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The Rise of a Hispanic Enclave in Davidson County, Tennessee

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THE RISE OF A HISPANIC ENCLAVE
IN DAVIDSON COUNTY, TENNESSEE

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Geography and Geology
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Geoscience

By
James P. Chaney

August 2007
THE RISE OF A HISPANIC ENCLAVE
IN DAVIDSON COUNTY, TENNESSEE

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

So many people have contributed to making this thesis a reality, but a few people must be singled out for particular thanks. Firstly, I want to thank everyone in the Department of Geography and Geology at Western Kentucky who gave me a hand during my research. Dr. Algeo, thank you for your unlimited patience and all of the knowledge and advice that you have shared with me over the last two years. I couldn’t have asked for a better thesis advisor. Dr Keeling, thank you for getting me started on the right foot in regards to my thesis topic and always having time to chat with me about my research on a moments notice. I also would like to thank Kevin Cary, Debbie Kreitzer, Dr. Yen, and Dr. Foster for their help with maps and equations that were necessary in this thesis.

Secondly, I’m grateful to Dr. Heffington for reintroducing me to cultural geography, and steering me towards the masters program at Western Kentucky University. Your enthusiastic approach to geography and field work is what encouraged me to get out in the field and get my hands dirty.

Thirdly, I want to thank everyone in the Hispanic community in Nashville who took me in to their homes and families, and also for putting up with all my questions and surveys. I appreciate your patience.

Finally, I want to thank my parents for everything they have done. You both have always supported me in all of my endeavors, no matter how crazy you might have thought they were. You guys truly are the best parents anyone could ask for.
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The Rise Of A Hispanic Enclave
In Davidson County, Tennessee

James P. Chaney August 2007 141 pages

Directed by: Katie Algeo, David J. Keeling, Stewart A. Foster, and Douglas J. Heffington
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In recent years, the United States has observed a significant increase in the Hispanic population within its borders through immigration. Since the 1980s, there has been a shift in the immigration and movement of the Hispanic population from border states to states in the southeastern United States. Many Hispanics, attracted by employment opportunities, have moved into growing metropolitan areas in the American South. In some of these cities, new Hispanic immigrants have created distinct enclaves. These enclaves provide almost all needs for the Hispanic community, such as shopping, healthcare, legal assistance, dining, employment, entertainment, and religion.

This study examines the creation and functionality of the burgeoning Hispanic enclave within Davidson County, Tennessee through fieldwork, in-depth interviews with immigrants, volunteer work with Hispanic organizations, and census data. It suggests that the rise of this enclave, complete with Hispanic cultures, businesses, organizations, and churches, is interfering with the assimilation of Hispanics into the local community. The results from this study indicate that many Hispanics immigrants choose to function almost entirely within this enclave and that the enclave creates an environment in which immigrants do not need to intermingle with the host society. While Hispanic enclaves can
serve as an important transition tool for many newly arrived immigrants, these findings suggest that ethnic enclaves can also have negative impacts on assimilation into the larger host community.
Chapter 1

Introduction

In the past few decades globalization has exploded. Usually the term is used to express the denationalization of markets and the increase of international capital flow, but it can also apply to the movement and merging of cultures and people on a global scale. As communication technologies and transnational transportation increase, the world is witnessing a reduction of human and cultural barriers to movement, leading to the integration of once distant cultures and ethnic groups. Waters (1995: 3) defines this aspect of globalization as “a social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding.” Most of these transnational migrations are largely related to economic or political motivations. The United Nations (2004) now estimates that there are more than 175 million immigrants worldwide, double the estimate of just 40 years ago. This trend is fueling multiculturalism and the fusion or merging of cultures throughout the world, especially in industrial and politically stable nations.

Immigration has always been part of the ethnic identity of the United States. Europe and both South and East Asia, historically, have been its source for new immigrants. As an industrial, First World power during the age of globalization, the U.S. has been attractive to many wanting to escape the economic instabilities and lack of economic opportunities that exist in the developing world. More recently, the U.S. has observed a significant increase in the Hispanic population within its borders. The word “Hispanic” refers to a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or any other Spanish cultural origin regardless of race. According to the U.S.
Census (2005), the number of Hispanics currently residing in the United States has reached 41.3 million or 14 percent of the total U.S. population. This is an increase from 22.3 million (9.0 percent of the total population) in 1990. Of Hispanics in the United States, Mexicans make up the largest subgroup (Fig.1). The rise in the Hispanic population can be attributed to immigration (both legal and illegal) and high birth rates. In the past, the anchors of the Hispanic population have been found in border states such as California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Florida (which has a considerable concentration of Latinos from Cuban, Nicaraguan, and Caribbean backgrounds in the southeastern part of the state). Other than a few pockets in upper New Jersey, New York, and Cook County, Illinois (Chicago), Hispanics have been concentrated in these limited regions until recently.

![Figure 1. Hispanics by Country or Region of Origin](Source: United States Census, 2002)

The U.S. Census (2005) has recorded shifts in immigration and movement of the Hispanic population within the United States since the 1980s. Throughout the latter part
of the 20th century, migrant agricultural workers have annually moved back and forth from the southern U.S. and central valley of California to their respective permanent homes in Latin American countries (usually Mexico). In the last twenty years, though, Hispanic migrants in the South have begun settling in small towns and rural areas for more permanent work in field agricultural and poultry plants, and a large number of newcomers have chosen urban destinations (Mohl, 2003). The population of Hispanics from 1990 to 2000 in the southern United States almost doubled from 6,489,920 to 11,084,967 (U.S. Census, 2005). These numbers only reflect the recorded population and do not include a much larger hidden population, which many argue exists (e.g. Kochhar et al.; Passel, 2006; Smith and Edmonston, 1997; Wadhwani, 2004). Also, data from the Census show a large influx of Hispanics into major southeastern metropolitan areas such as Atlanta, Charlotte, and Nashville. Between 1990 and 2000 the number of people claiming Hispanic as their first identifiable ethnicity quadrupled in the cities of Greensboro, Charlotte, and Raleigh in North Carolina and Nashville.

The explosion and speed of the migrations have begun to create Hispanic communities that are nestled inside larger metropolitan areas. Many of these communities seem to be self-sufficient, containing stores and places of business tailored to the tastes and native language of Hispanic immigrants. In most cases, these ethnic neighborhoods are located in areas of lower property value. In the larger cities, these communities contain larger specialty stores or mercados such as carnicerías, panaderías, pescaderías, and peluquerías, which cater directly to Hispanic clientele. Also, the diaspora of Hispanics in the United States has created newspapers and other media outlets that primarily provide information on Hispanic issues or news from their “patrias”
or countries of origin. Though these news sources do cover U.S. politics, they focus mainly on political policies that impact Hispanics (Thompson, 2002).

In southern cities (excluding Florida), the Hispanic explosion is a new phenomenon. Historically, the population in the south could mostly be defined as either black or white (Mohl, 2003). This racial distinction has existed for generations. The new structure of multicultural and/or multinational communities is unfamiliar. No matter whether the economic impact of migration is positive or negative, longtime local residents can be uncomfortable with these demographic changes.

Concern about a new ethnic group in a community may arise, especially when the new immigrants tend not to intermingle with the host community. For example, enclaves like Buford Highway in Atlanta, Georgia allow Hispanics to operate and survive almost entirely without communicating with other groups. This can allow a cultural rift in a community to begin, as well as slow the acceptance of Hispanics into the larger host society. Additionally, conflicts can arise between the second- and third- generation, who feel they have assimilated, and newly arrived first-generation immigrants whom the earlier immigrants believe are refusing to assimilate (Driever, 2004).

While keeping cultural traditions is important, resistance to or lack of assimilation could potentially have negative results such as prejudice from natives, less education resulting in lower socioeconomic status, and non-integration into political affairs (Alba and Nee, 2003; Huntington, 2004). Jordan-Bychkov and Domosh (1999:517) define assimilation as “the loss of all ethnic traits and complete blending into the host society.” However, more recently, researchers have noticed the fact that while assimilation is a ubiquitous phenomenon, immigrants and ethnic groups can retain some
of their ethnic identity and integrate successfully into a host society (Isajiw, 1993; Ling, 2005). Therefore, assimilation can mean that a group or individual can effectively integrate and function in a larger host society while maintaining an ethnic identity.

With first-generation immigrants, the process of assimilation can begin with acculturation. Acculturation is a process where an ethnic group will adopt a modicum of the culture and customs of a host society in order to function better within that community. This can lead to a higher standard of living for Hispanic immigrants. Learning the local customs, government systems, and language of a host community will increase opportunities for higher paying jobs and salaries; involve Latino parents more in local schools systems; increase educational opportunities (trade schools or higher education); expand knowledge of legal and tax systems; and encourage participation in local politics. Also, higher levels of involvement with local people from the host society can decrease many prejudices and misconceptions that the host society might have about immigrant populations. Historically, theories about assimilation have suggested that the second and third generations of immigrants build on the acculturation of the first generation (Alba and Nee, 2003). This allows the second and third generations to assimilate faster, experiencing upward social mobility, obtain higher education, and participate more in the host society. Moreover, it was assumed that upward mobility was the strongest driving force for assimilation and that, as immigrants achieved higher educational and occupational statuses, the more they would assimilate into the mainstream (Chang, 1999).

For Hispanics, the old rules and ideas of assimilation do not always apply in the same way. The children and grandchildren of Latino immigrants (especially those from
Mexico and Central America), on average, do not demonstrate the same academic
advancements as do other immigrant groups (Alba and Nee, 2003; Clark, 2002).
Throughout the 1990s the dropout rate for Hispanics in U.S. schools was around 30
percent—twice that of African Americans and three times the rate of white non-Hispanics
(Chang, 1999). In addition, the high school dropout rate for Hispanics born in the United
States actually increased with the second and third generations. Consequently, lower
educational achievement is one of the factors that lead to low economic status for
Hispanics in the United States. On average, Hispanics of legal status in the United States
are less likely to hold managerial or professional positions than other immigrants groups,
have a lower home ownership rates than other Americans, and are three times more likely
to be impoverished than their white counterparts (Chang, 1999; Huntington, 2004).
While some Hispanics do escape poverty and lower class status, some scholars find that
many Hispanic immigrants do not follow a linear assimilation pattern. In fact, an
examination of the wages earned by first, second, and third generation Mexicans in the
United States by one researcher showed that third generation Hispanics, on average, earn
wages less than the second generation (Livingston and Kahn, 2002).

Language and monolingualism is another important indicator of assimilation. And
like educational achievements, Hispanics in the United States lag behind other immigrant
groups in becoming monolingual in English, by some accounts up to an entire generation
behind (Alba and Nee, 2003; Huntington, 2004). Why Hispanics retain their mother
tongue more than other groups is debated, but is probably the result of multiple factors.
First, as the world grows smaller, metaphorically speaking, due to globalization and
technological advancements, immigrants (regardless of origin) can stay in contact with
friends, family, and native culture through a vast array of media technology such as the internet, international television channels, and telephone service (Thompson, 2002; Hardwick, 2006). Second, the close proximity of the United States to Latin America (especially Mexico) has historically allowed Latino sojourners and permanent residents alike to move back and forth between countries easier and more often than immigrants from other countries (Suro, 1998). Third, the large influx of Spanish speaking immigrants into ethnic neighborhoods across the United States enables Hispanics to maintain their mother tongue for longer periods of time. Finally, new doctrines promoting multiculturalism and diversity that arose in the second half of the twentieth century rejected the old ideas of assimilation into the established culture as ethnocentric (Huntington, 2004). This, in turn, opened the door to bilingual institutions and schools in many United States cities and school districts. Additionally, American businesses also aid bilingualism by trying to corner a niche market of Spanish speakers. Many major U.S. companies advertise products, label them, and provide customer services in Spanish. As a result of these combined factors, it is easy to see why many Hispanic immigrants do not follow the classic three-generation transition to English monolingualism.

Another factor that could be preventing the assimilation of Hispanics (and maybe the most important) are Hispanics themselves. Many Latinos in the United States simply refuse to assimilate and wish to continue observing and practicing native cultures (Chang, 1999; Huntington, 2004). Likewise, it is not uncommon for Latino parents to actively encourage children to not conform and to maintain strong Hispanic identities through culture and language, even though they moved to the United States for better life (Suro, 1998). In some cases, this resistance is fueled by Chicano—people of Mexican descent
living in the United States—scholars, some of whom even go so far as to campaign for ethnic regional autonomy in the southwestern United States. In other cases, Mexican immigrants may just want to avoid the ridicule from friends or family of becoming too American. For example, the word pocho is usually used by Mexicans to describe a Mexican who was born in or moved to the United States. Yet, sometimes it can be used in a derogatory manner to portray a Mexican who migrated to the United States and has lost or even rejected Mexican culture. Hence, to avoid being “pochos,” some immigrants may be reluctant to embrace acculturation into the American mainstream.
Chapter 2

Research Question

Nashville, Tennessee, is one of the larger metropolitan areas of the upper south. It serves as a regional hub for middle Tennessee and southern Kentucky. As with many Sunbelt cities, the Nashville metropolitan area’s economy and population have grown significantly in recent years. Also, the diversity of the economy helped the city weather the economic slowdown at the beginning of the 21st century. Along with other economically successful southern cities, Nashville has witnessed a boom in its Hispanic population. The U.S. Census shows a Hispanic population increase from 7,665 in 1990 to 26,091 in 2000. Including the 8 counties that are part of in the Nashville’s Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) from the 2000 Census, the figure is 50,000. A recent estimate from the U.S. Census Bureau (2005) puts the number of Hispanics residing in Davidson County1 over 35,000. According to the Tennessee Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the true number of Hispanics in the Nashville area is probably around 200,000, although during my research I was never able to uncover how they reached that figure (Wadhwani, 2004). As with Buford Highway in Atlanta, Nashville’s Hispanics seem to gravitate to a corridor in Davidson County for shopping, dining, nightlife activities, and religious worship. Although a patchwork of small Hispanic business clusters can be found throughout the county, the epicenter for these activities appears to be located on

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1 Nashville proper is located inside Davidson County. In 1962, the city and county governments were combined. As a result, I use both Davidson County and Nashville interchangeably.
Nolensville and Murfreesboro Pike\(^2\) while a small enclave exists on the opposite side of town on Gallatin Road.

This research hypothesizes that the rise of immigrant enclaves within Davidson County, complete with Hispanic cultures, businesses, mercados, and places of worship, is disturbing the assimilation of Hispanics into the local community. Nashville does host other ethnic groups such as Somalis and a large population of Kurds, but neither has created a self-sufficient enclave as has the Hispanic community. Throughout the neighborhoods that are connected to Nolensville and Murfreesboro Roads Latin music, clothing stores, and restaurants representing cuisine from Peru, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, and Cuba create a segregated section of Nashville, whose main function is serving its Latino population. Through these areas of the city, Hispanics, whether they live inside or outside the enclave, are able to operate and function without intermingling with other ethnic and local cultures. The purpose of this research is to study the development and functionality of the Hispanic Community and its enclaves in regards to assimilation, primarily within Davidson County.

Several questions are pertinent to understanding the Hispanic community and the creation of an enclave in Nashville. First, what elements are driving the increase in the Hispanic population in this area? Second, how are the Hispanic community’s businesses, social groups, churches, and families assisting immigrants? Third, does the enclave serve as a transition zone into the local culture for newly arrived Hispanic immigrants, or do Hispanic immigrants prefer to remain and function inside the enclave for the duration of their time in Nashville? Fourth, how are Hispanic businesses changing the local

\(^2\) Nolensville and Murfreesboro Pikes are known locally as Nolensville and Murfreesboro Roads.
landscape of certain areas of Nashville?

The answers to these questions will be derived from both qualitative and quantitative sources. Interviews with local Hispanic immigrants and representatives of Hispanic organizations within Nashville are used to address immigration methods and motives. Additionally, interviews can shed light on the roles the Hispanic enclave and established Hispanic organizations play in helping immigrants integrate into the host society. Quantitative data are used to analyze Hispanic population trends inside Davidson County, and to determine if immigrants are indeed clustering into certain neighborhoods. Secondary data from Nashville’s public records will illustrate the geographic formation and location of Hispanic business within the designated enclave. Ultimately, the research seeks signs of positive acculturation into the host community, such as learning English, utilizing public services and political organizations, and interactions (e.g. business, recreational, or religious) with locals from the Anglo culture. In summary, this thesis will analyzes whether an ethnic enclave has a negative impact for Hispanics in Nashville by segregating immigrants from the host community, or if the enclave functions as an important transitional tool for newly arrived immigrants and their families.
Chapter 3

Literature Review

International Immigration

There are several engines that can drive international immigration: the search for better economic opportunities through chain migration or labor procurement agencies; flight from war stricken regions, and religious or political persecution. In most cases, immigrants are searching for better economic opportunities, and they initially relocate to larger metropolitan areas (Ley and Murphy 2001; Light, 2004). These immigrant groups affect the politics, demographics, and cultures in their receiving cities in both positive and negative ways. For example, many immigrants from underdeveloped economies can become an important component in a developed economy by filling low-skill jobs that natives may shun. On the other hand, large scale immigration can be perceived as challenging the cohesiveness of a community and incite negative or even racist feelings from members of host societies.

