school in South Bend:

*"Do you wanna go all white?-" That's what they say. They bring each other down. If a Latino starts to really succeed he gets negative pressure, that he's becoming white, that he's in some way doing something wrong by excelling in school. How can we stay down and bring each other down? (Kopczynski)*

In my interviews with the four Mexican/Mexican-American offenders at SBJCF, I specifically asked about attitudes towards school. Responses ranged from 'I don't care' to 'I do what I want' to 'I knew I could succeed but I choose not to' to 'I had better things to do.' Interestingly enough, much later in the interviews, I asked about long-term and short-term goals. Each of the four young men stated that they wanted to at least finish

high school; three of the four also expressed the desire to continue on to higher education at Ivy Tech or Indiana University of South Bend. This discrepancy between attitude, behavior, and performance in school and education-related goals is paralleled in a report recently published by the Pew Hispanic Center, *Between Two Worlds: How Latinos Come of Age in America*. Despite delinquency and low enrollment and attainment rates, Latinos are just as likely as other youths to say that education is important for success (Pew Hispanic Center).

Dissonance between expectation and achievement may reflect the strong pull of oppositional youth sub-culture. While young second generation Mexican transmigrants likely do theoretically understand and believe that education is of substantial value, the tangible reality is that it is far easier to maintain solidarity with the social group of the oppositional youth sub-culture than it is to resist the resistance. When such an established, powerful sub-culture prevails on the streets, in the neighborhood, the individual youth is subject to the strong influence of social networks, peer pressure, and the need to 'look cool,' define masculinity, and earn respect. How could the school even stand a chance?

Fig.VIII Latinos and Education  
(Source: Pew Hispanic Center)

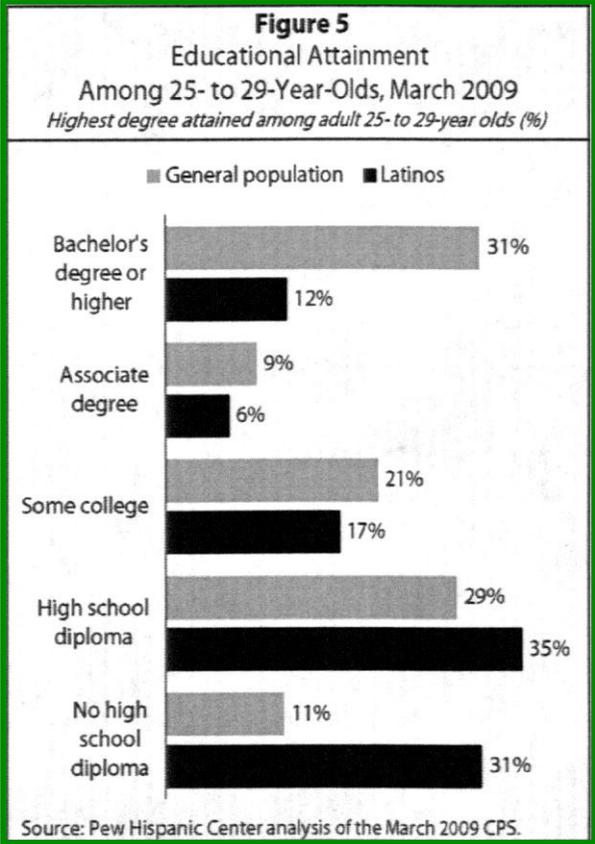
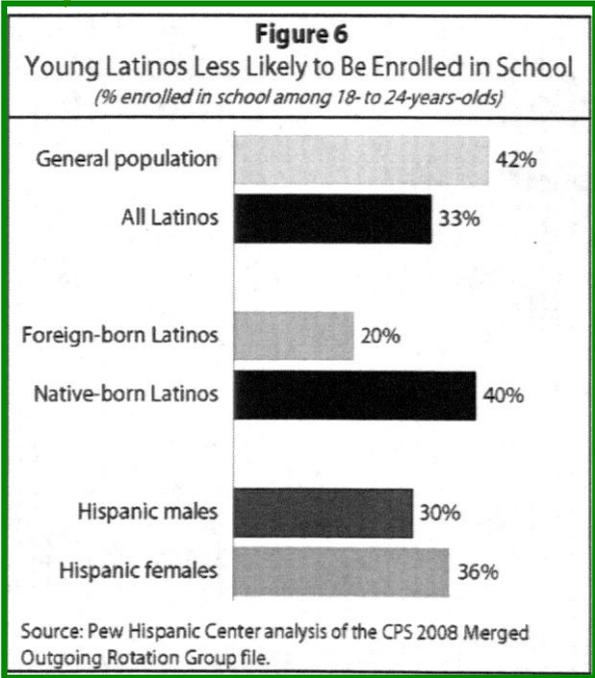


