

CHAPTER FOUR

The Role of Tepeyac Association to Assist Mexican Immigrants to Assimilate to Life in New York City.

As we have seen throughout this thesis, Mexican immigrants coming from small communities in the Mexican Mixteca area to New York City become, to borrow the title phrase of Oscar Handlin's classic study, "The Uprooted" (Handlin, 1951). They have been uprooted from their families, their possessions, friends, etc. They have also left their familiar environment and are now confronted with a new culture, language and customs. They might not be as unfortunate or as poor and tired as the "huddle masses" described by Emma Lazarus in her poem at the Statue of Liberty, but they certainly have to overcome many obstacles when they arrive in the City. As Xochilt Bada describes it, "The change from peasant to factory worker or service industry worker is an abrupt one" (Bada, 1998, p. 14). Nevertheless, today's Mexican immigrants to New York City are received by a safety net of other Mexicans that did not exist before. Ten years ago, programs such as the Mexican Communities Abroad (MCAP) did not exist and Mexican immigrants' associations in the New York City area were limited to soccer leagues and other sports teams (Bada, 1998). There were no advocacy groups who could help immigrants when they had legal or other problems. Today, at the federal level, the Mexican government sponsors

the MCAP, working through the Mexican consulate. At the state level, the state of Puebla maintains Casa Puebla, and at the non-governmental, grass-roots level, the Tepeyac Association serves as an advocacy group.

Perhaps because of Mexicans' mistrust of their government, or because of their devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Tepeyac Association has been the most effective agency to gather, organize, and mobilize Mexican immigrants in New York City. Brother Joel Magallan founded the Association in 1997, but the idea stemmed from the Catholic Church in New York City. In 1996, the New York Archdiocese asked for the help of the "Compañía de Jesus de Mexico," the Jesuit order in Mexico, to help the growing population of Mexican immigrants in the City. The order responded by sending Brother Joel who had been living in the Mixteca Sur area in Mexico, and who thus knew the characteristics of migrants (Bada, 1998).

I worked for Tepeyac as a volunteer from June 25th to August 3rd, 2001, assisting Esperanza Chacón, the Urgent Cases Chief. I first wanted to work with Teresa Garcia, the Finances' Chief because I have a marketing background and she is also in charge of public relations, but Brother Joel recommended that I work with Mrs. Chacón because it was in her department where the needs of the Mexican undocumented community were most evident. Within the next few weeks I would realize he was right. The cases handled by this department were diverse --from accompanying immigrants to court to helping them transport a recently deceased person's person body to Mexico-- but they all had one thing in common: they portrayed the immediate needs and suffering of a very vulnerable community, which in fact, as Brother Joel had stated, were more concern with surviving than anything else (for a complete description of Tepeyac's Urgent Cases Department, see Appendix F).

On the whole, though, that summer, the general mood in the association, and of Mexican immigrants throughout the United States, was very optimistic. Especially the undocumented ones had reasons to feel good about the future. President George W. Bush was supporting President Vicente Fox's proposal to grant legal status to the estimated more than three million undocumented Mexican in the United States, and negotiations to pass such legislation seemed to be on their way. (Crowley, 2001).

Most of Tepeyac's main issues that summer had to do with immigration as well. The day I spoke with brother Joel to inform him that I had arrived in the City, he immediately invited me to a demonstration in front of the Mexican Consulate to demand that Presidents Bush and Fox not to pass into law a Guest Worker Program that would allow many Mexicans to go to the United States to work legally for six months. Tepeyac's position regarding this issue was that before allowing other Mexicans to work in the United States, those who were already working there illegally should had been granted a general amnesty legalizing their situation (E. Chacón, personal communication, June 26, 2001).

But that would not be the only demonstration planned that summer. At the local level, the Association was planning and promoting a demonstration at One Police Plaza in Manhattan to demand that the Mexican Independence Day parade in September would take place at a main avenue in Manhattan, instead of at an outer borough like Brooklyn or Queens. At the federal level, the Association was promoting the general amnesty march, scheduled to take place on September 26th, 2001 to Washington D.C. The march was planned to support Bill H.R 500, introduced by Representative Luis Gutierrez (D-IL), which mandated an amnesty for all undocumented immigrants in the United States. Although there were other organizations participating, Tepeyac was in charge, and those who wanted to go to the march had to reserve their place and pay at Tepeyac's offices.

Unfortunately for Mexican immigrants, the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks diverted attention to national security issues. The march to Washington D.C. was canceled and the discussions regarding the amnesty program for undocumented immigrants came to a halt.

Tepeyac was busy with other activities as well, as I describe throughout this chapter. One thing that greatly impressed me was that the Association seemed very well organized. From the paid to the volunteer staff, most of those working there showed a true concern and care for the problems of Mexican immigrants. As we will see in the next section, they are indeed very well organized and they also have a well-planned out activities' agenda.

4.1 Tepeyac Association: Background and Structure.

Tepeyac Association's headquarters is located on 251 West 14th street, about two blocks away from Fifth avenue, between Seventh and Eight Avenues, and 15 minutes walking distance from Union Square. The area around Tepeyac building mirrors the city's ethnic diversity. Walking on 14th street towards Fifth avenue, one can see the Church of Guadalupe just one or two buildings away from Tepeyac, followed by clothing, electronics, and other shops mostly owned by immigrants. Close to Fifth avenue, the Salvation Army headquarters building stands out. Once on Fifth avenue, the atmosphere starts to change. Trendy Union Square is very close, and stores like The Gap, Banana Republic, and others begins to dominate the view. So, from Ninth to Fifth Avenues, one can take a quick tour from immigrant to trendy New York City.