The flow of immigration in many Western countries has increased exponentially due to more liberal entry criteria introduced in the 1960s and 1970s, diversifying the ethnicities and origin countries of immigrants. Cities that become entry points into a country for large groups of immigrants are known as gateway cities. Gateway cities usually have diverse economies that generate employment opportunities in almost every sector. As a result, these cities can sustain employment for a large group of immigrants with various skill levels.

In many gateway cities experiencing large scale immigration, new challenges have arisen in trying to incorporate immigrants into long range city planning. This is
observed by Ley and Murphy (2001), who investigated the impact immigrants have had in two gateway cities: Sydney, Australia, and Vancouver, Canada. They analyze to what extent contemporary immigration has reshaped the urban landscape in the last 30 years. Their research shows that increased immigration to these cities has caused a decline in domestic migration to Vancouver and net domestic out-migration from Sydney. Also, they argue that the changing demographics within these cities may create strains to the nation state and provoke strong nativist feelings from many long-established residents. Additionally, they demonstrate the need to reexamine the impact of gentrification and the new trends towards re-investing in city centers to attract higher income residents. They suggest, that unchecked, these processes can displace immigrants outward into suburban rings, where communities have little experience with cultural diversity and may be inadequately prepared to offer multicultural services.

Gateway cities are usually points of entry for immigrants. In these cities they can find work in either high or low skill jobs or through ethnic economies. Yet, sometimes, gateway cities are unable to provide enough employment for all newly arrived immigrants. In these cases, immigrants begin leaving for other job markets that are usually located in midsize cities in the same host country. Light (2004) provides insight into this process by examining the function of ethnic economies within world cities. He proposes that ethnic economies create buffers within world cities or “reception” cities. When economic downturns occur within these reception cities, the ethnic economic buffer protects migrants for a period of time. Light (2004: 385) further explains that “the buffer itself is finally saturated after a lag.” When this occurs immigrants are deflected (by politics and increased poverty) to lesser, surrounding cities. Immigrant deflection
could have been responsible for the first large group of Hispanic immigrants who began moving to Nashville in the early 1990s. Immigrants were deflected from other larger cities in the South (e.g. Atlanta, Dallas, San Antonio or Miami) as well as cities in southern California. Nashville’s economic prosperity allows it to provide an ample supply of jobs for immigrants from all parts of the world. Therefore, Nashville’s economy, which grew throughout the 1990s, would have been attractive to low skill immigrants looking for a metropolitan area that could provide abundant jobs.

With technological advances in international communication and the ease of travel between certain countries, many contemporary immigrants now fall into a transnational pattern. A transnational pattern or simply transnationalism is the maintenance of regular relationships, practices, and norms between two different countries (the host country and country of origin). Through transnational connections immigrants can continue relations and sustain ethnic ties to their native countries. These transnational connections strengthen chain migration and allow immigrants to build strong ethnic communities in their host countries. Walton-Roberts (2003) documents these types of transnational communities in Canada. Walton-Roberts focuses on Sikhs living in metropolitan areas of Canada and in the Indian Punjab. She investigates the social and community structures of transnational Doabo Sikhs and how these structures have created unique migration patterns to specific metropolitan areas in Canada. She concludes that Sikhs, who maintain these transnational connections, are able to uphold religious, cultural, and family bonds with others in Punjab, as well as build Sikh communities in larger cities in Canada.
Ethnic Enclaves

Ethnic clusters are the result of people from the same race, ethnicity, nationality or religion congregating together in a residential area either voluntarily or by discrimination. In most cases an ethnic enclave is conceived of a low income area where immigrants or ethnically similar people settled by necessity (economically and culturally) or as a result of ethnic or racial discrimination (Ley and Murphy, 2001). To meet the demands of living in a new country and community, many arriving immigrants choose to reside in ethnic enclaves. These enclaves provide familiar culture, native languages, and employment for newly arrived international immigrants (Miyares and Gowen, 1998). Usually these enclaves or neighborhoods can be identified by their physical characteristics (areas considered by the mainstream as less desirable to live) and by the characteristics of the people who live in them (Logan et al., 2002). As globalization increases, international immigration is at an all time high level. As a result, many ethnic enclaves located in gateway cities in more developed societies have grown (Ley and Murphy, 2001).

For much of its history, the United States has experienced large waves of immigration (Alba and Nee, 2003). Consequently, the major gateway cities for immigrants have always contained ethnic enclaves. In the past, the most recognizable ethnic enclaves could be found in the larger financial and industrial centers of the country, such as Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York or Chicago. But, in more recent times, as economic prosperity shifts south, more immigrants are attracted by the demand for low-wage labor in southern cities (Mohl, 2003). In recent years the most notable immigrants moving to the South has been Hispanics. Accordingly, new ethnic
neighborhoods and enclaves have emerged in cities that in the past had a large bi-racial composition. Just like other immigrant groups that lack high levels of education and work skills, many Hispanics immigrants, as part of a larger community-survival strategy, move into areas that already have a large Latino presence.

Li and Li’s (1999) study of the economics of a Chinese enclave in Toronto, Canada explains some of the functions and benefits of immigrant enclaves. Their research focuses on the relationship between Chinese immigrant firms and the core business community of the greater Toronto area. Li and Li suggest that ethnic clustering exists to provide stable economic and employment needs for immigrant populations. Kaya’s (2003) research supports Li and Li’s findings that ethnic clustering many times helps provide arriving immigrants with employment. Kaya’s work focuses on Turkish identity-construction spaces and their role in the preservation and reformation of Turkish American identity. Yet, he also explains the important part Turkish neighborhoods and communities play for Turkish immigrants who possess low levels of English and work skills. Additionally, Kaya indicates that not all Turkish immigrants are strongly associated with Turkish enclaves, and Turkish immigrants with professional jobs and higher levels of human capital usually have more social and economic contact with the American mainstream.

In contrast to Li and Li and Kaya, Davis’s (2004) study on the Cuban community in Miami, Florida, indicates that ethnic enclaves could, in fact, have a negative economic effect on a city’s immigrant population. Her research indicates that Cubans who participate in the Cuban community in Miami, on average, have a lower personal income than Cubans who live in or have integrated into traditional American communities.
Davis’s findings do not support the idea that ethnic enclaves are needed for the long-term economic survival of an ethnic minority.

Logan et al. (2002) challenge the well-accepted theory of spatial assimilation and ethnic enclaves. These research discusses the concept and creation of both ethnic enclaves and immigrant neighborhoods. The spatial assimilation theory states that immigrants entering the United States with low levels of education, few work skills, and strong cultural bonds to native culture will naturally cluster in certain neighborhoods (usually areas of low property value) and will work in tandem to maintain an ethnic economy to provide employment for first-generation families. This allows first-generation immigrants to gradually adapt to their new surroundings. The second-generation will, on average, be more assimilated to the host society, possess greater skills and education, and will begin to leave the ethnic enclaves in search of more mainstream middle class neighborhoods. Through their fieldwork with large ethnic groups in Los Angeles and New York, Logan et al. identify differences between immigrant enclaves, ethnic communities, and minority ghettos in central and suburban cities. Also, they examine how well each group has assimilated, the work skills and abilities they possess, years spent in the United States, and the relationship of each ethnic group to their ethnic enclave. Although Logan et al. do find several examples supporting spatial assimilation, they also demonstrate that the theory can not be universally applied to all immigrant groups. For example, regardless of economic advancement or participation in the mainstream work force, Filipinos in both New York and Los Angeles continue to ethnic cluster. Therefore, some groups choose to cluster in ethnic neighborhoods despite their income, education levels, and assimilation into the mainstream culture.
Pamuk’s (2004) findings on ethnic clustering are similar to those of Logan et al. Pamuk discusses large migration movements into metropolitan areas by using spatial analysis to identify ethnic enclaves in San Francisco. Her method for surveying immigrant spatial patterns could be applied within Davison Country. By using 2000 U.S. census data on population and housing down to the census tract level, Pamuk examines the spatial distribution and housing conditions of three large ethnic groups: Filipinos, Chinese, and Mexicans. Her study concludes that many contemporary immigrant communities do not view ethnic clustering or ethnic communities as transitory.

Hispanics may go one step further when choosing to cluster with other Hispanics. In some larger cities where Hispanics from multiple countries have settled, researchers have argued that Hispanics prefer to self-segregate amongst themselves. Miyares and Gowen (1998) illustrate this type of self-segregation based on nationality in their work on Latino neighborhoods in New York City. In addition, Miyares and Gowen bring forth the idea of “steering”. Steering is a real estate concept used mostly by agents to direct people or families to locate in demographically similar areas. A similar observation of self-segregation is shown by Pessar’s (1995) study of Latinos in the greater Washington D.C. area. Pessar concludes that ethnic solidarity does not always exist within the pan-Hispanic community, and social class and nationality further segregate Latinos. It would be interesting to see if parallel preferences for self-segregation exist in Davidson County.

Since the end of last century, some social scientists have suggested that more recent immigrant groups in the U.S. may choose not to settle in propinquity, but in a more dispersed pattern. They also contend that even though these immigrants live in more widely dispersed places they are able to maintain strong ethnic identities. This
theory, known as “heterolocalism,” was originally put forth by Wilbur Zelinsky (Hardwick, 2006). Hardwick (2006) expands on and critiques this concept by examining the spatial patterns, ethnic and religious identities, as well as the transnational relationships of Russian and Ukrainian immigrants in the areas between Vancouver, British Columbia, Seattle, Washington, and Portland, Oregon. Since Hardwick’s study involves immigrants relocating in two different countries, she also investigates the transnational relationship that exists between the immigrants in both the United States and Canada. Her findings are interesting in that each group has a different political status. For example, Ukrainians and Russians that live in Canada are given the admission status of “immigrant” while those who moved to the United States are considered refugees. Therefore, the residential locations of these groups may differ somewhat based on that status. The Ukrainian and Russian “refugees” who live in the United States are usually found in clusters that are located near refugee resettlement agencies, religions institutions, and social-services providers. As for Ukrainians and Russians that reside in Canada, Hardwick found that almost all preferred to live in small towns located next to the border of Washington State and British Columbia so that they could easily attend church services in the United States. In both cases, this study found that although spread out on a larger scale than immigrant residential patterns of the past, immigrants still cluster to some degree based on social networks as well as government or privately provided aid.

Hispanic Immigration and Assimilation in the United States

Focusing on Hispanics, Smith and Edmonston (1997) describe the economic effects of Hispanics on the United States from the macro level all the way down to a local
level. Their research was created as a response to congressional interest and curiosity about the impact of immigration in the United States. Their aim was to weigh the financial benefits and burdens of immigrants by asking two main questions. What are the effects of immigration on the overall economy? And what is the fiscal impact of immigration on federal, state, and local governments? Immigrants in this study were broken into cohorts based on age of arrival in the U.S.: the government benefits received by migrants over their own lifetimes and the lifetimes of their children were projected. These benefits include Medicare, Medicaid, Supplementary Security Income (SSI), Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), food stamps, Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI), etc. Similarly, taxes paid directly by migrants, as well as other taxes (such as corporate taxes) were also projected for the lifetimes of the migrants and children. Accordingly, the net fiscal burden was projected and discounted to the present. In this way, the net fiscal burden for each age cohort of migrants was calculated in present value terms. Within each age cohort, immigrants were further categorized into three groups: less than high school education, high school education, and more than high school education. The results suggest that migrants with less than a high school education are typically a net fiscal burden that can be as high as approximately $100,000 in present value, when the migrants are twenty to thirty years on arrival. Therefore, according to Smith and Edmonston’s study, if the majority of Hispanics entering the country are young and possess low levels of education, then they could be a financially straining the local, state and federal welfare programs of their host communities.

If immigration is having an impact on the country’s economy, two important questions should be answered: Where are immigrants moving? And, why are they
moving there? Since the last census, several researchers have attempted to answer these questions. Reynolds’ (2004) work discusses the burgeoning economic market and business opportunities in second tier and southern cities. Using census data, Reynolds demonstrates a recent shift in the migration patterns of Hispanics within the United States. He suggests that these new patterns can be attributed to higher educational achievement and an increase in overall incomes among Hispanics. Moreover, he suggests that higher educational attainment among Hispanics could be what is fueling the migration of Hispanics away from gateway cities such as Los Angeles, Houston, and New York into the larger metropolitan cities of the southern United States. Yet, others argue that it is not higher education achievements that are driving Hispanic movement to the American South, but rather ample jobs that do not require high levels of education nor English. Kochhar et al. (2005), for example, examine the sudden shift of Hispanics away from Hispanic traditional settlement destinations such as California and New York, and the impact of this shift on the infrastructure of the southern United States. They contend that most Hispanics moving into the southern states are foreign born and posses low levels of education and English skills.

Suro and Singer (2002) concentrate on general Hispanic population shifts in the U.S. and broadly explain urban growth patterns of the ethnic group inside larger cities. Suro and Singer (2002: 1) state, “the Hispanic population is growing in most metropolitan areas, but the rate and location of increase varies widely.” Their research discusses four discernable patterns of growth among the 100 largest metropolitan areas in the United States. Although established Latino metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, New York, and Miami continue to post the largest absolute growth of Hispanics, Suro
and Singer note how cities that originally had small bases of Hispanics, such as Nashville, TN Atlanta, and Raleigh, are currently experiencing high growth rates. Suro and Singer (2002:4) dub these types of cities as “sites of hypergrowth.”

Although several cities in the southern United States may be experiencing a hypergrowth of Hispanic immigrants, many times the exact size of that growth can be difficult to accurately calculate due to the recent increase in the undocumented population in the United States. According to the Pew Hispanic Center (Passel, 2006) the undocumented population in the United States is estimated to be close to 12 million. Of that number more than half are assumed to be Mexican. The Pew Hispanic Center arrives at their undocumented population estimates by subtracting the estimated legal-immigrant population from the total foreign-born population. The residual is then used as total number of undocumented immigrants currently living within the United States. The Pew Center notes that the current undocumented immigrant growth in the United States has increases in southern United States, and new settlement areas have arisen in states where foreign-born populations have been relatively small. For example, the study lists Tennessee as a state where the rapid growth of undocumented immigrants has been the principle driving force behind the foreign-born population.

In addition to the economic impact Hispanic immigrants are having on the United States, some people are concerned that, if left unchecked, the large scale Hispanic immigration could negatively change the country’s core culture and divide the country. Huntington (2004) ominously warns against the possible negative effects of large scale Hispanic immigration, arguing that there will be repercussions from the non-assimilation of Hispanic immigrants into local cultures. He argues that the United States is ignoring
the problem of non-assimilation by Hispanics. Huntington (2004: 30) contends that “persistent flow of Hispanic immigrants into the country” and the “move of Hispanics to form their own political and linguistic enclaves” will divide the United States into two distinct cultures, peoples, and languages. Huntington and other nativists believe that the core culture of the United States is Anglo-Protestant. He insists that the United States’ economic strength and success as a nation is based on Anglo-Protestant beliefs and heritage. He agrees that the United States is a nation of immigrants, but he argues that, in the past, waves of immigrants (mostly European) assimilated and accepted Anglo-Protestant core values (Anglo based rule of law, work ethic, and individualism) and culture. Huntington fears that the large, unchecked rise of Hispanic immigrants that are unwilling to assimilate will lead to contempt for “American” culture and weaken the ideas, values, and concepts on which the United States was based.

Chang’s (1999) research on Chicanos takes Huntington’s one step further, by suggesting that many Hispanics are resisting assimilation as a means to achieve some type of autonomy from the United States government, as well as Anglo culture in the within the U.S. borders. She contends that Chicano activists in American universities such as Berkeley are using the acquisition of the American Southwest in the 1800s by the United States government as a justification to launch a movement to “re-conquer” certain areas in the southwestern United States. As a result, Chang infers that the blame for this current movement can be spread among some Hispanic intellectuals and politicians, unrestricted corporate and governmental pluralism, and the ever-increasing flow of illegal immigrants entering the country. Although some may find Huntington and Chang’s arguments that many Hispanics refuse to accept neither current political borders nor adapt
to Anglo-culture xenophobic, their work does illustrate that Hispanics are in many ways less inclined to assimilate than other immigrant groups in the United States.

