mentators, who took it as a demonstration that Mexican Americans, in the main, are not assimilating, even after their families have lived three and four generations on this side of the border. In his commentary in The Washington Post and Newsweek, Robert Samuelson concluded that we could address this problem by refashioning “immigration policy to favor skilled over unskilled immigrants, because they contribute more to the economy and assimilate faster.” Rich Lowry (of The National Review and The New York Post) was blunter: “If we have a population of Americans of Mexican origin who are having trouble getting a firm grasp on the rungs of upward mobility, the last thing we should be doing is importing poorly educated Mexicans…”

No social scientist is responsible for every use of his or her work made in the public sphere, and Telles and Ortiz are not to blame for the uses to which their work has been put. There are no easy formulas when it comes to successfully making the public case for progressive policies, other than doing the best one can to get the story right. When presenting work on topics of public controversy, however, it is particularly important to put the emphasis in the right place, to get the “headline” right. While acknowledging that downward assimilation is an important part of the story for some children of today’s immigrants, our research and the other studies of the second generation including CILS consistently show that it is a minority experience and that real, if often modest, upward mobility is much more common. That is an important message for Americans to hear.

References