Tepeyac's building is like many others on 14th street; there is nothing Mexican about it. However, once inside, I felt like I was in Mexico. A nice Mexican young man opened the door for me and took me upstairs, where I would meet Brother Joel Magallan. The first thing I noticed was a big picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe, followed by poster of Mexican girls dressed in colorful Mexican ethnic outfits.

The structure of Tepeyac Association includes not only those working at the headquarters. It includes lay people and Catholic leaders, in sum, all those who desire to contribute to the Association's goal, which is the whole welfare of Mexican immigrants (see Appendix G). The staff or team of supporter, and many volunteers work out of the headquarters, and they are the ones dealing daily with the immigrants, who can become members and contribute by attending meetings, organizing activities, volunteering, etc. Tepeyac's full time staff, working at the association's headquarters, has a well-defined organizational structure, although some positions are still vacant. Brother Joel stated that he conceived this structure at the time he started the Association, but that at that time, the only person the Archdioceses of New York could pay was the Urgent Cases Chief, Esperanza Chacón. The other positions have been filled as the Association could pay the salaries (Figure 4.1 shows a diagram of Tepeyac's organizational structure and its full-time members). The Association mobilizes the Mexican community in New York City by having a highly efficient network of forty community-based organizations, located in neighborhoods across the five New York City boroughs and parts of upstate New York. According to Tepeyac, there are currently over 10,000 members in the association.

In terms of functions, Tepeyac prides itself in being different from other organizations of Mexicans in the City, and for having specific functions focus on the whole welfare of immigrants, as figure 4.2 shows. Thus, according to Brother Joel, Casa Puebla and Tepeyac have very different approaches. Tepeyac is a human rights organization, and perhaps because it is not aligned with the Mexican government, somewhat radical in its views. They periodically accuse the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) of racism by targeting Mexican immigrants, and it promotes a general amnesty for undocumented immigrants, organizing such immigrants in New York City to go to the

nation-wide demonstration in Washington D.C. every year (Smith, 2001). On the other hand, Casa Puebla is more concerned with promoting business between Puebla and New York. According to Brother Joel, most of the 50 organizations included in a list that the Mexican consulate in New York City gave me (see appendix H), are just sports or entertainment clubs (J. Magallan, personal communication, August 1, 2001). Thus, when it comes to supporting the whole welfare and human rights of Mexican immigrants, Tepeyac Association seems to be the prime option in New York¹.

4.2 Tepeyac Leaders' Views Regarding Assimilation.

According Tepeyac's official pamphlet, its mission is twofold:

- Organizing groups of Mexicans in New York City to defend and promote their human rights and social welfare of Latino immigrants, and support the other common minority ethnic groups struggles (sic.)
- Promoting a holistic and integrated approach of programs, activities, and strategies to develop and empower Mexican leaders. They expect to build a Mexican community that will share its cultural heritage and be integrated, not assimilated, into the economic, political, and cultural life ("Asociacion Tepeyac de New York," 2001).

Tepeyac clearly states that Mexican immigrants do not wish to "assimilate" to life in New York City, but rather to be "integrated" into the society. As in chapter one, these two terms sometimes overlap in meaning. As I learned about the different activities and goals of the Association, I realized that it supports Mexicans retaining their own language and culture rather than adopting that of the majority culture of the United States or the culture of any of New York City's other minority groups. However, it also supports the integration

¹ It is worth mentioning that brother Joel observed that most of the Mexican organizations on the consulate's list are headed by only one individual. In fact, I asked at the consulate for a list with phone numbers so I could contact some of those leaders, and I was told that I could not get it because most of the leaders wanted to keep their privacy. Given the fact that those organizations supposedly act on behalf of Mexican immigrants, that seems to set up a barrier with their clientele.

of Mexican immigrants to the economic and political life in the city. These goals fit with the definition of integration given in Chapter One, and with the definition of assimilation given by those who use the term to explain full economic and political participation of minority groups in the United States. It is important to mention that in its Web Site the Association's mission statement is slightly different and does not mention anything about assimilation (see Appendix I). In the following section, I will further describe the views of some of Tepeyac's leaders regarding assimilation and the implications of such views for the Association.

4.2.1 Brother Joel Magallan: "Immigrants' Main Concern is to Survive, not to Assimilate."

*"...For many peasants (arriving to the United States) it was the first time away from home, away from the safety of the circumscribed little villages in which they had passed all their years. Now they would learn to have dealings with people essentially different from themselves. Now they would collide with unaccustomed problems, learn to understand alien ways and alien languages, manage to survive in a grossly foreign environment." (Handlin Oscar, *The Uprooted*, 1973, pp. 35).*

In our discussion, Brother Magallan revealed his own ideas regarding the concept of assimilation, stating the following:

"For the immigrants that we help, assimilation is not even an option. They are not concern with it, or have any desire to become 'Americans'. Their immediate concern is to survive. Undocumented immigrants are a very vulnerable group. They do not know their legal rights (in fact, they think they do not have any). On the other hand, they are not an immediate concern for politicians because they cannot vote, so they do not have any political power." (J. Magallan, personal communication, June 26, 2001).

For Brother Magallan assimilation meant becoming American, and Mexican immigrants were not interested in it. At that time, I truly believed he was exaggerating. I had been an immigrant myself over ten years before, and although I did not desire to

become American, I did want to learn English and acculturate to my new environment, which I supposed meant assimilation.

After working only one week in Tepeyac, I realized that Bother Magallan was not far from reality, and that my own immigrant experience had been different from that of the immigrants he helps. After speaking with various immigrants who came to the Association, I realized that although they did have the same desire I had to learn English, most of them were not there to inquire about the English classes Tepeyac offered. They were there because they had been abused in their jobs, or because they had other major problems, such as the immigrants I met in my second day volunteering who wanted to take their comatose brother to Mexico. Furthermore, the majority of the immigrants I spoke to were not very interested in learning “American ways,” since they considered Mexican superior to American culture and traditions.