Both Huntington’s and Chang’s concerns, I believe, are common among Nashvillians. To many Americans, including Tennesseans, the rapid, continual growth of Hispanic immigrants is impeding their progress of integration into the larger host society. A common assumption among members of host societies is that unless an immigrant population loses its ethnic identity and integrates fully into the host society, they have failed to assimilate (Isajiw, 1993). Likewise, the notion that retention of strong ethnic identity has a negative effect on both Hispanics and the host society is often discussed in the United States (Huntington, 2004). Some social scientists argue to the contrary, that the retention of some ethnic identity does necessarily slow the integration of first, second, and third generation immigrants into a host society. Isajiw (1993: 14) suggests “ethnic identity retention does not per se disrupt the process of incorporation of ethnic groups into the mainstream society, as measured by generational occupational mobility.”

Research by Isajiw (1993) suggests that retaining ethnic traits and customs does not have slow down positive integration into a local society, and ethnic identity retention is not a detriment to social mobility. By using a random sample survey from 1979 of three generations from four different immigrant groups- German, Italian, Jewish, and Ukrainian- in the city of Toronto, Isajiw examined 3 main indicators of assimilation for immigrants into a host society: English as the mother tongue, out-group closest friends, and participation in out-groups function. Also, Isajiw examines the social mobility of each interviewee by creating two-by-two matrixes juxtaposing cultural and social aspects of identity with internal and external dimensions. The internal dimensions are the area of
self-inclusion in a certain ethnic group. These dimensions overlaps with the process of self-identity or who a person thinks he is. In this case, of what ethnic group a person believes he is a member. They articulate with the feelings of sympathy and loyalty toward members of the same ethnic group. The external dimensions are the perimeter of exclusion of membership between ethnic groups; it is how others perceive or identified by others as being part of a specific ethnic group. The cultural dimension used in this study consisted of customs, language, and food, while the social dimensions included friends, family, and gatherings. To illustrate external dimensions, the study uses visible behavior, participation, and consumption. For describing internal dimensions, feelings, attitudes and obligations are used. In both cases, Isajiw’s research showed that ethnic identity retention does not always have a negative effect on the integration of the first, second, and third generation of immigrants into society or their social mobility. Isajiw’s work suggests that ethnic groups can assimilate into a host culture and retain an ethnic identity but does not explain how this occurs.

Ling (2005) demonstrates how an ethnic community can successfully integrate into a larger existing community, yet actively maintain and practice its native cultural beliefs and lifestyles. Her study is based on the Chinese community of Saint Louis and proposes that the Chinese community in St. Louis can be used as a new model for ethnic communities in the United States. Ling (2005:67) insists that “a cultural community does not always have a particular physical boundary, but is socially defined by the common cultural practices and beliefs of its members.” During St. Louis’s boom era, Chinese immigrants clustered—a result of racial Chinese exclusionary laws—in a section of the city known as Hop Alley. This created an ethnic enclave or “Chinatown” within St. Louis.
that lasted from 1869 to 1966. Eventually, Hop Alley was destroyed to make way for urban renewal, and ethnic Chinese began to move into suburbia. Now, the majority of ethnic Chinese are well integrated into the larger society, both economically and residentially. Ling describes how most ethnic Chinese in the St. Louis area work in professional jobs, and have been almost totally assimilated into the larger white-collar business community. Nevertheless, ethnic Chinese have retained many aspects of their heritage by forming their community around cultural activities, organizations, and institutions such as Chinese-language schools, Chinese Christian churches, Buddhist temples, and political organizations.

I propose that Ling’s model for ethnic communities within the United States could be a useful goal for Hispanics in the Nashville area wanting to retain Hispanic heritage. Ling (2005: 67) contends that, historically, immigrant groups go through three main stages of assimilation: 1) physical concentration for economic survival; 2) cultural congregation for ethnic identity; and 3) political participation in democratic governments. According to Ling’s model, Hispanics in Nashville would be in the first stage, forming a physical ethnic community for socioeconomic survival. However, many researchers believe linear patterns of assimilation do not always apply to Hispanic immigrants (Alba and Nee, 2003; Isajiw, 1993). According to Alba and Nee’s (2003) findings, many Hispanics inside the United States fit into a transnational pattern between the U.S. and their countries of origin, while others follow a segmented assimilation pattern. The segmented assimilation theory states that an ethnic group with a socioeconomic advantage will assimilate at a much faster pace into mainstream society than an ethnic population that is disadvantaged socially, educationally, and economically. In fact, the
latter group may sometimes assimilate into the subordinate class in the host community. Alba and Nee (2003) suggest that the speed and method of assimilation vary greatly depending on the ethnicity of the immigrant group. Therefore, assimilation patterns of one ethnic group might not always be similar to another.

The economic and social challenges that Latinos face in the United States and their impact is evaluated by Suro (1998). Through personal accounts and qualitative analysis, Suro surveys the Latino population within the United States. In his work, Suro examines the legal, economic, and cultural issues that Latinos face in the United States as they quickly become the largest minority in the country. The tensions between African-Americans and Hispanics, immigration laws, prejudices from mainstream America, the future advancements of the children of Latino immigrants, and uncertainty about how to adapt into the existing larger culture in the United States are challenges that Latinos, both immigrants and citizens, must confront in today’s society. Suro warns that Hispanics risk falling into an underclass that is segregated (sometimes voluntary and other times not) from the mainstream.

Taking a closer look at Hispanics’ economic achievements and ascension into the middle class, Clark (2001) examines the economic and educational gains Hispanics have made between the first, second, and third generations. Clark reviews past studies and investigates the progress or lack there of Hispanics immigrants have made in homeownership, income, and educational advancements. Clark critiques some recent studies that paint positive picture of Latino progress. He argues that some studies are subject to some important methodological caveats, and that when re-examined, the success of Hispanics climbing the social latter are not so encouraging as this study
suggest. More specifically, Clark is critical of an analysis of new middle class Hispanics in southern California by Rodriguez (1996). In that study, Rodriguez concluded that Hispanics have succeeded in achieving middle class status. Rodriguez reports that as much as a third of foreign born or first-generations Hispanics meet the criteria for middle class in the state of California. Clark questions Rodriguez’s definitions and methodology for defining middle class. Rodriguez’s definition of middle class is based on median income for the total population. As a result, Rodriguez suggests that Hispanic households that are above that threshold are middle class. Clark argues that this is an ecological fallacy. Therefore, it is an inaccurate measurement for demonstrating that Hispanics are financially equal with the average level of the population. In addition, Clark points out that Rodriguez only uses the medium income of Los Angeles County to establish his threshold, yet his collected data consist of all five counties that make up the southern California region. Clark also criticizes Rodriguez use of the words income and homeownership interchangeably, arguing that they are actually intertwined aspects of middle class status. Finally, Clark points out that Rodriguez’s use of proportions without the accompanying data on absolute numbers has a tendency to overstate the gains of Hispanic households. Clark’s own work also seems to indicate that Hispanics are not following the typical three-generation linear assimilation, and that the overall advancements for Latino immigrants may not be that impressive. His examination of Hispanic middle-income and ownership gains in context with the growth of the Hispanic population, finds that although some Latinos have advanced financially they have not reached parity with the U.S. population as a whole and foreign-born Hispanics, as a group, are less likely to be in the middle class.
Livingston and Kahn (2002) examine and compare the wages of first, second, and third generation Mexican American men and women to see if past theories of immigrant incorporation apply to contemporary Mexican immigrants and their children. They use the 1989 Latino National Political Study and the 1990/1991 Panel Studies of Income Dynamics and OLS regressions to estimate the effects of generation, education levels and works skills on wages. There findings show that immigrants have lower wage patterns than their offspring until human capital controls where added. Once theses controls were added wage patterns decline across generations for men, and become stagnate for women. They concluded that more contextualized immigrant adaptation frameworks need to be developed.

Mohl (2003) explains how Hispanics have affected U.S. immigration policies and changed the flow of Mexican migrant workers within the U.S. He also reviews the resulting social and economic impacts on U.S. society. Most of Mohl’s work is based on secondary, archival data and uses a macro scale to focus on changing demographics in the last 25 years. Coinciding with Mohl’s observation of border states as a spring board for Hispanics who are migrating internally is research by Durand et al. (2000), who have devised methods to describe trends in geographic destination of Mexican immigrants to the United States. By using public-use samples of individual records from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample and a 1996 Current Population Survey, they tabulated the distribution of foreign-born Mexican immigrants on the state and city level. They concluded that since 1990 Mexican immigration in the United States has moved from a regional to a national phenomenon. By the 1990s, almost a third of new arrivals were going to places other than the five traditional gateway states (California, Texas, Illinois,
Arizona, and New Mexico), which historically have absorbed 90% of all Mexican immigrants.

Stokes’ (2003) work on Hispanic immigration in Dawson County, Nebraska, demonstrates how population increase in one ethnic group can impact the local economy. The study suggests a contradiction that can be found in some areas pertaining to assumed and recorded trends of economic impacts of immigrants on the local level. Johnson-Webb’s (2002) work on Hispanic labor in North Carolina looks at some of the driving forces on immigration to southern cities. She uses a qualitative research approach to interview employers of Hispanics in North Carolina. Johnson-Webb’s (2002: 2) interviews revealed “that these employers utilize the social networks of their immigrant Hispanic employees to recruit new workers.” Martin’s (2002) article on Hispanic immigration growth in Charlotte, North Carolina is also valuable, since Charlotte’s demographics and population resemble those of Nashville. Martin’s (2002) research indicates that between 1990 and 2000 a 1,200 percent increase in Hispanic immigrants from Central and South America.

Geography of Hispanic Communities in the United States

Arreola’s (2004) edits an anthology that includes the combined research of 16 geographers and sociologists. By investigating different aspects of Hispanics in the Unites States, this work argues that Hispanics are not one homogenous group but are diversified peoples. Each author looks at different immigration trends, landscapes, and relationships with non-Hispanic societies within the U.S. The book categorizes the neighborhoods examined by each study of Hispanic neighborhoods into one of three types of Hispanic communities: continuous, discontinuous, and new communities. A
continuous community, as defined by Arreola, is a place where Hispanics have always been the dominant population group. Discontinuous communities are places or locations where Hispanics were once dominant but now are chiefly occupied or controlled by non-Hispanics, typically Anglo-Americans. Finally, new communities are places where Hispanics have emerged recently as the largest or most dominant groups in a location or neighborhood. Nolensville Pike would be categorized as a new community as Hispanics are arriving in an existing Anglo community and are beginning to dominate the area.

Haverluk (2004) discusses “Hispanization”, the gradual process by which the originally Anglo-dominated town of Hereford, Texas, became increasingly Mexican over several decades. Haverluk analyzes how many Mexicans in the community went from being migrant laborers (mostly of whom were from south Texas) to working professionals and the impact this had on the community as a whole. He demonstrates this transformation by examining changes in place names, increased economic achievements, greater political involvement, and demographic shifts. Even though Nashville’s experience will most likely never be as significant as Hereford’s, the Hispanic transformation of place names and businesses inside the enclave in Nashville shows similarities in regards to Hispanic place making.

Although there are many cultural similarities that Hispanics share between nationality and race, Hispanics are not a single, homogenous ethnic group. Hispanics, commonly, self-segregate once settled in U.S. cities. Using cultural markers unique to nationalities or specific subcultures, different Hispanic groups sometimes alter the visual landscape when clustering in ethnic neighborhoods, hence claiming that specific area as their nation-specific territory. This practice was documented by Benedict and Kent
(2004), who surveyed the cultural landscape of Puerto Ricans in Cleveland’s Near Westside. Attracted by recruiters offering good paying factory jobs, Puerto Ricans began to flock to Cleveland after World War II. They eventually established a Borinqueno (Puerto Rican) neighborhood in an existing part of town on the southwestern side of Cleveland. As a result, most of the landscape modifications made by Puerto Ricans were in the form of semi-fixed features (e.g. storefront signs, religious shrines, building and house colors, and displays of national-origin flags or symbols). Although other Hispanics live in the Cleveland area, no other Hispanic group is as dominant as Puerto Ricans. For that reason, Puerto Ricans have left a unique cultural imprint that is distinctly Puerto Rican. Benedict and Kent go on to say that other Latino groups seem to have accepted the Puerto Rican dominance, and thus, do not attempt to re-alter the visual landscape to match their own nationality. This could be occurring in Nashville where Mexicans are the largest Hispanic group in the city.

Driever (2004) examines the spatial disconnection that can be found among Hispanic neighborhoods in Kansas City. Kansas City, like many cities in the United States, does not consist of large areas of concentrated city blocks. As a consequence, Hispanic communities in Kansas City are not found in a dense urban neighbor but rather spread out in small clusters throughout the metropolitan area. Driever (2004: 207) labels this as a “polynucleated Latino community.” Kansas City has long been home to a substantial Hispanic population. Accordingly, the city has three existing Latino neighborhoods that were located near meatpacking plants and railroad yards. As the economy and employment needs changed and jobs relocated to different areas of the greater metropolitan area, new enclaves and clusters of Hispanics began to appear in the
suburbs. Consequently, Hispanic community activists in Kansas City have championed several metropolitan area-wide organizations and media outlets to help the Hispanic community maintain solidarity. Driever researches the manner in which community leaders attempt to cement the bond between different communities located in different areas of the city. Likewise, Driever examines the disunity that exists between Hispanics of different social classes and generations. He touches on some of the tension that is present between assimilated second- and third-generation Hispanics and newly arrived Latinos in regards to cultural practices and perceived resistance to assimilation.

Herzog (2004) examines the process of “barrioization” and “barriology” in Hispanic communities in San Diego and San Ysidro, California. Herzog (2004:205) defines barrioization as the “formation of barrios as an experience of less advantaged Latino populations staking out a territory which is then overwhelmed by urban diseconomies-poverty, crime, negative land use, and so on.” Barriology, on the other hand, describes a process by which Latinos use political means, cultural markers, and art to create identity and reshape urban planning in Latino neighborhoods. He contends that forcible segregation through the external pressures of urban development and anti-Mexican settlements helped to form the barrios in San Diego and San Ysidro. This is an example of barrioization. Afterwards, descendents of Mexican immigrants in these barrios created an urban landscape and atmosphere that mimicked urban spaces in Mexico. This internal response by people of Mexican heritage is an example of barriology. He contends that these two forces have resulted in creating strong ethnic pride in these geographic spaces. What will be interesting to see in my study if Mexicans inside this new enclave in Nashville will display ethnic pride and heritage as positive
values that transform urban space like the Hispanic communities of San Diego and San Ysidro.
Chapter 4

Methodology

To answer the questions presented in my research, I plan on using a triangulation approach. This will include secondary data, qualitative research, and field observation. The secondary data will consist of other studies, papers, articles, and books that pertain to this topic. I will utilize data from the United States Census to identify population trends and locate concentrations of Hispanic households within Davidson County. To describe the landscape of the proposed enclave, I will use field surveys and mapping.

For collecting qualitative data, I will use participant observation and conduct in-depth interviews with informants. Participant observation will come through volunteer work with organizations that cater to Hispanics, as well as spending time in the homes of Hispanic immigrants and accompanying them on trips within the enclave. In many cases, I will be teaching English or attending Hispanic events and gatherings. In-depth interviews will be conducted face-to-face using a questionnaire. The questionnaire will consist of fixed and open-ended responses. The fixed responses (e.g. income, age, years spent in the U.S. and fluency in English) will be used for quantitative analysis. The open-ended responses will take on a more semi-structure tone, and will probe the informant about lifestyle, opinions, and day-to-day routines. This part of the interview will allow me to obtain a thick description (Clifford and Valentine, 2003) of my target population.

Locating an Enclave

To begin my study, I will first have to locate an area in Nashville where I believe an enclave has formed. A simple approach for locating segregated ethnic residential and
business sectors of a city is given by Logan et al. (2002: 301):

Ethnic neighborhoods are most often identified and studied through fieldwork in which the researcher typically begins with the knowledge that the ethnic character of a given locale is socially recognized—certainly by group members and perhaps also by others. This ethnic character may be visible through the observation of people in public places, the names of shops or the languages found on signs or spoken by clerks or patrons, or by community institutions such as churches, social clubs, and associations.

Using this definition as a basis for determining the existence of an enclave, I have concluded that Nolensville Road, and the surrounding area is a burgeoning Hispanic neighborhood. To strengthen my argument for the existence of a Hispanic enclave along Nolensville Pike, I examined census data to look for adjacent block groups with high percentages of Hispanics. Additionally, I analyzed the linguistic and commercial landscape for signs of a Hispanic presence. Photographs along Nolensville Road will show businesses that bear names of Spanish origin; window and wall advertisements that are in Spanish; entire blocks of business establishments which cater to Hispanic culture; and parks where most who attend are of Hispanic descent and the most common language spoken is Spanish. Also, I include a time-series map of the business names along a small stretch of Nolensville Pike to illustrate the increased influence of Hispanic proprietors in the area. This information was obtained from the Nashville City Directory (1985 and 2005).