Fig.VII Explaining the Educational Attainment Gap  
(Source: Pew Hispanic Center)

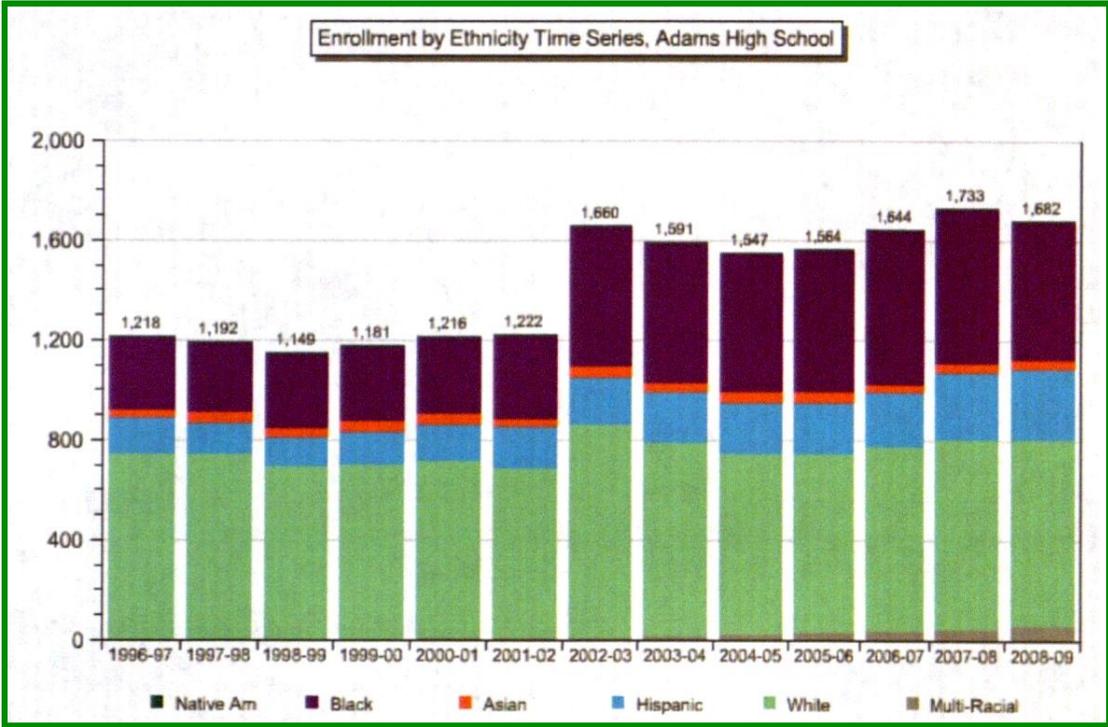


Fig. IX Adams High School, public high school with highest percentage of Latino students in South Bend  
(Source: Indiana Education Statistics)

## Street: Gangs, Violence, and Substance Abuse

The street is the zone of the informal – the territory of the informal social group – in the paradigm of oppositional youth sub-culture. Paul Willis explains that the informal social group is the basic unit of oppositional youth sub-culture, the fundamental source of resistance that makes possible all other elements of the culture. Along the same lines, violence in the informal zone is the ultimate source of revolt that breaks completely with the rules and meanings that are imposed from above, from the mainstream. Violence momentarily disbands boredom and asserts masculinity as the flow of time is disrupted and the anticipation and fear of the fight translate into a climax of emotional energy and violent action (Willis 34). The ensuing high is addicting: “Violence is one of the most intensely lived experiences and, for those capable of giving themselves over to it, is one of the most intense pleasures” (Buford 205). While Willis does not necessarily use the term gang or gang violence to define the informal social group or the violent acts perpetuated by this group, in applying Willis’ theory to impoverished, marginalized minority youth of low socioeconomic class living in urban environments, the terms gang and gang violence are synonymous with the informal social group and subsequent violence of oppositional youth sub-culture.