4.2.2 Esperanza Chacón and Teresa García: “Americans are Prejudiced and Hold Stereotypes.”

Esperanza Chacón, the Urgent Cases Chief and Teresa García, Chief of Finances, held a view of assimilation similar to that of their director. They stated that Mexicans should always try to keep their culture and traditions, and not try to become “Americans”. They sometimes referred to Americans as “racist”, and said that Mexican immigrants were victims of prejudice and stereotyping. Such opinions contrasted with my own, and I even thought that what they said did not really happen, until I went to court with Esperanza when she served as the legal representative of Rosario Lopez². Rosario was a 17 year-old girl who had arrived in New York City from a small town in Puebla to live with her aunt and

² Immigrants’ names have been changed for privacy reasons.

uncle. After living a few months with them, they accused her of stealing money from them and took her to court. She then accused her uncle of sexual harassment and rape. Since she was a minor, she was placed in a foster home. She ran away from the home and finally came to Tepeyac for help. Tepeyac directed her to New York City's social services, which got her a lawyer. The Association also offered to assign someone as her legal representative and translator, since she was a minor and did not know English. After the second time she went to court, she confessed she had lied and that her uncle had never abused her. Finally, the uncle and aunt could not prove that she had stolen from them, so the charges were dropped, with the condition that either she went into a foster home until she was 18 years old or that an adult took responsibility for her. Esperanza decided she would accept that responsibility and would take her into her home.

Before this, on our way to court, Esperanza told the girl to be careful with her statements because since she was undocumented, anything could be used against her, inferring that her legal situation could make her an easy target of discrimination and prejudice. The incident that occurred toward the end of the hearing would teach me that indeed, Esperanza had a reason to warn the girl. In her closing statement, the judge mentioned that the situation itself (the reason why this girl had been taken to court) was unfortunate, but it was still more unfortunate that it occurred among "illegal aliens," who had no right to be in the country in the first place. Although the judge was just doing her job, the verdict had been given, so this statement sounded out of place, since the legality of the girl's status in the United States had not been the issue she had judged. We spoke to the girl afterwards, explaining to her that indeed the fact that she was undocumented made her an easier target of discrimination and prejudice. This incident serves to exemplify the personal difficulties that some undocumented immigrants face when they become involved

in legal proceedings. This experience was also a lesson for me because I never thought that the judge would draw on the girl's legal situation to humiliate her even more, since she already looked embarrassed about what had happened.

Although this was the only time I went to court with Esperanza and therefore the only time I witnessed such a situation, Esperanza stated that she was used to comments like this, or to similar situations. Thus, after this incident, I could understand why Esperanza and Teresa did not agree with Mexicans' assimilation, and why both ladies hold the view that, as they both stated on separate occasions, "Americans are prejudice and hold stereotypes."

4.2.3 Joe McNulty: "Mexican Immigrants Should Assimilate"

The debate regarding assimilation explained in Chapter Two also takes form within Tepeyac. Joe McNulty, the Association's labor expert who volunteers at the Association three hours a day, giving advice and helping immigrants who have been abused in their jobs, believes that the fact that Mexican immigrants in New York City do not want to assimilate presents a problem. According to him, "keeping your own ways can keep you apart because it underlines the concept of 'other'. They need to grow beyond that and adopt American ways" (J. McNulty, personal communication, July 20th, 2001). By stating this, Mr. McNulty did not mean for Mexicans to give up their language or culture. Rather, he meant for immigrants to learn English, American customs, and try to be part of American mainstream society instead of just adhering to their own language, customs, and celebrations. Thus, Mr. McNulty believed in the concept of assimilation as a two way street in which immigrants are transformed by their new environment and adopt new ways, at the same time that they influence their host society (J. McNulty, Personal Communication, July 20, 2001). As the only white American volunteering for Tepeyac, he was very committed to

the immigrant's cause and helped them as much as he could. Furthermore, as far as I could notice, he was the only one at Tepeyac holding this particular view regarding assimilation.

4.2.4 Assimilation and Democracy.

The fact that Mr. McNulty holds a different view from that of Brother Magallan, Mrs. Chacón and Miss. García, regarding the assimilation process of Mexican immigrants, does not seem to affect the association's main goal: to work on behalf of such immigrants. Everyone at Tepeyac is free to hold his or her own views. Just as Mr. McNulty thought differently and had the freedom to express his ideas, so did I. My view of American society was and still is positive, not as pessimistic as Esperanza's or Teresa's, and I agree for the most part with Mr. McNulty's view of assimilation, perhaps because I never suffered the abuses or extreme problems I witnessed other Mexican immigrants suffering in New York City. My religious background is also different from Tepeyac's Catholic one because I have been a Protestant all my life. Nevertheless, neither Mr. McNulty nor I had problems there for thinking differently.

At Tepeyac, Brother Joel puts into action the only value he expressed he would like for Mexican immigrants to assimilate from American society: democracy. Brother Joel clearly stated that he wants the immigrants to assimilate to the democratic values of American society, not to be like Americans, but just to be democratic. "Be democratic" means that all members' opinion is respected and taken into consideration and that they have the opportunity to participate in the Mexican and American political process by presenting their request to politicians so they can influence their decision making process. The benefits of this would be that laws are enacted on their behalf, as for example a general amnesty for undocumented immigrants. In fact, because the presidential figure in Mexico carries a connotation of corruption, authoritarianism and lack of true democracy, Tepeyac does

not have a president, it only has “chiefs” (see Figure 4.1), and “coordinators.” Thus, the Association's leaders learn that they do not "mandan" (do not mandate) but they only coordinate the different activities. Furthermore, Brother Magallan also stated that he wanted Tepeyac to be very different from the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)* in Mexico, and that he wanted the Association to become independent even from the Catholic church, something he believed could be possible in the near future (J. Magallan, personal communication, August 1, 2001). At the time of my interview that was not yet possible: the Archdioceses of New York City still paid the salaries of some of the full-time staff members.