**Locating Contacts**

To begin the interview process, I first had to find informants who were willing to spend time speaking to me about issues that I wanted to cover for my thesis. I had a target number of 25 different interviews. To achieve this, I used snowball sampling with the help of gatekeepers (i.e. leaders in Hispanic organizations that I was working with)
and existing contacts to find respondents. Snowball sampling is a technique that relies on referrals from initial subjects or informants to generate additional informants. Furthermore, I was able to locate other willing participants within the Hispanic community by volunteering in Hispanic organizations. Also, opportunities arose at unplanned times where an informal interview, such as talking with a Hispanic store clerk, a waiter, or just chatting with someone in a park. I believe these situations were rich sources of information, and I took full advantage of them.

Trust was a major issue that I feared could hamper my efforts in finding informants. Census volunteers have reported that in the 2000 census, communicating with Hispanic immigrants and families about migration, settlement, and establishing residency was difficult due to fear of deportation. To avoid this potential setback, I began working with two organizations in Nashville that were involved with helping newly arrived Hispanics assimilate and function within Nashville. These organizations were excellent portals for meeting and gaining the trust of people in my target population. To further insure informants that personal information in the interviews would be confidential, I use pseudonyms in the place of real names throughout the thesis. This was to assure interviewees that their identities would remain private. Working with established organizations that are geared to help newly arrived Hispanics, allowed me to overcome any trust issue and helped me build a good rapport with potential interviewees.

The first organization where I volunteered was Conexión Américas. Conexión Américas is a non-profit organization based in Nashville that serves the Hispanic population within Middle Tennessee. Their mission to the Hispanic community is to help Hispanic families advance socially and economically by promoting their social,
economic, and civic integration into the Middle Tennessee community. Conexión Américas offers several services to Latinos in and around Nashville, including: financial literacy education; homeownership programs; immigration and legal support; English classes; cultural assimilation classes; job opportunities and referrals; and taxpayer education. The organization also supports a program called ¡Avance! ¡Avance! is designed to support Hispanic business owners, managers and employees by providing a forum for learning, networking, and peer interaction.

My contact within Conexión Américas was Maria Mejía. Mrs. Mejía is a co-founder of the organization and is the developer and chief instructor of the Latino Cultural Competency Training. Through Mrs. Mejía, I gained insight into Conexión Americas’ integration services such as cultural assimilation classes that are designed to teach newly arrived Latinos about local culture and behavioral traits and several of the Negocio Próspero classes (basic business classes) which are held at Belmont University. Also, I assisted in a language exchange program. This program aims to pair up native English speakers with Spanish speakers who wish to improve their everyday English. Beginning in August (2005), I was paired with one or more individuals with whom I would meet several times a week to help them practice English while I improved my Spanish.

The second organization that I worked with was the Brentwood Baptist Church. Through a Hispanic resident in my apartment complex, I was put in contact with a Hispanic outreach service ran by Brentwood Baptist. This church had set up an outreach program within an apartment complex known as Welch Bend located next to Nolensville Road. The church had been given a large, two bedroom apartment by Welch Bend to
operate their outreach program. The apartment is used by church members from
Brentwood Baptist Church and Hispanic immigrants within the complex for a variety of
purposes.

The program was run by a part-time, Hispanic preacher from Mexico named Ray. Ray used the outreach program not only to educate Hispanic residents in Welch Bend Apartments about the Baptist denomination but also to host English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. According to Ray, over 70 percent of Welch Bend residents are Hispanic, and most of the residents do not speak English. Although I have no affiliation with Brentwood Baptist Church, Ray asked me to teach English classes once a week at Welch Bend. As a result, each Monday night during the summer of 2005, I taught a basic English class to several Hispanics who live in the complex. The number of students each week fluctuated, yet there were always a few regulars in attendance. This opportunity gave me a chance to build a relationship with several Latinos who work and live within the enclave on Nolensville Road. At that time, Ray was the gatekeeper for Latinos within the Welch Bend outreach program. Hence, he was in control of the time and place I could interview Latinos from the outreach program. I had explained to Ray that I was writing a thesis on the Hispanic community in Nashville, and he was fully cooperative in helping me find participants for my study.

My third approach did not use organizations to find informants. I felt that if I only used organizations that help Hispanics assimilate then I would only be interviewing immigrants that are actively trying to assimilate. Thus, I would not be accurately documenting other Hispanics who live in Nashville but do not wish to use or attend organizations that support assimilation or acculturation. For this approach, I used existing
contacts in the Hispanic community that I have made in the past year. With these contacts, who live inside the proposed enclave, I used snowball sampling to find other immigrants.

This avenue was the most difficult since I was viewed as an outsider. Also, I had taken into account the idea of unequal power relations. Informants, especially those who are *sin papeles* (undocumented), might have considered sitting down in an interview with me as uncomfortable. To try and balance power relations, I was constantly aware of positionality (Clifford and Valentine, 2003). I realized that no matter what I did, I was probably seen as a young, educated, Anglo male. Although I could not change my appearance, I believed that approaching the interviews and the informants in a modest manner (both in dress and attitude) helped equalize the social relationship. Moreover, meeting potential interviewees through snowball sampling allowed me to meet many informants on a more casual level, as well as reassure them that I could be trusted.

**Interview Format**

The interviews were performed face-to-face. Conducting interviews in this manner gave me the ability to ask more complex questions, clarify vague or ambiguous responses, and probe for hidden meanings (Clifford and Valentine, 2003). In most cases, there will be a translator to help with any language barrier if needed. The location of the interviews was left to the informant. I believed that letting the informants choose an environment in which they were most comfortable would lead to more meaningful answers during the interview.

The formal interviews were both structured and semi-structured because I used a questionnaire with both fixed and open-ended responses. Conducting a face-to-face
interview with a questionnaire helped me guarantee that I covered all topics and questions that I needed for my study. The interview were broken into seven sections: basic information, why Nashville was chosen compared to other cities, job description, education, family, plans for the future, and day-to-day chores and opinions on assimilation. All questions were worded as simply as possible to avoid confusion.

Fixed-response questions were used to gather simple and numerical information such as age, time periods, origin, income, and any questions that could be answered with yes or no. Once all simple factual information was collected, the interview took a more relaxed and conversational tone. All other questions leaned more towards open-ended answers, thus evoking more detailed responses from informants. This allowed respondents to elaborate on their feelings, past experiences, and future plans, while allowing me to explore, in greater depth, the values, meaning and intentions of my target population. Because this part of the interview was more semi-structured, the informants were able to set the pace of the conversation. Each section of open-ended questions had follow-up question to insure that all information needed for that section was obtained. Of course, if an informant gave lengthy, detailed responses, then the follow-up questions were required.

The first section of the questionnaire sought very basic factual information about the informant, such as age, sex, place of origin (country or another area of the United States), years lived in United States, years lived in Nashville, number of children, income, fluency in English, and the area of Nashville where the informant was currently residing. The actual numeric value was recorded for age, years lived in Nashville and the United States, and number of children. Fluency in English was a difficult category to
ascertain. To determine how fluent the informant was, I used a five-point Likert scale, and I allowed the informant to choose the option they felt they belonged in. Yet, if I felt the option the informant selected was incorrect, I made a note of it after the question. Place of current residence was asked. If the informant does not wish to give me their full address then I would request a general location or whereabouts (e.g. street name, neighborhood, or zip code). Place of origin was the only open-ended response in this section. This allowed the informant to explain if they have lived in several different locations before Nashville. Most responses in this section were simple and can easily be analyzed. Although my sample size was small, I looked for obvious trends between several factors: the relationship between income and education; the relationship between income and time spent in the United States; and the relationship between age and fluency in English.

In section two of the interview, I wanted to investigate the reasons or motives as to why informants had moved to Nashville. What was the initial draw to this area of the country? I opened with a simple and direct question: “Why did you choose to move to Nashville?” Follow up questions inquired if family and friends were a factor in this decision: “Did you have any family or friends living in Nashville before you moved here?” and if so, “Did they encourage you to move here?” or “Have you or would you encourage any of your family or friends to move to Nashville?” These questions were designed to look for evidence of chain migration.

Section three addressed employment. Initially, I asked what they do for a living. With this part of the interview, I also wanted to ask several direct questions regarding their job and work environment. Did they move here with or without a job? Is their job
permanent or seasonal? Is their boss or employer Latino? Do they have more than one job? Do they work with other Latinos? Also, I inquired about the importance of English in their job. Simply put: Is English necessary where you work? In addition, if they worked with other Latinos, I wanted to know if most could or could not speak English. With questions regarding English, I was curious to see if being fluent can open more doors for promotion or higher pay in the work environments of immigrants.

Discussions on education were covered in section four. First, I asked what the highest level of education the informant had received. Originally, I wanted to use a scaling system for this question, but due to the different educational structures of Latin American countries, one generic scaling system would not work for all immigrants. Therefore, I recorded the actual response. The rest of this section focused on education within the United States. I believe that if immigrants were planning to or were currently receiving any education, then this would demonstrate some intention of assimilating. For most new immigrants, I inquired about learning or improving English. In most situations, this is the most important skill that immigrants could learn to gradually adapt into a host society. If an informant was already proficient in English, then I wanted to know if the informant had any desire to further their education while in the United States (e.g. trade school, GED, or a college degree). Finally, I inquired about how important education was to the informant. Do they feel education is necessary to have a better life? How important do they feel education is for their children? Do they want their children educated in English only schools? This section was important in determining interest in adapting to the local society. Ambition to continue education, while in the United States, also illustrated a desire to partially assimilate.
Section five will explore the family relations and home life of my target population. For example: “Are other members of your family living in Nashville?” and if so “Do they live with you?” and “Would you raise a family in Nashville?” or “Do you send *envíos or remesas* (remittances) to family in another location?” Also, I wanted to expand on questions from section two concerning the encouragement of family members to move to Nashville. Topics regarding living situation were addressed, as well as whether anyone in the household must act as an interpreter for others in day-to-day life. Furthermore, I wanted to query the informants about purchasing property. I wanted to know if they plan to buy a home or land within Davidson County, or if they plan to purchase land in their country of origin. Discussing investments in real estate helped in determining the long term goals of informants.

Section six will cover the long term plans of Hispanics in Nashville. In this part of the interview, informants asked to provide information about what they think life in Nashville has in store for them, and what their aspirations in the United States were. Do you wish to seek citizenship? How long do you plan to remain in Nashville? Do you want to make Nashville your permanent home? Eventually, do you want to return to your home country?

The final section investigated what affiliations the informants had with local organizations: the shopping patterns of informants; and how well the informants believed they were assimilating into the local culture. I wanted to know if there are any organizations (Hispanic or Anglo) with which the informant associates with. For shopping preferences, I asked informants about weekly spending habits. Where are most
household items purchased? Where they prefer to buy food? What restaurants, bars or
nightclubs do they mostly frequent?

Additionally in section six, I wanted to investigate the informant’s personal
feelings about acculturation. Does the target population prefer relationships with people
from their home country or Hispanic cultures over members of the local population or
Anglo culture? Do language barriers discourage my respondents from shopping, eating,
or spending money in Anglo-oriented establishments? Finally, I frankly asked, “Do you
feel that you are assimilating into the local culture of Nashville?” Even though the entire
questionnaire was to examine this research question, I wanted to know what the
informants think about their progress in Anglo society. I wanted to follow this with
questions regarding their own feelings on acculturation or assimilation into a host culture.
Overall, does the target population think assimilation at any level is important? Do they
want their children to adopt Anglo-culture? Do they want their children familiar with
their traditional custom? Do they want their children to speak Spanish?

After each interview, I immediately reviewed all answers that the informant gave
me. In addition to their responses for the questionnaire, I examined any discussions
about relocating to Nashville, day-to-day life, and assimilation. From this, I determined
how well each informant had adapted into the host community. My conclusions were
based on several factors: fluency in English, level of income, level of activities
(shopping, employment, relationships, organizations, or educational facilities) outside of
the Hispanic community, residence, home ownership plans, future plans for immediate
family (i.e. children and spouse), interest in learning local culture, and opinions of
acculturation. In some cases, levels of acculturation differed due to the legal status of the
informant; therefore, different people might embark on different paths of acculturation. I will take this into consideration by reviewing each interview on an individual basis.

**Additional Sources of Qualitative Data**

Another source of qualitative data that I had hoped to use was the Tennessee Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (THCC). Unfortunately, I was never able to establish any type of contact with the THCC. Each time I tried to visit their office, they were closed, and they never returned any of my phone calls. This organization is located in downtown Nashville. Its purpose is to help develop and promote local Hispanic businesses. The information I hoped to obtain from this Chamber of Commerce included how it educates, promotes, and protects Hispanic businesses, as well as how financially linked Hispanics businesses and people are to the mainstream economy in Nashville. Furthermore, I wanted to inquire how the THCC's future plans would continue to aid in growth of this Hispanic community in the Nashville MSA, and if the THCC was happy with the community's progress so far. Also, I wanted inquire about any quantitative data that the chamber might have had concerning Hispanic business in Davidson County.

**Quantitative Data**

For statistical analysis of Hispanics within Nashville, such as monitoring population growth and trends, I used the census. Though the census was an important source of quantitative data, it was always viewed as an "at least" count of people of Hispanic origin inside the county. This means that I knew that there were at least "X" number (the census count) of Hispanics residing inside certain boundaries. Undoubtedly, there is a much larger hidden population residing in Davidson County.

Unfortunately, census population estimates and projections do not report on
hidden populations at the city level. Secondary data from The Pew Center was used to establish an estimate of undocumented Hispanics in Nashville. Anthony Lucas, a Tennessee Hispanic Chamber of Commerce board member, has been quoted in *The Tennessean* as estimating the Nashville area Hispanic population to be close to 200,000 (Wadhwani, 2004). This number is considerably larger than the census figure of fewer than 140,000 Hispanics statewide. Since I was not able to establish any type of dialogue with the THCC, I was never able to find out how they arrived at that figure.
Chapter 5

Expected Results

The results from this thesis should reveal several things: the existence of a Hispanic enclave and community within Davison County, how Hispanics are assimilating or acculturating into the local community, and how Hispanic organizations assist immigrants with assimilation. By using visual observation, I have already determined that the Nolensville road area serves as a Hispanic enclave. This section of Nashville contains social clubs, community institutions, churches, supermarkets, and a variety of stores which all cater to a Hispanic clientele. Census data and mapping along with a map of clustered Hispanic businesses will confirm this location as an ethnic enclave. The map of stores, major billboards, marques, window advertisements, and people who frequent the area will demonstrate the change in the residents and visual landscape in this neighborhood of the city. When finished, the research for this section of the thesis will delineate and pinpoint the geographical location of the Hispanic enclave.

Interviews with immigrants and leaders of Hispanic organizations will answer the main questions about how well Hispanics are assimilating into the host community. Face-to-face interviews will give personal accounts of how immigrants are adjusting to life in Nashville. Each interview will provide a detailed response of an immigrant’s experience in Nashville, English fluency, relationship with family and friends, employment, education, home life, future plans, and opinions of assimilation. Interviews with Conexión Americas will focus on how established organizations assist immigrants in integrating into mainstream life in Nashville. Interviews with the staff at Conexión Americas will show exactly how established organizations support Hispanic families with
social and economic adaptation into the host community. Also, interviews with Conexión Americas and examination of their records should illustrate the progress of their Hispanic clients in assimilating into the Nashville community. Additionally, working with the Brentwood Baptist’s outreach program inside the enclave will produce information about how the local community is reaching out to Hispanics and how receptive Hispanics immigrants are to engaging Anglo-led organizations. The results from these interviews will give a clear picture as to whether ethnic socioeconomic clustering of Hispanics in Nashville negatively impacts assimilation into mainstream society.
As with many of the larger cities in the American south, Nashville’s racial and cultural landscape historically has been divided between two groups: white Anglos and African-Americans. In the case of Davidson County, whites have always made up the majority of the population, mostly controlling the power structure in the community, and holding the highest paying jobs, while blacks have made up the minority, worked in low-wage jobs, and, until recent times, been shut out of participating in the mainstream community, as well as city planning (Schimmenti and Kreyling, 2005). As a result, blacks and whites have mostly lived in separate areas within the city. These segregated neighborhoods are culturally distinct and many support businesses such as stores, funeral homes, restaurants, and churches that cater only to the surrounding residents. Although many black neighborhoods in Nashville are gentrifying, a process that creates racial-mixed areas, racial solidarity is still visible in some black communities in the inner city. For example, the majority of neighborhood merchants along Jefferson Street, a historically black thoroughfare north of downtown, are black families who live in the area, and Jefferson Street annually hosts an annual jazz and blues festival put on by local black community leaders.