The gang, then, is the infrastructure, the element of organization underlying such a sub-culture. The word ‘gang,’ however, is subject to murky definition and manipulation by the political mainstream. As stated by Joey Leary and Sophia Cortez in their research brief titled *Mexican Gangs in South Bend*:

*Anthropologist Malcom Klein defines a gang as any identifiable group of youngsters who (a) are generally perceived as a distinct aggregation of others in a neighborhood, (b) recognize themselves as a denotable group (almost invariably with a group name), and (c) have been involved in a sufficient number of delinquent incidents to call forth a consistent negative response from neighborhood residents and/or law enforcement agencies (Leary and Cortez).*

Not all incidents of violence can be attributed to gang activity. Violence manifests in the home as domestic abuse, child maltreatment, and sexual abuse as well as in the community in ways that may be completely unrelated to a gang. Gangs do, however, provide a social structure that forges a pathway around the normal confrontational tension and fear that tend to prevent interpersonal violence (Collins 20). Gang violence – at its worst, deliberate homicide – may be best understood not by searching for its individual determinant but by exploring the social networks of action and reaction that propagate it. Basically, the gang itself in relation with other gangs becomes an institutionalized network of conflict and violence that is distinct from individual motive (Papachristos 74). No wonder that several of my interviewees – Rita Kopczynski and the guards from SBJCF – describe those youth who do not ‘make it’ as *getting lost*, lost in the gangs and the overall oppositional youth sub-culture.

If the gang is the basic unit – the informal social group – that cultivates violence on the street and underlies oppositional youth sub-culture, then the sale, use, and abuse of illegal substances provides the material support for such a sub-culture. The street is a place of enormous innovation, ambition, and creativity, often expressed as the entrepreneurship of illegal enterprise, namely, the business of drugs and guns. Importantly, the sale of drugs and guns is organized around the gang network. Hispanic gangs in the United States in particular – the most prevalent of which is the Latin Kings – assume a large and currently increasing role in wholesale drug trafficking across the border and distribution throughout the United States (National Gang Threat Assessment). Data compiled by the Pew Hispanic Center provides additional information on the well-established presence and impact of Hispanic gangs such as the Latin Kings. Perhaps most significant is the variance in gang exposure and involvement with the progress of generation: U.S. born Latinos are twice as likely as foreign born transmigrants to have a friend or family member in a gang and smaller increases are seen in gang membership, fighting, possession of a weapon, and the use of illegal substances with time progression from the first to second generation. Within the Latino population, Mexicans – who constitute six of every ten Latinos – were nearly twice as likely to report gang exposure or involvement (Pew Hispanic Center).

Such statistics are disheartening because they point to definite downward assimilation into and creative proliferation of oppositional youth sub-culture among Mexican transmigrants in the second generation and beyond. Robert Courtney Smith explicates the social disorganization associated with transmigration and the need for new institutions of belonging and settlement, which gangs meet. He posits that gangs provide one route of adapting to a new world in which Mexican manhood or ‘machismo’ seems challenged and compromised. Gang membership commands respect and fear, a way of affirming manhood when other means – such as school, a good job, or a career – that could be used to constitute manhood through respect seem impossible and therefore not worth the time or effort (Smith 213, 231). Philippe Bourgois echoes this sentiment: In the end, it (oppositional youth sub-culture) is not about the drugs or the violence or the gangs. It is about the struggle for survival, subsistence, and dignity at or below the poverty line. It is about an active response, never specifiable in advance, by humans to the structures, institutions, and processes that formed and form them. It is about a search for respect.