4.3 How Tepeyac Association Helps Immigrants to Integrate into Life in New York City.

Tepeyac’s target population is “low-income Mexican men and women of all ages , dispersed throughout New York City, who are new immigrants.” (Asociación Tepeyac de New York, Inc., 2001). With the increased number in New York City of such immigrants, Tepeyac definitely fulfills an important function and has even greater challenges and potential. The needs are illustrated by the following list of types of cases handled by Tepeyac Association from January through May 1998 (Tepeyac Association, 2002).

INS Raid	192
Criminal Cases	10
Kids Taken by Social Services	5
Labor Disputes	5
Accidents & deaths	5
Children with severe illnesses	4
Arrested flower vendors	4
Homeless people	3
Fraud by lawyers	4
Psychological Therapy	6
Domestic problems	2
Discrimination and abuse	4

Automotive Accidents	2
Medical malpractice	4
Youth Gangs	16

The fact that Tepeyac fills a niche within the Mexican immigrant community in New York City was made more evident to me on July 17th, 2001, when I went to Jackson Heights in Queens to promote the presentation of the Association's Mexican folk dance. This neighborhood used to be mostly Colombian, but for the past few years ago it has been transforming into Mexican. Most people walking by ignored us at first, even though they heard the Mexican music and looked at the dance group's posters. Even those who seemed Mexican did not show any kind of excitement, nor signs of missing Mexico while looking at the posters and knowing that a Mexican folk dance group was going to perform in the city. However, many did start to pay attention approaching us when we started to promote the upcoming "Amnesty March" to Washington D.C. It was then when I realized that many of those walking by were undocumented immigrants. In fact, after careful observation, I could notice that the majority of those passing by looked as if they were. They did not wear the big gold chains or nicer clothes that Mexican Americans wore. Most of them were young, in their early and mid-20's. Most older men were with a younger man, and the women looked also young, many with children. Although many requested information about the Amnesty March, only two people signed up to receive information in their home about the Association. Nevertheless, at least ten people who were just walking by happened to be Tepeyac members already, so they stayed to help out, as if they had nothing to do.

This scene illustrates the sociological data: that there are many Mexican immigrants in New York City, and that as Robert Smith states, many of them are young, even still in their teens. The fact that many asked for information about the Amnesty March reflected the high percentage of undocumented immigrants who could use Tepeyac's services. Following

is an analysis of what Tepeyac is doing to help in the cultural, economic, and political integration of Mexican immigrants in New York:

4.3.1 Cultural Integration: Keeping Their Own Ways and Culture

The cultural activities organized and sponsored by the Association aim to promote and preserve Mexican immigrant's culture. They include the following (“Asociación Tepeyac de New York, Inc., 2001).

- May: “Festival of the Mexican Artistic Expression:” Annual one-day festival in which different Mexican artistic expressions are represented, such as groups of dancers, singers, and musicians.
- July: “Soccer Summer Courses:” These are soccer classes for boys and girls between 8 and 16 years old, and soccer coaches and referees classes. Usually the Association invites professional Mexican coaches to New York City to give these courses.
- August: “Festival of the Mexican Culture:” This is a very important annual one-day event which includes Mexican music, dances, and food. Its most important characteristic is that it takes place in Central Park, where many New Yorkers from all ethnic backgrounds are exposed to it.
- September: “The Mexican Independence Day Parade and Kermess:” This one-day event emulates celebrations that take place throughout Mexico to mark Mexican Independence Day. It also serves as a fundraising event with three main purposes: (1) to allow needy Mexicans to sell their crafts and dishes; (2) to educate Mexicans on immigration rights and different legal, health, and housing resources available to them, and (3) to allow Mexicans and other Latino artists to show their work to the entire community.

- November: “Days of the Death.” A celebration held on November 1st and 2nd that resembles the celebrations taking place in Mexico, with the traditional “death’s altars” to honor the dead. This festival represents a significant effort by Tepeyac to oppose assimilation to American culture, since during the same days of this festival, Americans celebrate “Halloween,” which has a very different meaning than the “Days of the Death.”
- Other events: in addition to the annual celebrations mentioned, Tepeyac also promotes other celebrations in the different member churches, such as a Mother’s Day festival in May and different fundraising dances throughout the year. Throughout the year, it also promotes its own Mexican folk dance group called “Tepeyac’s Association Folkloric Ballet.”

*4.3.1.1 Promoting Selective Acculturation: English as a Second Language Classes
for the Immigrant Parents and After School Programs for Their Children*

To foster a selective acculturation process, Tepeyac sponsors two main programs that run from September to May: English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and the “Escuela de Tarde: Encontrando Nuestras Raices” (Evening School: Finding Our Roots). The ESL classes are intended for young adult and adult immigrants. Conversely, the evening school is designed for the immigrants’ children who attend American elementary schools. From 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday, Mexican children learn Mexican history, traditions, and culture. They also have the opportunity to attend a soccer school, and get tutoring for their school work in both English and Spanish (for a complete description of the program, see Appendix J). Both Programs are taught by volunteers, and at Catholic churches’ locations. According to the program’s coordinator, it is difficult to find volunteers to work on both programs, but the Association usually manages to offer

each one in at least one church (P. Quintero, Personal Communication, July 2001.) This year, the Association is offering English classes in the five New York City boroughs, and holds the after school programs in Queens and the Bronx.