In more recent times, the dichotomous social make-up of Nashville has been challenged by the arrival of different ethnic groups from all over the globe. Globalization, refugee relocation programs, and the influx of capital creating jobs at every level are currently transforming Nashville from a predominately biracial city to a multiethnic community. Thus, Nashville’s cultural landscape is changing in different areas of the
city. Immigrants moving into low income neighborhoods bring cultural markers with them, such as national flags, signs in languages other than English, and religious icons that are unfamiliar to the native population. Other cultural markers such as ethnic markets, restaurants, and places of worship further change the landscape and usually signal the existence of a large ethnic population.

Nowhere is the cultural change in Nashville’s landscape more salient than in the area south of Interstate 440 between Murfreesboro and Nolensville Road—the principal commercial streets in this area. The streetscape along Nolensville Road has experienced significant transformation since the 1980s and has become the main artery for business and nightlife for the city’s growing Hispanic community (Fig. 2). Mexican and Central American flags hanging in windows, billboards in Spanish, mariachi and cumbia music blaring from speakers placed outside stores or from cars passing on the street, and businesses catering mostly to Hispanic clientele demonstrate the rise of a Hispanic enclave in Davidson County. Although this area is home to other immigrant groups and other multicultural businesses, Hispanics have come to dominate the cultural landscape, both visually and economically, along several city blocks. In fact, many non-Hispanic proprietors carry Latino products in their stores and advertise in Spanish as a way to lure the growing Hispanic clientele into their businesses. Additionally, many American born entrepreneurs who have operated stores and business on Nolensville road for years have redecorated their stores to match the cultural décor of Hispanics, and some have even gone so far as to learn Spanish. Many of these accommodating changes made by American businesses in the enclave are found in larger, well-established business such as car dealerships and banks, yet smaller “mom and pop” establishments have adapted as
well. For example, one native Tennessean barbershop owner (who requested not to be named in this study) has changed their outside business sign to say *peluquería* (barbershop), redecorated the inside of their shop with Hispanic flags and icons, and has become fluent in Spanish in order to stay in business in the enclave.

This process of Hispanization that Nolensville Road is going through is the result of the large Hispanic population that has moved into the area. Hispanization is the adoption of social and cultural Hispanic/Latino characteristics by a person or place (Haverluk, 2005). Due to years of urban sprawl, most of Nashville’s streets and...
neighborhoods are not densely arranged into large city blocks. As a result, most Hispanics are not tightly clustered into a small area, but rather are loosely concentrated over a continuous area in neighborhoods adjacent to Nolensville and Murfreesboro Road in southeastern Davidson County (see fig. 3 and 4)\(^3\). The Latino population along these roads seems to be substantially large enough to maintain a visibly ethnic Hispanic commercial and entertainment hub.

On Nolensville Road (Fig. 5) the majority of these structures were built in an Anglo-American style that can be found throughout the American South and beyond. Since Hispanic entrepreneurs and residents cannot alter basic form or "fixed featured

\(^3\) Other small patches of Hispanics residents can be found randomly in the city, but none have a large enough population to support the number of Hispanic business that are located in Nolensville or Murfreesboro Road.
elements” of the existing buildings they inhabit, they have remodeled and transformed their surface

Figure 4. Location of Proposed Enclave

appearance and style or “semi-fixed feature elements” (Benedict and Kent; 2005). This is the most noticeable way that the area has been “Hispanicized.” Many of the simple block-shaped buildings made of brick or concrete, as well as older structures that once contained Anglo restaurants (full service and fast food), have been colorfully painted and completely redecorated to appeal aesthetically to the taste of Hispanic patrons. Hispanization in the form of muralism is also visible on the walls of larger brick and concrete buildings throughout the enclave. This type community art reminds all who pass of the Latino presence that has moved into this section of town.
Figure 5. Changes of Anglo business names to Hispanic business names along a section of Nolensville Road between 1985 and 2005. (Source: City Directory and Field observation)
Cultural transformation of an area by ethnic groups goes beyond changes in the visual appearance of structures. The Hispanization in southeastern Nashville can also be recognized by the preferred language used by patrons in businesses along Nolensville and Murfreesboro Road (Fig 6). Spanish is the language of commerce and trade in many of the establishments in the enclave. Likewise, most of the media sold, as well as the free local publication, are in Spanish. Latino radio stations also reemphasize through commercials and onsite promotions that these roads are important commercial areas for the Hispanic community. Many of the commercials played on Latino radios advertise for businesses, restaurants, and nightspots that are located in this area of Nashville. Additionally, onsite promotions conducted by these stations are often held inside the enclave, usually in discothèques and bars on Nolensville Road.

**History of the Enclave**

The area of south Nashville that is most recognizable as a Hispanic enclave is the Woodbine neighborhood. Although its boundaries are often contested, Woodbine roughly encompasses all subdivisions and commercial complexes on or adjacent to
Nolensville Pike south of Interstate 440 until just past Harding Place Road. The eastern boundaries broadly extend into subdivisions that are connected to Murfreesboro Road and the western boundaries stops at the railroad overpass on Thompson Lane. The boundaries of Woodbine have gradually extended south through the years as the result of continued development (both commercial and residential) along Nolensville. The borders for Woodbine described here and much of the area’s history are based on discussions with longtime residents and business owners from this area. Like many neighborhoods in Nashville, Woodbine’s exact location is spoken about in very general terms by locals, yet most seem to agree that Woodbine falls well within the bounds of the proposed enclave.

The Woodbine area was inhabited by Native Americans long before Davidson County was settled by people of European descent. According to local lore, different tribes of Native Americans used to congregate frequently in this area to discuss hunting and farming rights. The location of these meetings, as the legend goes, was on a large obtrusive flat rock (Bryer, 1998). Subsequently, White settlers who began arriving after the revolutionary war named the area Flat Rock. Through most of the 1800s, Flat Rock was just a small farming community well outside Nashville, and Nolensville Road (then known only as Nolensville Pike) was dotted with small farms and medium sized plantations.

By the early twentieth century, the Flat Rock community had been changed by a large freight yard known as Radnor Yards built on its western edge. This train yard brought jobs and more families to the area, and, as a result, more commercial development appeared along Nolensville Pike. Eventually, the original flat rock was

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4 Woodbine is only one section of the enclave. Other sections can be found along Nolensville Road.
removed to make way for development. As the neighborhood grew into a middle class suburb of Nashville, residents decided in 1939 to change its name to Woodbine, in hopes of giving the area a more upscale image. After World War II, Woodbine had become Nashville’s largest suburb, boasting a population of 16,000 (Grigg, 1946). Residents from that time remembered it as mostly white with several neighborhood protestant churches and commercial businesses.

Economic decline came to the neighborhood in the 1950s. As innovations in the railroad industry allowed companies to streamline their workforce, many Woodbine railroad employees lost their jobs. This loss of economic stability, combined with “white flight” (a national trend during that time), caused a demographic change in the community. More black residents began to move into the area. Yet, the demographic change didn’t lead to more black-owned businesses. In fact, many of the stores and restaurants stayed in the hands of white families who commuted daily from other areas of the city. By the 1970s, the neighborhood was considered a biracial, working class neighborhood.

Woodbine’s first large challenge to its racial dichotomy came in the 1980s. Refugees from Laos came to Nashville through the help of relief organizations, predominantly the Catholic Church. Residents and business owners alike say they remember thinking that the entire area was going to become Lao. One business owner joked that she was sure she was going to have to learn Lao just to communicate with her new customer base. But the Laotian presence soon faded. Conversations with Laotians who once lived in the neighborhood suggest that many Laotians quickly educated themselves and pushed their children to assimilate. Consequently, many Laotians took
better jobs and moved out of the area. Laotians were not the only new ethnic group to move into Woodbine during this time period. Turkish proprietors began opening cafes serving Gyro meat and kabobs. Unlike the Laotians, though, several Turkish and Middle Eastern-owned restaurants still exist in Woodbine.

By the 1990s a new ethnic group began to emerge in Woodbine. Hispanics from Mexico and Central American began to move into the area, attracted to lower priced property. Long term Hispanic residents that I spoke with said that the community seemed to spring up around the opening of a new tortilleria (tortilla factory) connected now to the authentic Mexican restaurant La Hacienda (Fig. 7). Throughout the 1990s and into the 21st century, Hispanic business owners gradually established a commercial base along Nolensville and Murfreesboro Road that caters mainly to Hispanic immigrants. Place names of businesses and ownership of buildings changed from Anglo to Hispanic, and, by 2006, the community around Woodbine had acquired a distinct Latino flavor.

Figure 7. This shopping complex houses the tortilla factory that many Hispanics say was one of the original cornerstones of the Hispanic enclave. (photo by author)
Chapter 7
Analysis

By the spring of 2006, the concern with illegal immigrants residing undocumented within the United States had become a topic of national debate. Nashville, Tennessee joined the list of U.S. cities that hosted large immigrant demonstrations over national immigration policies. Boasting almost 10,000 participants, Nashville’s pro-immigrant rally in March 2006 was a reminder to citizens that the city was now home to a large Hispanic population (Torres and Howard, 2006). With most of the rally’s speeches in Spanish and the participants main battle cry “Sí, se puede,” an obvious division of culture could be observed between the community’s new, large ethnic group and the host society.

The healthy and steady growth of Nashville’s economy has attracted immigrants from different parts of the world. As in growing cities world-wide, a strong demand for residential and commercial construction workers, as well as vacancies at the bottom of the labor market for employees who may possess low skills, all play a significant role in the recent boom of the immigrant population in the Nashville MSA (Ley and Murphy, 2001). In the case of Nashville, as in other Southern cities, most of these immigrants looking for construction work or low skill jobs are from Latin America (Mohl, 2003). The economic forces influencing Hispanic immigration to Nashville mirrors the situation in the American Southwest in the early decades of the twentieth century, where low skill economic opportunities drew large numbers of Hispanic immigrants (Herzog, 1986).

Many Nashville immigrants do not speak English or have legal means of obtaining a residence or even a job. My research seems to indicate that the recent barrioization of Nolensville and Murfreesboro Roads has created an immigrant reception
zone for newly arriving Hispanic immigrants—mainly from Mexico and Central America. Adjacent neighborhoods along these streets, such as Woodbine, have been transformed to resemble cultural and social spaces from Hispanic immigrants’ native countries. Hispanic immigrants already settled in this community receive newly-arrived immigrants and, in most cases, help them find a home and some type of employment.

Much of the contemporary research about Hispanic immigration in the United States focuses on either the different assimilation paths immigrants might take once they have arrived or how Hispanics are changing the cultural or visual landscapes of U.S. cities. The purpose of this study is to examine what role a geographical place that has been transformed by Hispanics into an ethnic enclave plays in the adaptation of newly-arrived immigrants into the host community. I aim to investigate what happens to Hispanics immigrants after they arrive in Nashville via this enclave. Do Hispanic immigrants begin to branch out from the Hispanic community and assimilate into the mainstream culture of the host society? Or does this Hispanic enclave become a permanent self-segregated home for many Hispanics in Nashville, thus preventing even the most basic assimilation into the host society and maintaining an entirely separate ethnic community that functions within its own parameters?

Through my research, I wanted to answer four main questions regarding the functionality of the enclave and the Hispanic community that it serves: What elements are driving the increase in the Hispanic population in this area? How are the Hispanic community’s businesses, social groups, churches, and families assisting immigrants? Does the enclave serve as a transition zone into the local culture for newly arrived immigrants, or do Hispanic immigrants prefer to remain and function inside the enclave
for the duration of their time in Nashville? Finally, how are Hispanic businesses changing the local landscape of certain areas of Nashville? By answering these questions, I can begin to understand whether the rise of this immigrant enclave, complete with Hispanic culture, business, *mercados*, and places of worship within Davidson County is, indeed, slowing the assimilation of Hispanics into the local community.

**Census Data and Demographic Change**

With the exception of Florida and Texas, the southern United States, generally, has historically had a demographic configuration that could be described as either white or black (Kochhar et al., 2005). Yet, by the 1990s, a third demographic group—Latinos—became increasingly visible. The economic shift in almost all sectors of industry towards the southeastern United States has attracted large numbers of young, unmarried men and women from countries south of the border.

In the past, the number of people who identify themselves as Hispanics has been quite low in much of the South; therefore, a recent surge of Hispanic immigrants has been extremely noticeable, both quantitatively and in the life experiences of Southerners. From 1990 to 2000, the Census recorded high rates of increase in the percent of the Hispanic population in seven southern states that have historically had low numbers of this ethnic group, North Carolina, Arkansas, Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina, Alabama, and Kentucky (Fig. 8 and 9). The proportion of Tennessee’s population that self-identifies as Hispanics increased by 278 percent from 32,741 to 123,838 between 1990 and 2000. As of 2005, the Census reported that Tennessee’s Latino population had increased from 123,838 to about 165,155. This is an increase of almost 35% since 2000,
making Tennessee the sixth-fastest growing Latino population in the nation. According to the Census, Hispanics make up 2.8 percent of the state’s 5.9 million residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Seventy percent of Hispanics in Tennessee are of Mexican origin, which is consistent with the estimated 64 percent nationwide.
The number of Hispanics in North Carolina increased from 76,726 in 1990 to 378,963 in 2000, representing a 394% increase. Arkansas also saw a significant increase, from 19,876 in 1990 to 86,866 in 2000, a 337% increase. Georgia showed a large growth, with the number of Hispanics rising from 108,922 in 1990 to 435,227 in 2000, an increase of 300%. Tennessee experienced a 278% increase, going from 32,741 in 1990 to 123,638 in 2000. Nevada saw a 217% increase, with the number of Hispanics growing from 124,419 in 1990 to 353,970 in 2000. South Carolina had a 211% increase, from 30,551 in 1990 to 95,076 in 2000. Alabama's Hispanic population increased from 24,629 in 1990 to 75,830 in 2000, a 206% increase. Kentucky had a 173% increase, with the number of Hispanics growing from 21,984 in 1990 to 59,939 in 2000. Minnesota had a 166% increase, going from 53,984 in 1990 to 143,382 in 2000. Nebraska saw a 155% increase, with the number of Hispanics rising from 36,966 in 1990 to 94,425 in 2000. The United States had a 58% increase, going from 22,354,359 in 1990 to 35,205,818 in 2000.

Figure 9. Change in the Hispanic Population, 1990-2000 Ten Fastest Growing States. (Source: Kochhar et al, 2005)

The Census indicates that in 2004 Davidson County had the largest number of Hispanics in the state, with an estimated population of 35,332 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). This is a 35.4 percent increase from 26,091 in 2000, and a 361 percent increase from 7,665 recorded Hispanics in 1990. This surge recorded by the census is a function of two factors: a relatively small Latino population in 1990 and the immense rate of growth of that base in the following decade. The majority of the Hispanic immigrants in Nashville are from Mexico and Central America (Fig. 10). Of the Hispanics in Davidson County, 19,311 identify themselves as Mexican, making them the largest subgroup at 55%. Immigrants from the six Hispanic Central American countries compose 25% of Nashville’s Hispanic population with 8,942 people. The large amount of immigration...
from these countries can be attributed to the relatively poor economic situations in these countries and their close geographic proximity to the United States.

Figure 10. Hispanics by Country or Region of Origin In Nashville
(Source: United States Bureau of the Census, 2005)

Unfortunately, the census tells only part of the story of Hispanics in the United States. It is widely recognized that the census routinely undercounts Hispanics living in the United States (Passel, 2006; Kochhar et al., 2005; Wadhwani, 2004; Smith and Edmonston, 1997). Much of the undercount can be attributed to their legal status. Hispanics who do not have the proper documentation attempt to avoid government agencies when possible. Therefore, the census must be viewed as an “at least” count. The Pew Center (2006) reported that by 2005 the total undocumented immigrant population had passed 11 million. As of March of 2004, according to the Pew Center, 8.4 million of the 10.3 million illegal immigrants were from Latin American countries. Of those
undocumented aliens, almost 6 million were of Mexican origin. Most undocumented Hispanics in the United States are young, male, and usually have low levels of education, although young women, too, are now beginning to emigrate from Latin America to the U.S. (Passel, 2006). Additionally, the Pew Center report indicates that Tennessee has become a new settlement state for undocumented Hispanics along with North Carolina and Georgia. The center estimates that there are between 100,000 to 150,000 undocumented immigrants within Tennessee. If we were to assume that over 90 percent of the undocumented are of Hispanic descent, then we would have a total population of around 300,000 Latinos residing in the state. Many Hispanic organizations and churches in Nashville also hold the numbers reported by the Census to be extremely conservative.