Fig. X and XI Streets in Cholula, Puebla, and Mexico City, Mexico (Source: Caroline Hawes, photographer)



## Street (Cont.)

Along with this quest to attain respect and define manhood, the past research brief *Mexican Gangs in South Bend* as well as my interviews with Rita Kopcynski and Tony Cunningham have all emphasized the role that family dysfunction and/or the absence of family plays in the choices the children of Mexican transmigrants make to become involved in gangs. While not necessarily the case in all or even most situations, a lack of paternal presence and support may motivate youth to start looking elsewhere – to their peers – to fulfill basic needs for attachment and community. More often than not, these peers are gang members. When one or both parents are Mexican transmigrants working long hours just to survive and provide for their family's basic needs, there is little time left to be present together as a family.

The importance of a consistent, positive adult influence in the life of a youth cannot be underestimated. I spoke with each of the four young detainees from SBJCF about their parents, siblings, friends, and role models. Two of the four had dads in jail for gang-related offenses. All of the other parents were working low-wage jobs with long hours. All four of the young men identified themselves as gang members and stated that their parents did not support gang membership and had tried to stop them from participating, to no avail. Each of the young men spoke about his or her parent(s) with utmost respect and many vocalized the desire to help provide a better life for their moms and younger siblings, but none identified a parent as a role model. In fact, when I asked about role models, the general reaction was one of hesitation and confusion; the offenders had a difficult time identifying someone in their lives that they looked up to and wished to model their life

after.

Friendship was a subject that evoked a much greater conversational response. When asked to identify who their closest friends were and why, without fail, the answer involved fellow gang members and sometimes siblings who were also gang members. For these Mexican/Mexican-American youth, gang members are those who support and give advice, mutually respect and trust one another, and help out with whatever is needed. Interestingly enough, these 'closest' and 'best' of friends are gang members who three of the four juvenile offenders said would threaten to hurt or kill them if they were to leave the gang. In an oppositional youth sub-culture solidarity is an enforced self-destructive trap. Violence is directed towards the self, fellow gang members, rival gang members, or immediate community rather than the structural oppressors of society at large (Bourgeois 326).

Moreover, in considering oppositional youth sub-culture relative to gangs, violence, and substance abuse, I want to give power to the voices I heard and the words I listened to, spoken to me by four young second generation Mexican transmigrants, all of whom are active participants in the phenomenon of oppositional youth sub-culture. The power is in the choice. When I asked the young men directly about why they joined a gang, why they committed a crime, why they acted violently, and whether or not they felt they had a choice, the response was a resounding yes. While feedback varied regarding a regret for

these choices and a view of such decisions as negative or detrimental, each of the four readily and actively acknowledged individual choice. The difficulty for these juvenile offenders was in articulating why they made the choices they had made – 'I don't know' or 'because I wanted to' were the common responses – and in admitting that many of these empowered choices have led them to where they are confined today: Locked within the walls of a correctional facility, now stripped of the freedom to choose.

In the United States, more so than ever before, oppositional youth sub-culture manifest in the school and on the street is a pathway leading into the criminal justice system. Since 1980, there has been an overall increase of 258% in incarceration – this includes the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. It is an era of mass incarceration and increasing poverty in the United States; the richest post-industrialized nation and greatest world power in history confines an escalating number of its citizens to impoverishment and imprisonment (Bourgeois 318). In their article *Learning to Do Time*, Kathleen Nolan and Jean Anyon point out that today, resistive or oppositional youth are learning to do time rather than learning to labor, as was the case for Paul Willis' young lads in the 1970s. Increases in incarceration, they argue, are connected to the need to manage and control a population that has become economically superfluous as a result of deindustrialization and globalization. A type of school/prison continuum has emerged in which public policy has shaped schools to become more like prisons. Many schools now work in close contact with the police to enforce criminalization of truancy, fighting, and any gang-related activity. Zero-tolerance policies in schools channel resistive, oppositional students into probationary alternative trade schools and then into juvenile detention facilities (Nolan and Anyon 142).

The most immediate cause of the era of mass incarceration has been the 'war on drugs' which began in the 1980s. Increased poverty in the inner cities and cuts in the availability of social services led to increased drug sale, use, and abuse – particularly crack cocaine. Policy-makers seized upon stepping up the criminalization of drugs as a way to indirectly respond (or avoid responding) to deep-rooted economic and social problems (Nolan and Anyon 138). Thus, the oppositional sub-culture of minority, marginalized youth – whether in the school and on the streets – has become a well-traveled pathway leading into the criminal justice system. Currently in the United States, between 3% and 4% of Hispanic males are incarcerated as compared to 9% and black males and 1.3% of white

males. Research shows a consistent trend of increased incarceration in the second generation and beyond of Hispanics in the United States (Pew Hispanic Center). While the reasons for such a trend are variable, it is likely that the persistence of oppositional youth sub-culture as an option for downward assimilation and creative proliferation has had some influence.