These two programs represent Tepeyac's closest efforts to promote a selective acculturation process, as explained by the segmented assimilation model in Chapter One. The main goal of the Association, given the leaders and members' ideas of assimilation, differs from the expected outcome of this type of acculturation: upward assimilation combined with biculturalism. Even though Tepeyac leaders and their members desire upward mobility, they do not call it assimilation, and more than biculturalism, they seem to desire to hold on to Mexican culture and values. Nevertheless, whether they call it "assimilation" or "integration," Tepeyac leaders understand that learning the English language is essential to attain upward mobility, and they believe that the immigrants children's main problem is not their lack of assimilation to America's culture and language, but their drifting away from the Mexican culture and Spanish language.

4.3.2 Economic Integration.

"In Sum, undocumented immigrants bring with them values similar to the Protestant work ethic. They tend to rely on their own resources, or in the assistance of friends and family. They are not accustomed to governmental assistance and view dependency on the government very negatively. Ironically, it is through the ambiguous process of acculturation, that is, the acquisition of American cultural values, that such values may become challenged and possibly eroded" (Chavez, 1992, "Shadowed Lives, Undocumented Immigrants in American Society," pp. 151).

Tepeyac's target population, undocumented Mexican immigrants, go to New York City to work very hard. Unfortunately, as discussed in Chapter Three, they lack high levels of human capital in the forms of education credentials and knowledge of the English language. Thus, they are able only to get low-paid jobs. To improve the human capital of

Mexican immigrants, and to help them function in the new economic setting they confront in New York City, Tepeyac holds educational programs throughout the year, such as English and computer classes. The computer classes, for example, have greatly improved since I volunteered there; several levels are now offered in different New York locations (Tepeyac Association, 2002b). In regards of the English classes, the description of such classes explains that “Tepeyac provides English classes at all levels to both its members and people from the community, with the goal not only to teach English, but also leadership skills. The mission of the English Program is to equip immigrants with the English skills they need to navigate in New York and to facilitate classroom environments that promote leadership and organizing skills in addition to English competency.” (Tepeyac Association, 2002c). Thus, Tepeyac encourages immigrants to learn English as a way to improve their human capital so they can obtain better jobs. Administratively, Tepeyac’s ESL program is part of the World Trade Center unemployment office, which Tepeyac established after the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks (Tepeyac Association, 2002c).

As a vulnerable group, it was obvious that Mexican immigrants were going to be especially affected by the economic stagnation that followed the attacks, and would need Tepeyac’s assistance more than ever. In fact, at least 29 Mexican immigrants were reported to Tepeyac as missing after the attacks, and many others reported having lost their jobs. After the terrorist attacks, Tepeyac was able to obtain many resources from private individuals, organizations, and even the city government. Tepeyac established two emergency funds: one for the families of those reported as missing, and another for the unemployed. A team of volunteers, headed by Liliana Rivera, was in charge of receiving and accommodating family members of the missing who traveled to New York City with humanitarian visas to try to find their relatives (L.Rivera, personal communication, April

21, 2002). More than one year after the tragedy, Tepeyac still sponsors two donation programs to help those who were affected: “Donations for relatives of missing people in the WTC attack,” and “Donations for those who have become unemployed due to the tragedy of the WTC” (Tepeyac Association, 2003). Since undocumented immigrants are not entitled to government assistance, Tepeyac Association may be the only alternative where Mexican undocumented workers affected by the attacks can get help.

Another very important educational program is the leadership youth pilot program in East Harlem that began last year. This program is targeted to Mexican undocumented adolescents that live in New York City without their parents. As stated in Chapter Three, this is a growing segment of the Mexican undocumented population. In fact, according to Tepeyac, 50 percent of such are from 12 to 24 years old. With this program, Tepeyac is definitely fulfilling a need among this population, offering a healthy option other than the streets and gangs (for full description of program, see Appendix K).

Tepeyac also develops leadership skills by involving its young members in the Association’s activities. During my time as a volunteer there, I noticed that in the evenings some young men would come to the headquarters to print pamphlets or handouts promoting the Association’s activities. When I asked two 21-year-old immigrants from Atlixco, Puebla why they participated in Tepeyac, they responded that they trust the Association more than, for example, the Mexican consulate, since Tepeyac has done more to help immigrants with issues such as abuses in jobs and housing, and with urgent cases. They also stated that they wanted to promote the unity of Mexicans in New York City and that Tepeyac provided the cohesion needed to accomplish that goal (V. Salas, & H. Rojas, personal communication, August 1, 2001). These youth activities promoted by the Association will hopefully translate

into leadership skills in the work place, thus serving as an asset in the immigrants' human capital.

Another effective way to promote economic integration is through the work of the urgent services/labor advocacy department. Joe McNulty, the department head, had been a professional pilot for many years, but he was always interested in human rights. By the time I met him, he had been volunteering for Tepeyac for 10 months, two hours a day, but had been active in human rights for over 12 years. He handles all types of job abuses suffered by Mexican immigrants (for a complete description, see Appendix F). He stated that he attends at least two cases a day. Out of those, he is able to take action and obtain positive results in about 50 percent of the cases. Out of these 50 percent cases, at least 70 percent are resolved because employers respond to his letters. The other 30 percent cases are reported to the New York State Department of Labor.

Mr. McNulty stated that the reason 50 percent of the cases do not obtain positive results is because immigrants do not provide proper information, such as the employer's complete name, address, and telephone number. "Positive results" means that employers pay or make arrangements to pay previously unpaid wages (this kind of abuse is the most common). He said that it is unfortunate when immigrants cannot provide all the needed information because that is all Tepeyac needs to take action. "Taking action" means that Mr. McNulty sends a letter to employers, with Tepeyac Association's letter head and endorsements, stating the specific complaint and demanding immediate remuneration for the Mexican worker or workers. Letters are usually mailed, but sometimes in order to apply more pressure, Mr. McNulty delivers them in person.