The interviews for this thesis support the reported trend that most undocumented Hispanic immigrants coming to the United States are male and have low levels of education. Of my 25 interviewees, 15 were men and possessed the equivalent of U.S. high school education or less. Originally, I was going to ask an optional question about legal status, but one of my gatekeepers suggested to me that such a question would not always get honest answers and it might make people uncomfortable. Therefore, I decided not to ask but rather only to record on my questionnaire when an informant mentioned their legal status or alluded to being illegal. By the end of the survey, 15 had admitted to being illegal or made convincing comments leading me to believe they were undocumented. Of course, there is no way of knowing the true number, which could be substantially higher, because even informants who mentioned that they were residing legally in the country could also be fabricating their status.
Student Enrollment of Hispanics in Davidson County Public Schools

The increase in Hispanics in Davidson County can also be monitored through the Nashville Metropolitan School System. Metro Schools have a total enrollment of 71,800 students in grades K-12 (Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, 2006). The school system consists of 129 schools: 71 elementary schools (K-4), 36 middle schools (5-8), 15 high schools (9-12), 3 alternative learning schools centers, 1 charter school, and 3 special education schools. The increase of Hispanic school children enrolled in Davidson County schools far outpaced the number of Hispanics reported living in Nashville by the census. During the year of this study (2005-2006), the number of Hispanics students was 8,150, making up 11.4 percent of all students in Davidson County. In comparison, during the school year 1995-1996 only 508 Hispanics were enrolled. In that school year Hispanics made up less than one percent of students in Metro schools. This is a student enrollment increase of over 1,500 percent.

Ten elementary schools, four middle schools, and two high schools serve families from the Hispanic enclave (see appendix A for list of schools). The percentages of Hispanics students enrolled in these schools for the school years of 2002-2003 and 2005-2006 suggest that the Hispanic population inside the enclave is growing rapidly. Except for one, all schools posted an increase in the number of students who identify themselves as Hispanic. I looked at ten elementary schools, four middle schools and two high schools. The elementary schools posted a combined increase in Hispanic children from 25 percent of the total student body to 37 percent (this was a percentage point increase of 12 in four years). In four of these schools—Haywood, Glengarry, Paragon Mills, and

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<sup>6</sup> The 2002-2003 to 2005-2006 school years were the only years with available data on Hispanics students.
Tusculum--Hispanics made up the majority of the student body (Haywood has the highest figure with 58.5 percent). Overall, the percentage of Hispanics in the middle schools demonstrates the same growth pattern. Thirty-four percent of students of the four middle schools examined are listed as Hispanic, up from 16.5 percent just four years previously, a net gain of around 17 percentage points.

The percentage of Hispanic students in the high schools was noticeably smaller than those in the elementary and middle schools. This can probably be attributed to two factors: First, the much larger school districts that these high schools serve compared to a smaller neighborhood elementary school. Second, Hispanic parents are most likely in their 20s and 30s; therefore, their children are going to be younger. Both high schools did record an increase in the number of Hispanics, but the original population of Hispanics was small. Glencliff High School increased 4.3 percentage points from 17.5 to 21.8, while Antioch High school saw the enrollment of Hispanic students rise 3.4 percentage points from 10.9 percent to 14.3 percent.

The rise in Hispanic student enrollment is another way Hispanic immigration is changing a society that has usually been divided into black or white. In response, Nashville Metropolitan Schools System has concentrated their ESL programs in the affected schools. In each of these schools, the demographics are changing. Each school witnessed a percentage decline in white students, and in many cases a decline in black students also. Interviews with my key informants and research subjects suggest that immigrants are eager to enroll their children in Nashville public schools to obtain a good education, but also to learn English through the ESL programs. This desire is easily
achievable because Nashville public schools do not require proof of legal status from children or their parents (see appendix B for requirements).

**Key Informants**

In this study, key informants were used to help obtain information about the target population and services provided to them. Each key informant was picked based on their connection or relationship with Hispanics who reside in the enclave. Each person possessed first-hand knowledge of the target population and/or the enclave. Susan Howell, who headed Nashville’s ESL program, provided insightful information about Nashville public schools’ impact on the children of Hispanic immigrants, as well as on the entire family. Ray, a Hispanic Baptist preacher, gave a depiction of the effects the enclave has on young Hispanic adults who are immigrating to Nashville. Additionally, he discussed Christian outreach programs that Protestant churches are creating for newly arrived Hispanics. An illegal immigrant named Al gave an inside account of ways undocumented immigrants can find and provide steady employment in Davidson County. He also described the communal living arrangement of transnationals inside the Hispanic enclave. Maria Clara Mejía’s relationship with the non-profit organization Conexión Américas made her a valuable gatekeeper and informant. She discussed the roles Hispanic organizations play in integrating Hispanic immigrants into the local community.

The interview methodology used in this section of the research was semi-structured. Before each interview, I created a list of topics and questions that were relevant to each particular discussion. I conducted all interviews face-to-face, and each one took a very causal, informal tone. All questions were open-ended with the purpose only to point the informant in general directions. The objective of this tactic was to give
the informant enough room with their responses to share their true perspectives about their position and responsibilities and the topic at hand.

**Nashville’s English as a Second Language Program**

It became evident during the interview process that Nashville’s public schools are important in teaching English to the children of immigrants and in aiding the development of friendships and connections outside the Hispanic community. In many cases, Hispanic children from the age of 5 and up become the translators of the home. These children can reach a high level of fluency by attending English as a Second Language classes in their local public schools. Yet, at home, they were able to retain near perfect conversational Spanish.

Susan Howell is the ESL program assistant, as well as head of the ESL program for Nashville’s public schools. Currently, the Nashville Metropolitan School System runs ESL centers in 23 elementary schools, 13 middle schools, and 8 high schools. During the school year of 2005-2006, 5,000 English Language Learners (ELL) were enrolled in Nashville’s ESL programs. Of the 5,000, 78 percent were of Hispanic descent. The program is broken into individual grade levels until seventh grade, which is combined with eighth grade. The high school ESL programs are not divided by grade. The high school program differs from the Kindergarten through eighth grade curricula in that it is based on proficiency, rather than grade level. High school students share a class based on their English proficiency with other students who, by age, would normally be in different grade levels. This gives the program the flexibility and efficiency to work with teenage students who have a weak grasp of English, regardless of their age. The programs are constructed to help students obtain five goals in English proficiency:
listening, speaking, reading, writing, and a basic vocabulary in mathematics. Students are tested for English proficiency before they enter the school system to decide what ESL level they should be in, and each year Nashville schools examine the progress each student makes. If students test high enough to meet the schools system's standards then they may be transferred into regular classes.

The success rate of the ESL program depends on the age at which the students enter the program. The younger the student is when they enter into ESL classes, the faster they learn and begin to make friends who are not Hispanic. If a child enters the program around the age of five, they may join regular school classes at an early age—possibly by third or fourth grade. At this age, the students seem to form friendships and social bonds with others in their class, regardless of race or ethnicity. This observation was repeated by parents and siblings of Hispanic immigrants who were interviewed for this study.

Mrs. Howell said that this pattern of readily mixing usually does not occur with the ESL students in high school or even middle school. In many cases, these students, due to language and culture, will cluster together with other Hispanics. Looking for peers of similar backgrounds, the Hispanic students who have entered ESL programs at an older age seem to prefer friendships with other Hispanics and will communicate with them in Spanish inside and outside school. This is contrary to the language habits of younger Hispanic students, who seem to communicate in Spanish only with their parents and in English with everyone else. Mrs. Howell believes that, to some degree, this may be the fault of the program itself. New students, at the same high school level who are weak in English will, in most cases, be paired together with other Latino students in the
program who are more proficient in English. The pair will naturally create a bond that is based on their similar cultural backgrounds. Therefore, Mrs. Howell added, the new students will become susceptible to the personal and social habits of their mentor. In some cases, Mrs. Howell says, the parents may not approve of the new friendships their children have formed, yet are somewhat powerless to do anything about it.

While most will agree that providing ESL classes for the children of Hispanic immigrants promotes assimilation and therefore is positive, this interview also touched on some of the negative effects for Hispanic families. For example, bilingual children have a key advantage over their non bilingual parents. Many parents with weak English skills will rely on their bilingual children to help handle day-to-day tasks, giving these children the opportunity to manipulate their parents. Sometimes these children can use their linguistic advantage to wield control over their families, Mrs. Howell suggested. In a sense, the parents can become hostages to the English skills of their children, especially adolescents. Likewise, immigrants who do not speak English or are in the United States illegally must contend with their bilingual children through the teenage years in an unfamiliar cultural setting. Many of these adults are at a legal, cultural, financial, and linguistic disadvantage as parents. If children become involved with peers that their parents would normally oppose, the options to intervene are limited at best. Parents may have reservations or lack the “know how” to seek outside help. Additionally, work schedules and salaries can limit the intervention options for Hispanic parents.

Overall, most will agree that the positives of bilingual children outweigh the negatives and give the second-generation an economic advantage. The recent increase in Hispanic students in public schools illustrates that immigrant parents want to take
advantage of the city’s education system. Registration for Nashville’s public schools is attractive to immigrants due to its lack of concern about requirements over legal status. These registration requirements allow almost all children of immigrants (legal or illegal) to enroll in public schools.

**Welch Bend Outreach Program**

The recent wave of Hispanic migration into the Nashville community has grabbed the attention of several Protestant churches as a potential source of new members from a demographic that has historically been Catholic. During the research for this study, I visited two different Protestant church groups—Glenwood Church of Christ and Brentwood Baptist Church—on a regular basis to study their outreach to Hispanics in the enclave and to find informants to interview.

Through Brentwood Baptist Church, I volunteered to teach basic English classes to immigrants. This position gave me the opportunity to meet an important gatekeeper to the Hispanic community. Ray is a Hispanic Baptist preacher at night and foreman for a construction company during the day. He uses the free English classes provided by the church as a means to “witness” to Hispanics that live in the Welch Bend complex. My interview with this key informant gave an interesting perspective from a Hispanic’s point of view on how well Hispanics inside the enclave are assimilating.

Ray is originally from the greater Mexico City area and has lived in the U.S. for close to 10 years. He is married and is the father of two daughters. Ray wishes to someday have his own congregation in the Nashville area, but his current legal status is preventing him from starting a church. When I met Ray, he was working in conjunction with Brentwood Baptist Church to begin to build a Baptist congregation of newly arrived
Hispanics who might revitalize the churches dwindling membership. Sometime last November, though, the relationship between Brentwood Baptist and Ray was severed over Ray’s legal status and other reasons Ray chose not to share. Regardless, Ray was very informative about what he has observed in the several years he has worked in Nashville.

Ray’s opinion of the enclave was surprisingly negative. He was actually more interested in discussing the recent rise of the Hispanic enclave than his work as a preacher with Hispanics. He viewed the enclave as a place where Hispanics were recreating some of the negatives aspects of life in their home countries that he believed they had left Mexico and Central America to escape. Ray, like many others I interviewed, believed that one of the best attributes of life in Nashville was how, “casi todo el mundo es derecho.” In other words, he admired how most people in Nashville are law-abiding. He insisted that in the time that he had been in the Nashville area, he had watched the Nolensville Road area become more Hispanic and that many “Chavos” (young males) who are now arriving do not want to conform to the larger culture and ignore many of the basic laws in Nashville.

Ray has become frustrated with many of the younger Hispanic adults who are immigrating to the United States, because he believes they are not trying to learn English. Ray insisted that this was due to the size of the Hispanic population in Nashville. Ray explained that when he first arrived in the southern United States there were not many Hispanics. He had to learn English quickly to survive. Now, he insists, Latinos do not have to learn English to find jobs or go shopping. When asked if he meant that most Hispanics shop at Latino establishments in the enclave, Ray indicated that was not always
the case. Ray believes that major American retail stores and business have created a shopping environment that now caters to Hispanics. Ray said now he can go to the Wal-Mart that is located on the south end of the enclave and never have to use English because there are so many Hispanic employees. He adds that many customer services for American business have Spanish speaking representatives to help Hispanic consumers. Likewise, Ray explained that government agencies in Tennessee now offer most of their services in Spanish.

Ray believes that the English classes offered in Welch Bend are having a positive impact on the assimilation process of Hispanics who are seriously participating. But there is another underlying motive for Ray to offer free ESL classes. Ray uses these classes as method to bring Hispanics immigrants together so that he can “witness” to them. Ray’s main goal for this program is to “bring people (Latinos) to God.” Moreover, after class, bible studies, prayer services, and sermons are held for all who attended classes. English is quickly abandoned, and all communication is in Spanish. Ray and other Hispanic ministers take this time to talk to the ESL students about religious matters and persuade them to start coming to other church functions.

English classes are not the only free service that Protestant churches working inside the enclave provide. Several offer family-oriented services such as homework assistance for school age children and child day care for working parents. These services have dual purposes: the first is to aid Hispanics with adjusting to life in Davidson County, and the second is to create another avenue for church membership recruitment. For many immigrants earning low wages or who do not have an established social network in Nashville, this type of free assistance is just too appealing to pass up.
Contract Work and Living inside the Enclave

Many of the Hispanics who are immigrating to the United States are young men seeking low skill jobs. One of the jobs that is available to Latinos in Nashville is construction. Through contract work, many male Hispanic immigrants can obtain decent paying jobs without presenting official proof of legal status. Of the 25 people I interviewed, 10 of the men were either currently in some type of construction job or had worked in construction since living in the United States. Six of these men—all in the United States illegally—had a job in construction already waiting for them when they arrived in Tennessee.

Two factors that attracted these Hispanic men to construction jobs were the ease of moving from one construction crew to another and that English was really not required in this line of work. Work seemed to always be available for basic types of construction, painting, and plumbing jobs, in and around Nashville. If a person had contacts with other crews in the area (or other cities) he could simply call up the chief of that crew, usually a Hispanic, and ask if he could join his team. The ease of job hopping is tied to the fact that most of these workers are illegal and the crew chiefs are Hispanics who have no quarrels about hiring workers without proper documents. Likewise, the hiring process is extremely simple for the chief of a crew. Since the worker is illegal and the crew is working under a loose sub-contract for a legitimate plumbing company, the chief does not have to go through the lengthy, legal hiring process. All the immigrant has to do is ask if he can join the crew the coming week, and the chief can give him a yes or no answer instantaneously.
Al is a crew leader from Guanajuato, Mexico, who has lived in the United States for seven years. He is an experienced plumber and has built a crew of his own by recruiting young men from Mexico through chain migration. Plumbing is a family trade for Al. All of his brothers of working age, as well as several of his cousins and brothers-in-law, are employed in the plumbing trade in Nashville. Al’s crew consists of anywhere from 8 to 12 men, depending on how much work he has each season or how many of the men want to work on his crew at any given time.

Al speaks limited English, but has created a lucrative business relationship with a well established plumbing company in Nashville. He is the liaison between this company and his crew. Through contract work, which legally separates Al from this company, Al and his crew are given work sites each week or month in neighborhoods or office buildings that are under construction. His team arrives at these sites and installs the plumbing. Afterwards, someone from the company will stop by to review the quality of the work. Each Thursday Al creates a report (using Microsoft Excel) outlining all the work and expenses that he and his employees accrued during the week. This report is turned over to the plumbing company on Friday morning and by that afternoon they have cut Al a check based on his work report. Al then goes to a check cashing business, located along Nolensville Road, to cash his check into hard currency to pay employees as well as himself.

Currently, Al is residing in United States “sin papeles.” He obtained his work license by some illegal means through a contact he has in Atlanta. He preferred not to discuss matters concerning his license in this interview, but he explained that as long as the plumbing company he works for is not exactly liable for him or his crew, then issue
of his legal status or that of his crew is not that important. He went on to explain that the company has several work agreements with Hispanics--including other members of his family--that are identical to the contract that he has with the company. Al insists that American companies in the construction business prefer Mexican workers because they are reliable, economically competitive, hard working, and do not question or talk back to their superiors. He adds that Mexicans take pride in these types of jobs while the average American would shun such work for these types of wages. He then adds that the pay is more than enough to live here humbly and still send money back to Mexico.

All of Al’s crew, along with Al himself, lives inside the enclave. Al lives with his family, while most of his crew shares several houses with other men who work for similar crews under other members of his family. Al or someone in his family set up the living arrangement, signing all the contracts and setting up all utilities using the name, social security, and credit of a friend or family member who has legal residential status. The tenants only have to pay the bills each month. All of these men are under the age of 30, and many knew each other in Mexico or are related.