Once a male youth enters the criminal justice system at a location such as South Bend Juvenile Correctional Facility, he may spend many years in a rehabilitation, release, recidivist pattern, and eventually end up in the adult prison system. One of the four juvenile offenders I interviewed had never attended a real high school; at seventeen, he has progressed through his first three years of high school in different detention facilities. The focus of the juvenile justice system is on the rehabilitation of offenders such that they become contributing members of society. Programs including counseling, intervention and treatment groups, school, tutoring, recreation, community service, and family visits are intended to accomplish 'rehabilitation.' Unfortunately, recidivism rates range from a low of 30% to a high of 70%. Several juvenile offenders resident at SBJCF have described the facility as a form of 'day care,' meaning that they can do more or less whatever they want. Gang members connect with other gang members in detention and learn about other gangs and criminal skills. Sometimes, new gangs can form in juvenile detention facilities.

Fig. XIII The Changing Pathways of Hispanic Youth Into Adulthood  
(Source: Pew Hispanic Center)



Fig. XII South Bend Juvenile Correctional Facility  
(Source: www.in.gov/ldoc/dys)

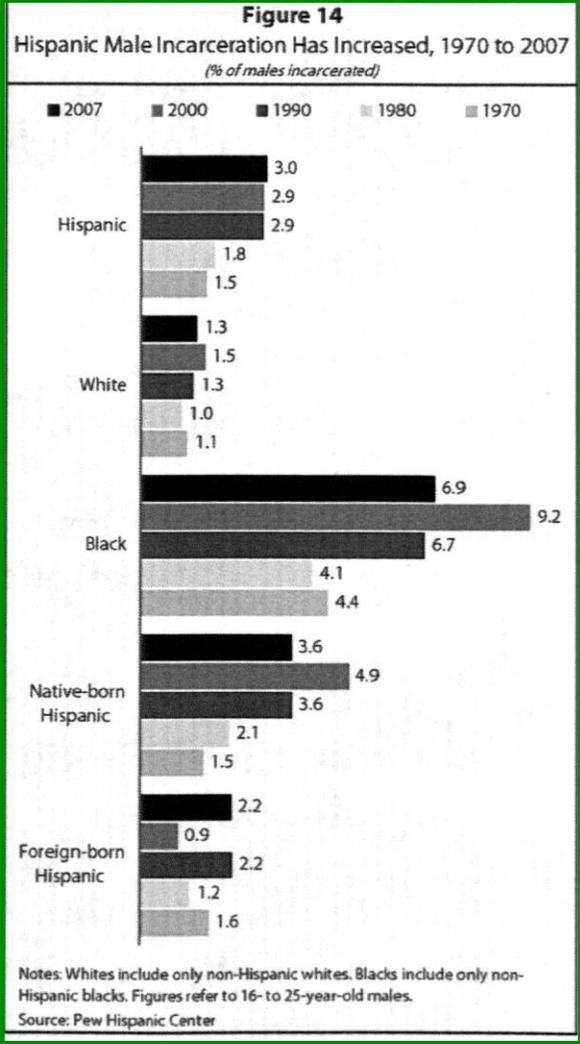
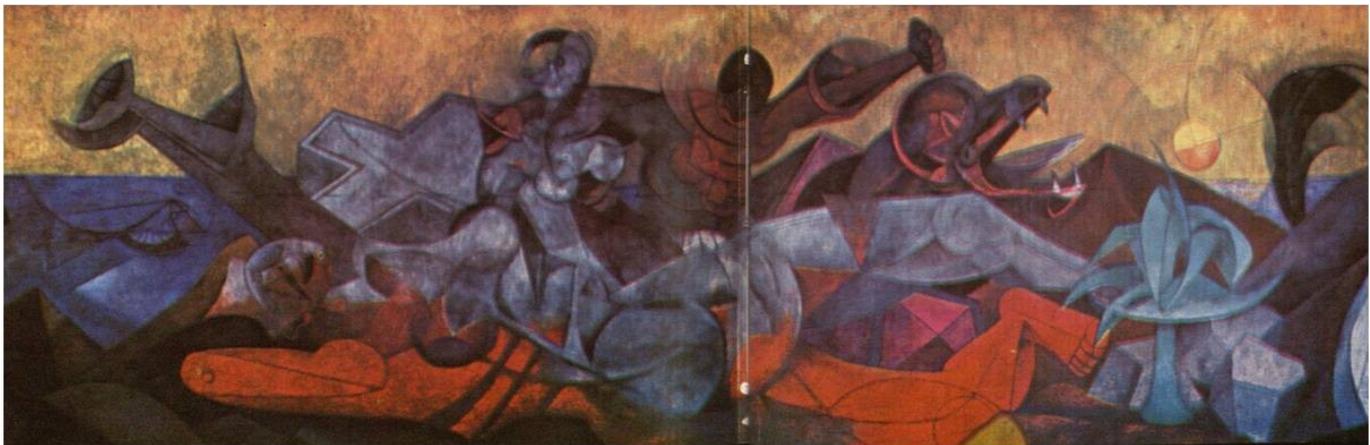