The majority of employers respond positively. Mr. McNulty told me about a case involving 18 workers he had handled the year before. The amount of money involved made

it his most important case up to that time (amount that was not disclosed, for privacy reasons). He stated that he reports cases like this, “interesting ones” in his own words, to the Attorney General of New York State, Mr. Elliot Spitzer, because he said that “if employers are persecuted, this makes good news and gets the word out that New York State is serious about labor legislation.” (J. McNulty, personal communication, July 23, 2001.) Another reason he reports “interesting cases” is because each one that goes to court may set a precedent that can help immigrants in future cases. Even those cases, he argued, that do not obtain positive results do not represent a loss because immigrants that were abused learn their rights, so they know what to do in the future (J. McNulty, personal communication, July 23, 2001.)

To educate immigrants about their rights, the Association also holds labor clinics across the five New York City boroughs. Tepeyac’s work in this regard is extremely important, because most undocumented immigrants do not realize that they have legal rights. In fact, many employers threaten them if they complain about labor conditions, or about low or late payment, telling them that they could call immigration on them. Most immigrants do not know that employers would never do that because they would be prosecuted for breaking the law by hiring undocumented workers. I had the opportunity to translate for Mr. McNulty a couple of times while he explained this to immigrants; their eyes opened wide, and I had to paraphrase what I had just translated, so they could believe it was true. Furthermore, when he told them that if employers did not comply regarding their petition, Tepeyac could send a letter to the Department of Labor in their behalf, their first question was whether the Department of Labor would inquire about their legal statuses. That had been the first question I had asked to Mr. McNulty the first time I spoke to him about his work. He had a clever answer: he said to me “they don’t ask you if you’re

married, why would they ask you about your legal statuses in this country? All workers are covered by law, regardless of their immigration statuses.” (J. McNulty, personal communication, July 23, 2001.) Whether they decided to take action or not --most immigrants decided to send the letter-- I saw that just by knowing that they do have rights in a place where they are considered “illegal” empowered them as individuals and made them feel better.

“Feeling better” may not seem a route to obtain economic upward mobility in a city such as New York, but I noticed that after speaking with Mr. McNulty, immigrants would feel more motivated to work hard, knowing that abuse was not a situation they had to bear. Thus, by educating immigrants about their rights and giving them educational opportunities, Tepeyac is helping them to integrate to the economic life of the City.

4.3.3 Political Integration

Politically, the Mexican immigrants that Tepeyac represents can only integrate partially. Their illegal status becomes their main hindrance to full participation. The hope for full participation, at least at the voting polls, is the second generation. Nevertheless, there are some ways in which undocumented immigrants can participate politically in the city, and Tepeyac has been extremely effective in organizing and encouraging such immigrants’ participation.

Tepeyac has also been effective in creating strategic alliances with the local government, business groups, and other minority groups in the city. Some of these groups are the Latino Workers Center, the Dominican National Congress, the Coalition for the Human Rights of Immigrants, and others. To keep an ongoing presence with the local government, Teresa García through the finances and public relations department, invites local officials to some of the events sponsored by the Association. For example, she invited

then New York City Mayor Rudolph Guliani to the presentation of the Association's folkloric ballet on July 22nd, 2001. Although the Mayor declined the invitation, Teresa stated that it was important they keep in touch with his office, so they could notice that Mexicans were having a significant presence in the city (T. Garcia, personal communication, July 20, 2001). That same summer, the Association had also received a grant from the city government to hire a bilingual professional, meaning someone with a college degree, to do community work, which entailed going to Latino neighborhoods to educate immigrants about health issues.

Even the most powerful Latino interest group in Washington, D.C., the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), has helped Tepeyac. According to Brother Joel, they do not support the Association openly because for them to function in Washington D. C., they cannot look "too radical." However, they do help Tepeyac with money and office space when its members go to Washington D.C. to participate in the pro-amnesty march. Raul Yzaguirre, NCLR's national director, has visited the Association's offices in New York City (J. Magallan, personal communication, June 26, 2001).

4.3.3.1 Playing Politics in the United States: The Dream of a General Amnesty and A Mexican Parade on Fifth Avenue.

Tepeyac Association rightfully states that the greatest need for undocumented Mexican immigrants is to become legal. As an active member of the National Coalition for Dignity & Amnesty, which is a coalition of more than 160 organizations, unions, and churches from across the United States, they advocate for a general amnesty. The Association most important event is the "Carrera de la Antorcha Guadalupana" (Guadalupan Torch Run). The run's main goal is to call attention to the plight of undocumented Mexican immigrants and win support for a general amnesty, as well as to

demand respect for their human rights. It has taken place every year since 1998. Each of the 40 community based organizations affiliated with Tepeyac forms a team of runners who take turns in carrying a torch to Saint Patrick's Cathedral, the head of the New York Archdiocese, get a blessing for the torch, and then take it back to their home churches (For a complete description, see Appendix L).

The latest run, from November to December 2002, was especially significant for the organization. Before 2001, the run had been taking place only from the five New York City boroughs to Saint Patrick's Cathedral. During the December 12th, 2001 mass, Cardinal Edward Egan challenged Mexicans to change that and take the torch from the Church of Guadalupe in Mexico City (Basilica de Guadalupe) to all the Catholic churches in New York City and finally to Saint Patrick's Cathedral. In November 2002, Mexicans on both sides of the border took up the challenge, and about 2,000 runners participated, dedicating that year's run to the World Trade Center victims. The runners were named the "Messengers for the Dignity of a People Divided by the Border" (*Mensajeros por la Dignidad de un Pueblo Dividido por la Frontera*). In a press release, Brother Joel made a strong statement regarding the special significance of that year's run:

"For all of them, the Special Messengers will run with the Antorcha Guadalupana, throughout the roads of both countries, to announce that it is urgent to unite in for faith and demand that the Government of the United States officially accepts their names and faces, and grants permanent Residency to the more than 9 million undocumented immigrants, so they can be in the books, have a legal identification, receive medical attention, travel to their countries of origin so they can be remembered by their sons, daughters, mothers and wives, to buy a house in the United States, cash a check, obtain a drivers license, to be able to get a death certificate when they die, to receive compensation for accident or death, so that their families will not be left vulnerable, and to stop the suffering for all that has been evident on September 11th 2001." (Press Release "Grant a name and face for the immigrants," Joel Magallan, SJ Executive Director, Tepeyac Association, September 11th, 2002).