Al looks for and uses only Mexican employees for his crew. In most cases, Al recruits employees from abroad through a simple recruitment system that he and his family have created based on social networks and chain migration. With Nashville’s continuing need for new office buildings and homes and with no immediate end to the construction boom in sight, Al and his family are continually recruiting employees by word of mouth through members of his crew. Al said that when he needs more workers he just has to get the word out through his crew that he needs some extra help. As Al notes, “someone always knows someone or has a relative in Mexico or another city in the
United States (usually Atlanta) that is looking for work.’ When asked if Al or someone in his family has to set up the travel arrangements from Mexico for a potential employee, he responds, “No, that is their responsibility to find away into the country and then on to Nashville.” Al explains that many borrow money from family members to pay a coyote—a person who smuggles people into the United States for a fee—who will then help them gain entry into the United States. Once here, they usually take a bus, using their own money, to their final destination.

The lifestyle that the men have here is somewhat communal and dependent on Al’s well-established family. Once they arrive in Nashville, they find a home, through Al or someone in his family, with other transnationals usually inside the enclave. Most do not have personal transportation, but usually one person in the household has a car or access to a work vehicle (which usually belongs to Al’s family). Food and alcohol are usually shared equally among all in the household, and weekends are usually spent with others in their house or with their friends in other crews. On many occasions, Al’s mother, the matriarch of Al’s family in Nashville, cooks large authentic Mexican meals for some of these men and delivers the food to their houses or invites them to her home. When any type of problem arises, Al or someone in his family is called to help resolve the issue, even if the problem is something as simple as help for ordering a pizza. Al feels that he is partially responsible for taking care of the members of his crew, and they will even lend large amounts of money if someone is in debt or is in trouble with the local authorities. In many ways, they indirectly manage most aspects of these men’s lives while they are in Nashville. Yet, the relationship is friendly, and it appears to be mutually beneficial to both Al and his crew. Sometimes, the employees who have
worked for Al for a long period of time begin to see Al’s family as their second family in the United States.

Nightlife and after-work entertainment for most of these men is usually limited to restaurants, bars and clubs that are inside or close to the enclave. Their lack of English usually inhibits them from traveling outside the enclave when searching for entertainment. Likewise, due to the structure of their work environment and living conditions, most of these men have contact only with other Hispanics. As a result, social relationships with Nashvillians or any other American are severely restricted. Other than a few trips to Wal-Mart each month, construction worksites, dinning in fast food restaurants, and the occasional stroll through the mall, these men live much of their lives in a recreated Latino environment.

To Al’s employees, the enclave is a cultural and linguistic safe haven in an alien environment. Here, at least, they can roam, shop, and socialize with others who share the same language and customs. Yet, this also has created an environment in which these men have become complacent and not are inclined to assimilate. Most will not attempt to branch out, nor are they likely to try to learn English. Unlike Ray who arrived in Nashville on his own several years earlier and quickly learned English to survive, these men are able to live a semi-comfortable life without having to engage with the larger American culture. Between living in the enclave and allowing Al and his family to handle most of their responsibilities in the U.S., these immigrants have no pressing need to assimilate into the host society.

Al does not see any problems with this lifestyle. He believes that this symbiotic relationship serves all parties involved well. He has a reliable source of employees, his
crew has a reliable source of employment and living arrangements, and the American plumbing company that Al obtains work through has dependable, cheap contract workers showing up at their work sites. This type of clandestine work relationship between Hispanic immigrants and American businesses came up often during my interviews. It demonstrates that Hispanics (legal or illegal) can easily obtain work in Davidson County without having to acculturate. Inside the enclave, already established Latinos—who may be illegal themselves—serve as employment gatekeepers. These gatekeepers can recruit illegal Hispanics for different types of service and construction jobs as well as provide housing.

Conexión Américas

Conexión Américas is a nonprofit Nashville organization established in 2002 to aid and support Hispanic immigrants. The organization seeks to help Hispanics coming to Nashville to integrate into the larger host society. Conexión Américas provides services such as home purchasing assistance, small business training, translation, job-finding, tax education, civic integration, cultural awareness classes, and one-on-one language exchange programs. Each service is free and available to all Hispanics seeking help.

Maria Clara Mejía is a co-founder of Conexión Américas as well as developer and chief instructor of the organization’s Latino Cultural Competency Training Program—a program that boasts an attendance of more than 3,000 over the years of 2005-2006. Originally from Colombia, Maria has lived and worked in 13 Latin American countries as a World Bank social development and resettlement specialist for Latin America and the
Caribbean region. She holds both a bachelor and post-graduate degree in economics and a master’s degree in anthropology. Since 2000, she has made her home in Nashville.

Maria became an important contact during my research. Through her, I was able to participate in Conexión Américas’ language exchange program as well as receive information and updates about community meetings and demonstrations over immigration policies in Nashville. The language exchange program became a valuable avenue for immersion into the everyday lives of Hispanics in Davidson County and a way to locate Latinos who were willing to participate in my survey.

Over the course of a year, I met with Maria periodically and was able to sit down with her for two formal interviews. These interviews revealed not only the ambitions of Conexión Américas, but also political motives and sensitivities. During the first interview, Maria explained the general problems that Hispanic immigrants have when entering the United States, such as dealing with government agencies and learning the everyday customary practices in an Anglo society. She emphasized the need for Nashville to have a program such as Conexión Américas to help Hispanic families and business owners harmonize their lifestyles and business practices with those of the host society. Maria believes that many of the Hispanics coming to the United States, especially from Central America, do not have experience using public services, working with established financial institutions or corporate businesses, or going to modern medical facilities. Therefore, Maria and her staff focus on acclimating newly-arrived immigrants into a modern and developed society.

Contemporary politics of immigration and the topic of my thesis were the main themes of our conversation. The second interview took a different tone than the first.
Maria showed concern that my research might show Nashville Hispanics in a negative light. The idea that Hispanics could be “self-segregating” inside an enclave provoked what seemed to be a pavlovian response about the assimilation process in which Maria emphasized the difficulties that Hispanics currently face in this country and the overall positive contributions that immigrants (legal and illegal) make in the Nashville area. She contends that the enclave acts as a safety net for arriving Hispanic immigrants, who soon acculturate into the larger community, although she didn’t provide any evidence to support her assertion of rapid assimilation. Moreover, Maria asserts that the notion that Hispanics are “self-segregating” is false. By the end of the second interview, Maria seemed disturbed over the entire subject of my thesis and questioned the intentions of my research.

Maria’s sensitivity to negative perceptions of Hispanics can be expected given her occupation and background. One of the goals of Conexión Américas is to aid and protect Hispanic immigrants, who, in most cases, lack the “know how” or ability to politically organize and combat opposing viewpoints and opinions regarding their legal rights or residency in the United States. As a result, Maria has a responsibility to be aggressive in confronting ideas that might cast Hispanic immigrants in a negative light. Consequently, this may lead someone in her position to turn a blind eye to the real possibility that Hispanics who live inside in the enclave are not integrating into the host society and have indeed “self-segregated.” For example, during the second interview, I suggested that there are many Latino immigrants in Nashville who have lived in the community for over five years without learning English or developing friendships with non-Hispanics. She responded that she found that hard to believe. Yet, both Hispanic
families that I worked with through Conexión Américas’ language exchange program had been in Nashville for over eight years and had several members who spoke little or no English, and lacked strong social connections to non-Hispanics.

The bias for Hispanics shown during the second interview is understandable given the immigration debates in the nation’s political arena and the recent backlash against the current wave of illegal Hispanic immigrants. Views such as that of Samuel Huntington’s (2004) concept of an Anglo society under attack from south of the border are becoming more prevalent in the general population. It became evident during the interview that this organization is extremely sensitive to this view. Conexión Américas’ help in organizing the Hispanic immigrant march through downtown Nashville on March 29, 2006 demonstrates they have taken a strong position on the topic of Hispanic immigrant rights. Yet, it is possible that refusing to consider the possibility that a Hispanic enclave may be impeding the assimilation of arriving immigrants could undermine the organization’s main goal of creating a cohesive community between Hispanics and the rest of Nashville.

Findings from Key Informants

Each one of the interviews I conducted gave a unique and valuable perspective as to how Hispanics are adapting to life in Davidson County. Two of my key informants are well educated and work in careers that help integrate immigrants into the host society. The other two are both illegal immigrants that have carved out reasonably successful lives in and around the Hispanic enclave. Their perceptions on how well Latinos are assimilating are quite different. Both Al and Ray were confident that newly arriving immigrants do not have to acculturate much to survive in Nashville if they live in the
southeastern part of the city. Both agreed that even illegal immigrants can come to Nashville, find a job, and raise a family without having to learn English.

The ideas of living in the enclave and resisting assimilation while building a life in Nashville seemed to come as a surprise to Mrs. Mejía and others at Conexión Américas. Conexión Américas has been successful in helping many Latinos with acculturation and learning the basic legal system and cultural etiquette in the United States, and this organization is undeniably an invaluable asset to the larger Nashville community. Her point of view may stem from selective contact with people from the Hispanic community who are more eager to assimilate. Many of the immigrants Conexión Américas comes in contact with are seeking assistance with matters concerning assimilation and are actively looking for help or guidance, while many other Hispanic immigrants may simply not be interested in such assistance.

One thing appears certain from these interviews: There are several organizations—governmental, non-profit, and religious—that are actively engaging with this burgeoning ethnic population in Davidson County. For example, my interview with Mrs. Howell revealed that Nashville’s ESL program in public schools shows great potential to support classic linear assimilation by aggressively focusing on teaching English to immigrant students. Young children who enter the program successfully master English and create social networks with children of different ethnic or linguistic backgrounds.

Unfortunately, the immigrants who arrive in Davidson County in their adult years have a far less chance of learning English or establishing friendships with non-Hispanic. Their lack of interaction could affect the assimilation of their children. Younger children of Hispanic immigrants in Nashville show some signs of integrating
with children from the host society through school. Yet, this integration could be countered if parents and family members, who fail to culturally assimilate into the socioeconomic mainstream, don’t encourage their children to assimilate. This could result in many Hispanic children who may be bilingual but still only have limited participation in the mainstream. Consequently, many of these children, like many Chicanos of the southwestern United States who oppose the idea of assimilating into an Anglo society, could later on in life fall into a pattern of segmented assimilation and never achieve the social and economic mobility enjoyed by other assimilated ethnic groups.

**Face-to-Face Semi-Informal Interviews**

A key research component of this study lies with the 25 semi-structured in-depth interviews with Hispanic immigrants who have moved to Davidson County. Using these interviews, which covered the daily habits, opinions, personal achievements, goals, aspirations, and life in general in Nashville, a clear picture begins to emerge of how well Hispanic immigrants are assimilating into mainstream society. The goal of this inquiry was to search for signs of, as well as examine levels of social, linguistic, and economic integration of immigrants who live and function in or around an ethnically Hispanic enclave. These interviews were designed to investigate how an ethnic enclave could affect the motivations of Hispanics immigrants towards assimilation or, for that matter, any degree of acculturation. Likewise, these interviews review the perceptions Hispanic immigrants have about culture(s) that exist in the United States. Finally, these interviews assess the extent to which immigrants’ goals include assimilation into the larger host society or whether their ambitions are to remain in a transnational community that linguistically and culturally resembles their country of origin.
Power Relations

An underlying concern throughout my qualitative data collection for this study was the positionality between the researcher and subjects. My concern was that power relations between the participants and myself could affect the answers to questions pertaining to an individual’s opinions, aspirations, history and life. In other words, I wanted to avoid informants giving answers they thought I, as a white, educated American male from a different social position, would want to hear. The fear of an interview environment consisting of rigid power relationships between an American researcher and Hispanic informant was amplified by the untimely arrival of a new immigration reform debate in Washington during the spring of 2006. In many cases, I knew that I would be working with undocumented immigrants who might be skeptical of my intentions. Before I began the interview process, this exact concern was expressed to me by gatekeepers and others who worked with Latinos in Nashville. They cautioned that even if many Hispanics chose to take part in the interview, they might fabricate answers to match what they perceive is the correct response.

To combat the issue of power relations during the interview and seek more candid answers, I used a multifaceted approach. The first approach was to try to use gatekeepers who were part of the Hispanic immigrant community. Most of gatekeepers were working class Hispanics who lived and functioned inside the enclave. I built a strong rapport, which quickly grew into a friendship, with individuals who acted as gatekeepers. This helped to establish confidence and trust. With many potential informants, I first established an acquaintance through a gatekeeper during informal gatherings and places (social events, dinners, bars, churches, or catching a soccer match on the weekends at
someone’s house). In all cases, I would inform the potential participant that I was researching the emerging Hispanic community in Nashville. Within the first or second meeting with this person, I would ask if they would be willing to answer a few questions about life in Nashville. I always was honest about my purpose and intentions, and I let them know the kind of questions I would ask. I assured them that their personal identity would be protected, and I explained to them their rights as participants, while reading to them the details of the consent form.

My second approach in locating informants and avoiding the pitfalls that can accompany unequal power relations was to frequent business establishments where I believed that I could find informants who were representative of Hispanic immigrants inside the enclave. By making multiple trips to these restaurants and stores, I again became acquainted with certain employees (cashiers, bartenders, or waitresses) and became a familiar costumer. On many occasions, I would be accompanied by a Hispanic friend or gatekeeper (usually of Mexican origin). In those cases, employees would begin to converse with me more openly and on a more personal level. Eventually, after I had forged some type of friendship with these employees, I would request an interview with them. Again, I would always be forthright about my intentions and objectives and always allow the potential participant the option to refuse if they felt uncomfortable. Luckily, almost all people I approached in this manner were willing to be interviewed, which indicated to me that I had established a good level of rapport in the community.

A third way to increase the candor of an informant’s responses was to hold all conversations in Spanish and conduct the interviews in Spanish as well. Through immersion with gatekeepers and Hispanic friends and families in Nashville, I attempted
to learn regional vernaculars. This greatly facilitated the interview process. Although I would always be seen as an outsider or different, using idiomatic words and expressions helped dissolve, to some extent, the “us against them” mentality that can be associated with power relations between people from different classes, cultures, incomes, and backgrounds.

**Target Demographic**

Informants who participated in this section of the study were recruited through a combination of snowball sampling and convenience sampling. Snowball sampling allowed me to find participants through gatekeepers while convenience sampling allowed me to use participants who lived and worked in the enclave and who I encountered during my research. The criteria for selecting optional participants was flexible and consisted of only a few factors. The first was that the participant had to be Hispanic, but not Puerto Rican. Puerto Ricans are, from birth, American citizens; therefore, Puerto Ricans do not, immigrate but migrate, when leaving their predominately Spanish-speaking territory for the mainland United States (Arreola, 2005). The second requirement was that some aspect of the informant’s life currently involves or has in the past involved living in or making weekly trips to the proposed enclave. The objective of this requirement was to locate Hispanics whose errands, daily habits, work, entertainments needs, and social networks pertain, in some manner, to services that are found or provided in the enclave.

Nascent ethnic enclaves are usually home to “labor immigrants” who fill jobs at the bottom of the labor market (Alba and Nee, 2003, 230). Highly-educated, first generation immigrants are less likely to live in enclaves because they tend to assimilate economically and culturally within a short period of time after their arrival. As a result,
almost all of my informants worked in jobs that were characteristically unskilled and low paying. None of the informants worked in skilled professional or technical jobs.

Findings

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured form. A simple form was used for collecting data (see appendix for a sample of the form used). It consisted of simple closed-ended questions and opened-ended questions that many times led into long discussions. Face-to-face interviews allowed me to ask informants to elaborate on certain answers and allowed the informant to ask me to clarify a question if they were confused. To put informants at ease, interviews were usually conducted in a location chosen by the participant. These places could be their homes, my apartment, a bar, restaurant, a church, a vending stand, or their place of work.

Interview topics were divided into seven sections: basic information, why Nashville was chosen rather than other cities, job description, education, family, plans for the future, and day-to-day chores and opinions on assimilation. Each informant’s answers were recorded on the questionnaire. Afterwards, they were tabulated into a spread sheet and then into categories to simplify examination and quantification of the findings. Both the spread sheet and the original questionnaire were used when I analyzed the results of these interviews. Responses to questions about shopping patterns, social relationships, fluency in English, future plans, and living arrangements were used as indicators of the level of integration into the larger Nashville community.