Fig. XIV "America"  
(Source: Tamayo, photographer)



### Criminal Justice (Cont.)

In light of oppositional youth sub-culture, the alarmingly high recidivism rates of repeat juvenile offenders are not surprising. To isolate the juvenile offender from the environment and culture, in the context of which the he committed the crime, disregards the collective and structural nature of some criminal, delinquent behavior. Upon release into the same environment, the youth reunites with his gang or informal social group and easily slips back into the oppositional youth sub-culture. Prevailing attempts to rehabilitate the individual juvenile offender treat only the symptom of a much deeper and broader problem: The tension and relation between structural violence and individual agency create an oppositional youth sub-culture that rejects education and perpetuates poverty.

## Outlook on Change

The prospects look bleak for the peaceful and prosperous incorporation of Mexican transmigrants in the United States as generations progress and native-born youth entangle with oppositional youth sub-culture. There is clear hope, however, in the individual agency involved in such a sub-culture. Emphasized by Paul Willis, Philippe Bourgois, and the young Mexican/Mexican American men I spoke to firsthand, the element of choice entails the relative freedom to choose that which is self-defeating and self-destructive or to make another, more positive choice. Willis describes 'sparks of creativity and aspiration' or 'moments of penetration' which are brief – often lost – moments that could be seized upon to redirect opposition in a more productive, positive manner (Dolby and Dimitriadis 6).

Combating structural violence may be a bit more idealistic than affecting individual agency. Overall, the United States needs to level the playing field in terms of the distribution of public funds, in particular, funding for education. The neo-liberal idea that the unregulated marketplace is the purest expression of freedom has only resulted in further stratification and marginalization (Nolan and Anyon 140). Decriminalization of the sale and use of drugs would also go a long way towards reducing urban poverty and crime rates (Bourgois 321). The creation and promotion of concrete economic opportunities in the form of jobs that provide a living wage and a

route out of poverty must occur if we are to expect youth to abandon the economic logic of criminal enterprise (Bourgois 322). Overall, justice and equality must be defended and enforced across class and ethnic lines.

Far more realistic, may be a focus on sustainable programs and policies at a local level that provide for consistent, positive adult influences and social support for youth in developing a healthy sense of self-confidence, self-dignity, and self-respect as well as motivate youth to complete high school and continue on to higher education. Programs here in South Bend such as the South Bend Police Department Youth Boxing Program, the Business Plan Program at Robinson Community Learning Center, Take Ten, and the variety of programs and classes for youth and families at La Casa de Amistad and Saint Adalbert's may be a start in transforming oppositional youth sub-culture among the second generation and beyond of Mexican transmigrants in South Bend. Perhaps most important, is the need for individuals and organizations working to combat poverty and injustice to network and connect with one another in pursuit of common goals. A lot of individuals, doing a lot of little things, *together* can change the world.