For that particular run, Tepeyac leaders also encourage Mexican immigrants not to work that day, telling them that it is their legal right to make such demand: “Tepeyac Association is encouraging Mexicans in New York to skip work on December 12th, and to use the right that we all have, based on Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of the United States. In effect since 1964, this Title prohibits employers from discriminating against workers based on their religious practices” (Tepeyac Association, 2002d).

Whether or not Tepeyac has a valid argument when it declares that “New York City recognizes December 12th as the day of the Mexican people in New York City for their contemporary contribution to this city and in honor to their cultural and religious practices...” (Tepeyac Association, 2002d), and even in trying to get employers to grant the day off to Mexican workers, what it is certain is that the organization has been very effective in mobilizing Mexicans to participate in this run. Tepeyac is the only Mexican organization that has organized such an event, taking the lead over cities with a much higher number of Mexican immigrants, such as Los Angeles or Chicago. A reason for this could be the Catholic church’s presence in New York City: Tepeyac is sponsored by the Archdiocese of New York, which is very powerful, and the City has a high concentration of Irish and Italian Catholics, who have paved the way for political participation of Catholics. Tepeyac has effectively taken advantage of these factors, using the Guadalupe Torch run as an opportunity to demand human rights for Mexican immigrants in New York City and across the whole United States.

If at the federal level, the dream for an amnesty is its battle, Tepeyac is fighting other battles at the local level. The Association mobilizes Mexican immigrants to participate in peaceful demonstrations around the city, to present different demands. When I volunteered there, one of the main demonstrations was a request to hold the Mexican

Independence Day parade at a main avenue in Manhattan, preferably Fifth Avenue, and not in a location on the outskirts where it had previously taken place. Such demonstration was held at One Police Plaza on July 30th, 2001. According to Tepeyac leaders, it is important that Mexicans have their parade on a main avenue in Manhattan because that would empower them as a relevant ethnic group in the city.

Another important event for the organization is a demonstration called the “Affliction of the Immigrant” (*Viacrucis de los Inmigrantes*), which takes place every year during Easter time. Mexican immigrants depict the suffering of Christ on the cross in a theatrical performance in front of the INS building, according to them “to denounce of all the abuses that new immigrants face because they are undocumented” (Asociación Tepeyac de New York, Inc.,” 2001).

In regard to immigration matters, the Association is always very active. Besides the permanent campaign for the general amnesty, it periodically holds immigration workshops, to inform immigrants about their rights in case they are detained by the INS. The Association also educates immigrants about new immigration law affecting them, and offers to help them complete related paperwork. In addition, members of the immigration commission organize visits to the INS detention centers, if needed. Tepeyac’s view of the INS in New York City is negative because according to them, INS officials discriminate against Mexicans, singling them out upon their arrival at the airport to detain them. Furthermore, according to Tepeyac, between 1998 and 1999, 84 percent of those detained during INS’ sweeps in New York City factories were Mexicans (Tepeyac Association, 2002e).

At a more personal level, through the urgent cases department, Tepeyac also encourages individual immigrants to take action and denounce employer abuses. I saw such

help in action, when an immigrant named Jorge Hernandez from the Mexican state of Guerrero came to Tepeyac asking for help. He had worked for more than a year at a delicatessen owned by Koreans. The owner had refused to pay him for last month of his work and fired him. At the Association, Jorge spoke with Joe McNulty about his legal options; Mr. McNulty helped him fill out a report of the situation for the Department of Labor. Jorge was afraid because he was undocumented, but after Mr. McNulty explained to him that the Department of Labor had nothing to do with immigration, he calmed down. He then spoke to Esperanza Chacón and myself about further action he could take so everyone would know how his Korean employers had treated him. Mrs. Chacón suggested a boycott of the store. She told Jorge to get nine more people together and go in front of the store with big signs urging people not to shop there because the owner was exploiting workers. She offered to go and support the protest. She also offered to try to get the media involved. Jorge said he was not sure he could get nine other people because he had been in the United States for only a short period of time and did not know that many people. His main concern, though, was his legal situation and how a protest would put him under the spotlight, thus putting him at risk of being caught by the INS. Esperanza explained to him that it was unlikely his former employers would report him to the INS because they were also doing something illegal when they hired him. Jorge left Tepeyac, saying that he was going to think about it and call or come back later. I was in Tepeyac for three weeks after that and Jorge did not call or come. Esperanza said that this was the typical reaction because most undocumented immigrants like Jorge who had suffered similar abuses were afraid to take any action to defend their rights or publicize those who abuse them.

From large demonstrations in Washington D.C. to demonstrations throughout New York City, Tepeyac tries to mobilize politically undocumented Mexican immigrants with

the few resources they have. After the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks, a general amnesty became even less likely and the dream of a parade on Fifth Avenue might have become more difficult. But Tepeyac's work as a liaison between Mexican immigrants and the New York City political machine has also become all the more essential.

4.3.3.2 Transnational Politics: Pressuring Mexican President Vicente Fox to Listen and Lobby on Their Behalf.

In regard to their relationship with the Mexican government, Tepeyac has promoted a transnational way of doing politics. They encourage Mexican immigrants to urge their families in Mexico to participate in politics, so they can pressure the Mexican government to pay attention to the immigrants' problems ("Amnistia General Incondicional," 2000). Because the main priority of most of its member is just to become legal residents in the United States, the Association does not really promote the double nationality program among its members. Rather, its main concern is to gain supports of Mexican politicians, and urge them to lobby on behalf of the immigrants with American legislators. To accomplish this, the association tries to keep an ongoing relation with Mexican politicians, and its leaders have been able to meet with the Mexican President Vicente Fox. On August 23rd, 2000, in one of the first trips President Fox made to New York City, Esperanza Chacón was designated along with Gerardo Domínguez from the Mexican-American Democratic Committee, as a spokesperson at a meeting that the Mexican President had with Mexican leaders in New York City. During that meeting, Mexican leaders asked President Fox to establish a dual education program for Mexican immigrants in New York City and their home communities in Mexico. They also asked for immigration legislation to stop immigrants from being detained or abused on both sides of the border. Finally, they also presented the specific situation and problems Mexican immigrant woman suffer in New

York City, and the necessity of creating the “Special House for Mexicans in New York” (*La Casa Unica del Mexicano en Nueva York*) (Rodriguez, 2000).

4.4 How the Future Looks for Tepeyac

Tepeyac's goals and activities may be controversial for some, especially their main goal for a general amnesty and the Guadalupe Torch Run promoting it, but they may also be the only source of hope for undocumented Mexican immigrants in New York City. What is certain is that Tepeyac's role as a bridge integrating such immigrants to life in that city is not a new one. 100 years ago, during the massive wave of European immigration to the United States, many other organizations helped new arrivals integrate to life in the United States (Gordon, 1964). The main difference now could be the fact that those organizations did not have the legal framework to aid them, mainly the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that Tepeyac has now. Furthermore, immigrants of that time faced a different cultural, economic, and political setting from the one immigrants are experiencing now. The forces of Americanization were rampant throughout the country, blue collars jobs with low-skills requirements were the norm, and a transnational way of doing politics, once one became an American citizen, was more difficult to carry on. Today, a pluralistic view in America is ascendant, the technology and service industries require workers with high skills, and changes in legislation allow many immigrants to hold double nationalities so they can keep participating politically in their countries of origin.

In the cultural aspect, Tepeyac has the legal right to promote, and even try to impose the Mexican culture and the Spanish language in New York City. There is little doubt that cultural elements are tenacious. Throughout the United States, the cultural legacy of the different immigrant groups that have arrived in the country can still be perceived. Italian and Chinese food are extremely popular, and most people feel a little Irish on Saint

Patrick's Day. Thus, Tepeyac is likely to continue to try to preserve the Mexican culture, and the Spanish language among both Mexican immigrants and their children.

In the economic aspect, Tepeyac's attempt to increase immigrants' human capital and help them to demand their rights in the workplace will continue to be crucial. Moreover, the emphasis on education that the whole Tepeyac staff gives, both permanent staff and volunteers, is hopefully making immigrants realize that if they want to "make it" in New York City, or at least help their children to do so, just a desire and ability to work hard is not enough. Thus, the tutoring offered through Tepeyac's after school program, as well as its main efforts to help immigrants' children to do better in school, is likely to continue and expand.

In the political aspect, it could be argued that Tepeyac leaders are in fact teaching Mexican immigrants that in the United States, they do have rights and resources as a minority group. Hence, those arguing against such programs may also argue that immigrants are indeed learning the "victim's mentality:" the notion that they are victims of discrimination and therefore they deserve preferential treatment. Nevertheless, it is also important that immigrants learn about their rights, not with the goal of obtaining something for free, but with the goal of learning to defend themselves from abuse.

In regard to the question of whether Tepeyac will decide to mobilize immigrants as part of the Latino race or as an ethnic group, my presumption is that it will depend on the issue. Thus, when it comes to the fight for a general amnesty, the Association may mobilize immigrants as part of the Latino race, and when it comes to expressing their own traditions and culture, such as having the rights to hold their Independence day parade on a main avenue in Manhattan or have the day off on December 12th, they may mobilize as an ethnic group.

In regards to their struggle to get December 12th off from work, whether Tepeyac will organize Mexican immigrants in New York City to file a collective lawsuit if they are denied to have this day off, is difficult to predict. With so many immigrants professing so many different religions in that city, such a case would be difficult for Mexicans to win. Nevertheless, the outcome of such legal action, either positive or negative, would be very relevant because it would set a precedent for future similar cases.

What is certain is that the work of Tepeyac Association will continue to be necessary for the well being of undocumented Mexican immigrants. New York City may be the most multicultural place in the world, and Americans there may be used to immigrants from around the world, but the vulnerability of the immigrants Tepeyac helps is also a reality. In this regard, I will never forget my last two assignments at Tepeyac. One was to make a directory of organizations that aid poor people with money and medicines. This was very necessary because the Association received many telephone calls from undocumented immigrants who needed medical services, but did not have insurance or money. The second one was a visit to the hospital. Two days before I went back to Mexico, Mrs. Chacón asked me to go with other Tepeyac members to visit Victor Morales, a 17-year-old who had been hit by a car, losing a leg as a result. Someone had called the Association because Victor was extremely depressed and just wanted someone to visit him. He had arrived in the city a year before, so he only had a few friends. Victor had an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe right next to his bed, and his eyes filled up with hope as he said he was trusting her to help him. His eyes also lit up as he saw us arriving. He said that our visit had been of great encouragement. Tepeyac was going to request help from the Mexican consulate to get humanitarian visas for his parents, and it also committed to

continue sending people to visit him. For someone like Victor, surviving was the main issue, and Tepeyac was there to give him hope.