If such change is to occur, if oppositional youth sub-culture is to be challenged, the knowledge distinguished in this research may be a starting point. Any effort to impact sustainable change in the lives of Mexican youth in the second generation and beyond must consider the tension between individual agency

and structural violence in the overlapping categories of economics, the school, the street, and the criminal justice system. Such a consideration must include the perspective of the youth themselves as well as that of the Mexican transmigrant community. Asking further questions and conducting extended research is necessary in order to gain a more nuanced apprehension of these issues.

My thoughts often return to the evenings I spent tutoring and mentoring Juan at SBJCF. At this point, he has been adjudicated 'rehabilitated' and released, and I can only hope never to see him again within the walls of the detention facility. In attempting to understand the how and why of Juan's violence, the following questions come to mind: Is violent crime really an act of individual agency that can be corrected at an individual level? Or is it rather a structured act of gang violence that, while played out between two individuals, really has nothing to do with the individuals, but rather, the broader social network of gang membership in an oppositional youth sub-culture? The answer, I believe, lies at neither the extreme of sole individual agency nor that of social networks and structural violence. Any intervention and change for Juan will, however, require an active choice on his part to promote peace.

*"Many who live with violence day in and day out assume that it is an intrinsic part of the human condition. But this is not so. Violence can be prevented."*

*~Nelson Mandela  
Take Ten*

## La Casa de Amistad

La Casa de Amistad is a community center on the west side of South Bend that was started by Fr. John Phalen in 1973 as a youth outreach program. Its mission is “To empower the Latino/Hispanic community within Michiana by providing educational, cultural, and advocacy services in a welcoming bilingual environment.” Today, programs fall into the categories of education/literacy, healthy living, and social services.

Notably, La Casa de Amistad runs GED preparation in Spanish, after school tutoring, and youth leadership LULAC. The organization also works to strengthen and educate families and unite everyone together in a supportive, safe community. Partnerships with the Center for Social Concerns at the University of Notre Dame, South Bend Police Department,

Youth Service Bureau, and Family Justice Center—among many, many others—make La Casa de Amistad the “hub” of the Latino community in South Bend, and therefore, a crucial and influential point of contact between youth and families and leaders and even youth who are delinquent members of an oppositional youth sub-culture.

Bringing people together from all different parts of the community may serve to initiate change in the lives of at-risk youth and disrupt the cycle of violence the permeates the gang organization of oppositional youth sub-culture. La Casa de Amistad is in a unique position to foster peaceful, positive networks of relationships throughout the Latino community in South Bend from within.



Fig. XV A mural outside of La Casa de Amistad in South Bend (Source: <http://www.lacasadeamistad.org>)

## Take Ten Violence Prevention Program

Take Ten Violence Prevention Program is headquartered at Robinson Community Learning Center in South Bend, just a few blocks from the University of Notre Dame’s campus. The program is active, however, in many South Bend public and private elementary, intermediate, and high schools. Take Ten started in 1995 as a slogan campaign created by Anne Parry in Chicago—Talk it out, Walk it out, Wait it out. It has developed into a full ten-week curriculum taught by volunteer teacher committed to the mission “To promote choices and strategies that cultivate nonviolent communities.”

The aims of Take Ten Violence Prevention Program are to reduce violence, prevent violence, and teach children positive alternatives to violence.

Throughout the course, students engage in discussion and activities that help them to understand conflict and violence, values and principles, and teach them skills to be fair and assertive, communicate effectively, problem solve, express anger, recognize perspectives, and walk away when need be.

Just this spring, Take Ten has been implemented as a pilot program at South Bend Juvenile Correctional Facility. Evaluative studies have confirmed the efficacy of the program in meeting its aims in schools, but tackling anger and violence among juvenile offenders is a new challenge. The hope is that Take Ten will characterize the school or facility environment, affect individual behavior, and dissipate out from the school or facility to challenge oppositional youth sub-culture among other forms of violence.

**TALK IT OUT—WALK IT OUT—WAIT IT OUT**

## For Further Information ...

Check out the following websites:

- <http://rclc.nd.edu/programs/take-ten>
- <http://www.lacasadeamistad.org/index.html>
- <http://pewhispanic.org>

Read the following books:

- [In Search of Respect](#) by Philippe Bourgois
- [Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City](#) by Elijah Anderson
- [Mexican New York: Transnational Live of New Immigrants](#) by Robert Courtney Smith
- [Waging Peace in Our Schools](#) by Linda Lantieri and Janet Patti

## Select Bibliography

- "Between Two Worlds: How Young Latinos Come of Age in America." Pew Research Center: A Pew Hispanic Center Report. December 2009.
- Bourgois, Philippe. "In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio." New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 1-48, 318-328.
- Buford, Bill. "Among the Thugs." New York: WW Norton & Co Inc., 1992. 177-205.
- Collins, Randall. "Chapter 1: The Micro-sociology of Violent Confrontations." *Violence*. Princeton University Press, 2007. 1-35.
- Cunningham, Anthony. Personal Interview. 7 December 2009.
- Dolby, Nadine and Dimitriadis, Greg. "Learning to Labor in New Times: An Introduction." *Learning to Labor in New Times*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004. 1-17.
- Glick Schiller, Nina. "Transmigrants and Nation-States: Something Old and Something New in the U.S. Immigrant Experience." *The Handbook of International Migration*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999. 94-119.
- Kopczynski, Rita. Personal Interview. 1 December 2009.
- Leary, Joey and Cortez, Sophia. "Mexican Gangs in South Bend." Student Research Series: Volume 2, Issue 3. University of Notre Dame Institute for Latino Studies. December 2008.
- National Gang Threat Assessment 2009. <<http://www.fbi.gov/publications/ngta2009.pdf>>
- Nolan, Kathleen and Anyon, Jean. "Learning to Do Time: Willis' Model of Cultural Reproduction in an Era of Postindustrialism, Globalization, and Mass Incarceration." *Learning to Labor in New Times*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004. 133-150.
- Papachristos, Andrew V. "Murder by Structure: Dominance Relations and the Social Structure of Gang Homicide." *American Journal of Sociology*. 115(1). July 2009. 77-128.
- Pensado, Jaime. Personal Interview. 1 December 2009.
- Perlmann, Joel and Waldinger, Roger. "Immigrants, Past and Present: A Reconsideration." *The Handbook of International Migration*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999. 223-238.
- Pew Hispanic Center. <<http://pewhispanic.org>>
- Portes, Alejandro and Zhou, Min. "Should Immigrants Assimilate?" *Public Interest*. 116(18). Summer 1994.
- Smith, Robert Courtney. "Mexican New York: Transnational Lives of New Immigrants." New York: University of California Press, 2005.
- Tavarez, Kimberly and Adsit, Jenna and Prot, Smilie. "Latino Immigrants in South Bend." Student Research Series: Volume 1, Issue 1. University of Notre Dame Institute for Latino Studies. February 2008.
- Wilkinson, Alisha and Yergler, Nicole. "Latino's Housing Dilemma and Their Absence in the Homeless Community of South Bend." Student Research Series: Volume 2, Issue 2. University of Notre Dame Institute for Latino Studies. December 2008.
- Willis, Paul. "Cultural Production and Theories of Reproduction." *Race, Class, and Education*. Worcester: Billing and Sons Limited, 1983. 107-127.
- Willis, Paul. "Learning to Labor." Saxon House, Teakfield Limited, 1977.

\*\*Personal interviews conducted with four juvenile offenders at South Bend Juvenile Correctional Facility and informal conversations with two employees at South Bend Juvenile Correctional Facility. Details confidential.

### **Acknowledgments**

Ethnographic research conducted by Caroline Hawes in South Bend, 2010. With gratitude to Professor Karen Richman, Professor Jaime Pensado, Tony Cunningham, Rita Kopczynski, and the young men detained at South Bend Juvenile Correctional Facility.

**Author**  
**Caroline Hawes**

Professor Karen Richman's  
Mexican Immigration: A South Bend Case Study  
ILS45103/ANTH45030 Fall 2009

Professor Karen Richman



We thank the University of Notre Dame's President's Circle and Office of Research and the Saint Joseph Medical Foundation for their generous support of our project.



**Institute for Latino Studies**

230 McKenna Hall  
Notre Dame, IN 46556  
5746314440  
[www.latinostudies.nd.edu](http://www.latinostudies.nd.edu)