The participants in the interviews consisted of 15 men and 10 women. Their ages were broken down into three categories: 18-30, 31-40, and 41+. The youngest person interviewed was 19, while the oldest was 58. The average age and sex were consistent
with findings of Hispanic immigrants moving into southern cities noted by other studies (Passel, 2006). Thirteen of the 25 informants were under the age of 30, and most were male. Most of the informants who were under the age of 30 had emigrated from Mexico to Nashville and had not lived in any other city in the United States prior to their arrival. Informants over the age of 30 were more likely to have lived in another city in the U.S. before moving to Nashville, usually one of the historic gateway cities for Hispanics such as Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, San Antonio, or Houston. This trend of younger immigrants coming directly to Nashville could demonstrate that Nashville is no longer a secondary reception city for Hispanics but rather an emerging gateway city.

Seventy percent of participants were originally from Mexico. Of those from Mexico, seven were from the state of Guanajuato. Of the other six participants, two hailed from Honduras, and one each from the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Colombia, and El Salvador. The percentage of Mexicans in this study is much larger than the percentage of Hispanics of Mexican origin the census estimates lives in Nashville. This could be the result of two factors: 1) the census has simply underestimated the number of Hispanics of Mexican descent that live in Nashville; 2) the snowball sampling method used to recruit participants. As other researchers studying Hispanics have observed (Miyares and Gowens, 1998; Pessar, 1995), Hispanics sometimes prefer to congregate or socialize with others from their country of origin. I observed this preference while spending time with Hispanics during this study. On several occasions, comments were made by Mexicans that they preferred not to associate with people from Central America in casual settings. For example, one informant stated that he didn’t get along with people from Central American countries because they lack
good etiquette and use vulgar language in public. He then added that Mexicans were usually more cultured and polite. Likewise, two informants from Central America both shared the opinion that Mexicans were overly patriotic and acted as if they were superior to other Latinos when in the United States. Although these sentiments from one Hispanic subgroup about another during the interview process were not universal, they did suggest that, once in Nashville, Latinos self-segregate somewhat based on preconceived perceptions, prejudices, and personal experiences.

Opportunity and the strong job market were the most salient motives given for moving to Nashville. Eighty percent of respondents reported that they moved to Davidson County for work. Three people added that, not only work, but also independence from family and constraints of what is culturally acceptable in Mexico were the most important reasons for moving into the Nashville area. Some of the other reasons for coming to Nashville and the United States ranged from asylum from police, to family problems in their country of origin. One informant said he had moved to the United States to escape the civil war in El Salvador.

Chain migration appears to be a strong mechanism for bringing Hispanics to the Nashville area. Twenty-two respondents had chosen Nashville because a friend or family member had suggested that they relocate to Davidson County. Likewise, 15 of the immigrants interviewed had made similar suggestions concerning relocating to the Nashville area to family and friends in Latin America. Moreover, through word of mouth Nashville’s reputation as a vibrant American city with copious jobs for Hispanics and as a safe place to live and raise a family has spread throughout Central American and Mexico.
Practically all the participants in this survey held low wage jobs. The most common occupations held by interviewees were construction, cleaning services, and restaurant/nightclub industry (Fig. 11). With the exception of participants who held jobs in construction, most participants worked inside the enclave. Participants expressed that it was easier to find jobs along Nolensville and Murfreesboro road than in other parts of Nashville.

Educations levels were recorded into four categories based on the level or grade lasted completed in each participant’s education system in their respected country of origin: Minimal, Secondary, Preparatory, and High (Fig. 12). Minimal represented enrollment in school for five years—equivalent to elementary school in the United States. Secondary represents between five and eight years of education, while Preparatory would describe a person who had more than eight years of school or had graduated from a school equivalent to a high school in the United States. High signifies that a participated had graduated and continued some type of higher education after preparatory school, such as technical school or university.

Most Hispanics in this study reported having an education level equivalent to or less that an American high school degree. Only three participants reported that they had continued their education beyond preparatory school. Yet, many participants, regardless of their education level, said that they would like to pursue some type of higher education
Figure 11. Employment of Informants (compiled by author)

or trade school while in the United States. All informants believed that education was important, and made life easier in the U.S. and their home countries.

One of the best indicators of assimilation is the adoption of the language of the host society (Alba, and Nee, 2003; Huntington, 2004; Isajiw, 1993). As a result, some of the most important questions during these interviews dealt with English. Levels of English proficiency were recorded and tabulated using a five-point Likert scale—with level one representing no English and level five demonstrating complete conversational and grammatical fluency (Fig 13). The level recorded was based on the informants’ perception of their English skills, as well as my judgment of their fluency during the interview. Informants were asked if and how well they could speak English. If an
Figure 12. Education Levels of Informants (compiled by author)

informant believed that they spoke a high level of English, I would switch the language of the interview to English and use more technical words and vernacular phrases to test comprehension. Most participants spoke little or no English, yet two did fall into the category of fluent (level four). These two participants had attended high school in the United States and learned most of their English in an ESL program.

There was a moderate positive correlation between the years spent in the United States and English language ability of the interviewees (Fig 14). The R-squared value of all 25 informants was .49. Yet, if you remove the two outliers from the data, the R-squared value raises to .61. Both outliers had a fluency level of two; one had been in the United States for 16 years and the other for 22. Although fluency does seem to increase slightly at first as immigrants seem to gain some basic English language skills, these advancements seem to taper off after several years and fluency no longer appears to be related to time spent in the United States. This is evident by examining the mean and
median between the years spent in the United States and levels of fluency. The participants who were ranked in fluency level one had a mean of 2.9 years in the United States and a median of 2.0 years. The mean and median of years spent in the United States for fluency levels two, three and four were all around eight years for all 25 participants. If the outliers are once again excluded, the mean and median between years spent in the United States and fluency level two drops to 5.5, but remains at eight years for levels four and five.

Most informants reported that they prefer to converse in Spanish even if they spoke English comfortably. This preference is indicated by the number of interviews conducted in Spanish: 21 out of 25. All informants reported that they would like to learn or improve their English. But when asked if they had immediate plans to attend classes, all but three answered no. Others explained that sometime in the future they might consider taking classes, while others said that it just was not high on their priorities at this time. Three informants said that even though they thought it was important and more opportunities existed for Hispanics who are bilingual, the short duration of the time they expected to stay in the U.S. did not warrant the long term investment in language acquisition.

Knowing English seems to give Hispanics who live in the enclave an advantage in the workplace. Seventeen reported that there was a higher chance of promotion if they were partially fluent in English, while six explained that English was somewhat important in their job, but one could advance without it. Only two informants said that English had no influence on job advancement. Ten of the interviewees had jobs where
few to none of the employees spoke English. For those who did not speak English, there was always at least one person who could translate for them between their manager or boss and themselves.

![Fluency level of informants interviewed](image)

Figure 13. Fluency level of informants interviewed (compiled by author)

The lack of English results in many immigrants having to rely on others such as family members, friends, or colleagues, for assistance with everyday chores or errands. Some respondents depended on friends or have at least one person in their household who speak enough English to handle their affairs—many times, this responsibility fell on their bilingual children. Several respondents stated that one could live in Nashville without knowing English well if you lived or functioned around the Nolensville road area.
Additionally, many respondents can now handle many of their day-to-day affairs in Spanish since many of the utility companies have telephone help lines in Spanish and customer service employees that are bilingual. Likewise, translators are now available for the courts, as well as the Department of Motor Vehicles, in Davidson County.

Opinions about learning English differed greatly. Some interviewees showed frustration, much like Ray's, with the attitudes of Hispanic immigrants who seemed to have no interest in learning English. One informant believed it showed a lack of respect to citizens of the United States and thought that it was one of the reasons why Americans resented Hispanic immigrants. This sentiment was echoed by another informant who felt that the communication barrier was the main reason behind the immigration reform movement.

A common perception held by participants as to why many Hispanics in Nashville are not interested in learning English is that many of the chavos (young adults) who are coming to Nashville have no plans of staying here permanently or are simply lazy. Also,
most felt that the Spanish-friendly environment of the enclave has a negative effect on motivating most Hispanic immigrants to learn English. None, however, mentioned that legal status was a barrier in enrolling in ESL classes.

Language was also significant in participants’ choices of stores, restaurants, nightclubs, and churches. When deciding where to shop, two out of three participants’ were influenced by language. Some just did not like to deal with language barriers at all. Some respondents stated that businesses such as auto dealerships, cellular phone retail outlets, law firms, and insurance agencies that had bilingual employees or were run by Hispanics, were preferable. This preference was due to the ease of conducting business and the perception that conversing in Spanish lessens their chances of being swindled.

Yet, all reported that sometimes they did have to go to stores where Spanish was not spoken. In these cases, participants who can not communicate well in English either have to bring an interpreter with them—many times their children—or try to communicate with their limited English skills.

Language, though, was not the only factor for choosing Hispanic establishments. Products—ranging from food to music—were major factors for frequenting Latino retail stores, restaurants, and entertainment venues. Eighteen people reported that product choice dictates where they shop. Food items, especially desserts and cuts of meat (Fig. 15 and 16), are the main products that attract Hispanic to Latino stores. In several interviews, I commented that many of the larger supermarket chains in Nashville carry products designed to appeal to Hispanic consumers. Most responded that certain products that they are looking for still are not available and that many things in the small, family-run Latino stores are just better quality. “The cakes in America,” one lady stated,
"are just too dry, but Hispanic cakes such as the ones from Aurora Bakery on Nolensville are moist and just have more flavor." She was referring to a popular desert known as *pastel de tres leches* (three milk cake). Opinions such as this were commonly expressed when referring to certain Hispanic products sold in American stores.

While language and certain products play important roles for choosing Hispanic store, two main factors occasionally deterred some Hispanics from solely shopping in Hispanics establishments and inside the enclave altogether: price and the perception that some American products are superior. Therefore, a dichotomy exists on the idea of what stores carry quality products. The prices of products are a large concern and often a determining factor when shopping that was shared by almost all participants interviewed. Consequently, all respondents regularly shop at Wal-Mart due to their monthly budgets. For some of the informants Wal-Mart was really the only American store where they
frequently shopped. Three younger male participants responded that when buying media such as Latin music or DVDs, they may check Best Buy or Tower Records before going to a Hispanic media retail store, because these large chains were usually a few dollars cheaper. Quality of products as well as price was a significant determinant of where to shop. Some of the informants believed that when it comes to furniture or clothes the products in American stores were of better quality. Others, still yet, said that they preferred the look or style of goods in American retailers, usually referring to clothes or cosmetics.

When choosing a place to dine outside the home, determining factors for participants resemble those of shopping preferences. Language, food, price, and quality are all important considerations. Yet, language and food types were a much more important factor in restaurant choice than in retail shopping. In fact, 20 percent of all Hispanics interviewed eat only in Spanish speaking establishments. Moreover, even when choosing different ethnic cuisines, such as Chinese, American, and Indian, interviewees tend to patronize a restaurants in the enclave where the employees speak Spanish. The only exception to this was fast food establishments, which—at least in the enclave—usually have Spanish speakers manning the registers. The advantages of speed, convenience, and price attract Hispanics just as they do their Anglo-American counterparts. Short lunch breaks or jobs that require commuting make fast food the most reasonable choice. For that reason, many of the Hispanics in the construction business eat in fast food chains such as McDonalds, Burger King and Wendy’s on a regular basis.

The types of dishes served in restaurants are important for Latinos when choosing where to eat. Participants demonstrated a preference for eating in establishments that
served regional cuisines and drink, and seemed rather particular about where they preferred to dine when choosing cuisines that represented food from their country or region (Fig. 17). A handful of restaurants (all on Nolensville Road) were undoubtedly the favorites among participants. This was in contrast to some of the more popular local Mexican chains restaurants in Nashville that *gringos* (Americans) frequent and hail as having great Mexican food. Yet, it should be noted that this is beginning to change as Americans are discovering these authentic restaurants along Nolensville Road. Hispanics believed the authenticity and *sabor* (flavor) of the preferred restaurants along Nolensville Road were more accurate and of better quality. Many of these restaurants offer selections that would never be found in the run of the mill Tex-Mex style restaurants popular with

Figure 17. Local Taco Stand. Such street vendors sell more traditional Mexican tacos. These tacos are served on corn tortillas that can be filled with an array of different meats such as tongue, intestines, adobada (a spiced meat), grilled chicken, or brains.

(Photo by author)
Americans, such as cow tongues and mouth or beef stomach lining. Likewise, country or region specific drinks and cocktails were factors that can contribute to choosing certain restaurants. Mexicans responded that they often enjoy drinking *micheladas* (a drink that consist of chili powder, lemon and tomato juice, salsa, and beer) and will choose dinner spots that serve it. Others look for authentic Latino establishments that serve drinks such as *horchatas* (a cold drink made of rice, almonds, cinnamon, lime zest and sugar), a favorite among Hispanic children and adults alike.

Nashville offers residents a vast array of recreational nightlife. The types of nightspots that Hispanics frequent provide clues to assimilation or lack thereof. Therefore, I asked with informants where and what types of bars, nightclubs, and discotheques they enjoy going out to in their free time, and I analyzed why a participant may opt for one place over another. Of the 25 participants interviewed, 14 go out on a regular basis and usually choose Latino places over any other. None from the interviews could demonstrate that they go to American bars or nightclubs on a regular basis. Occasionally, an interviewee would say that one time they had visited a dance club in downtown Nashville, but usually that person had not returned to that place since. In fact, most of the interviewees were not aware of the different nightspot zones in Nashville.

Music, language, patrons, and ambiance are the main determinants that attract Hispanics to Latino “hang outs.” Both men and women in the interviews indicated that they enjoy the music played in Latino bars and the dances performed in the Latino discotheques, all of which were located along Nolensville Road with the exception of a monthly dance put on by a Hispanic radio station at an expo center in Rutherford County. Also, young men said that they could meet women more easily in these establishments
due to common culture and language. Several of these men mentioned that they would love to meet American women, but language makes that nearly impossible in predominantly English speaking bars. Over all, a common culture and language were the main themes conveyed during the interview as to why these participants prefer Latino nightspots and restaurants over others. As a result, in the last five years, restaurants, bars and nightclubs have profited from this preference, and most can be found along one stretch of road in Nashville.

The ethnic make-up of friend networks affects decisions of which recreational establishment any group will frequent. Therefore, Hispanics choosing to go only to Latinos nightspots could be the result of a social network that lacks diversity. Although 14 informants had non-Hispanic friendships, usually these friendships were created in and exist only in the work place. Most stated that they did not “hang-out” with Anglo friends on regular basis—if ever. The participants’ social networks were largely homogeneous, and weekends are spent usually with other family members of the same age or with Hispanic friends from work.

Social, religious and family networks, as well as living arrangements, were examined to further enhance my understanding of how well Hispanic immigrants who function in the enclave have integrated into the Nashville community. Since most Hispanics interviewed indicated that chain migration played a significant role in bringing immigrants to Nashville, it was to no surprise that 21 of my informants had family living in Nashville. All but one of the interviewees had either friends or family living in Nashville before moving to Tennessee. As a result, extended social networks play an important role in the living arrangements of Hispanic immigrants in Nashville. Eighteen
informants lived with extended family, siblings or friends, while five informants lived in a nuclear family household. Yet, of the five who lived with their nuclear family, two have roommates that were either friends or extended family. Reasons for living with friends or extended family networks were a result of economic situations or camaraderie. Financially it is, of course, less expensive to live with others when one’s salary is low, and living with friends or one’s extended family can make life more manageable and comfortable when in an alien culture. Several participants voiced confusions as to why many Americans are so eager to leave the homes of their parents. The idea of trying to be independent and break away from one’s family was something many interviewees could not fathom.

All respondents, with the exception of one, lived in or close to the enclave. The one family that didn’t live in this area, was planning to move to a neighborhood adjacent to Nolensville Road within the next two years. The reasons given for choosing this area was that it was culturally familiar and it was where their friends and family live. Some informants joked that they would like to live in affluent areas such as Brentwood or Belle Meade, but none seem to take that idea seriously. A few of the participants mentioned that they wouldn’t mind buying a house in the country, but when I asked if they had plans to pursue this dream, all answered no.

The Catholic Church historically has been the dominant religion of Latin Americans. In Nashville, the church’s influence was evident among my informants. The majority of the informants (over 70 percent) considered their religious affiliation to be Catholic. Yet, since arriving in Nashville, only half attend mass on a regular basis. Of the remaining seven participants, six were Protestants who attend church weekly and one
was non-religious. All participants attended Hispanic churches or went to services held in Spanish with the exception of one participant, who attends both Hispanic and Anglo church services on a regular basis. Besides the language barrier, many find Hispanic church environments more relaxed and familiar and Anglo church environments somewhat rigid and uninviting. Therefore, many immigrants reinforce their social networks through religious organization that cater to Hispanics.

Many Latinos immigrating to the United States for work do not intend to stay in this country permanently. Instead, they are part of the migratory flow that exists between the United States and Latin America and which has intensified in recent years. This phenomenon is in contrast to what was promised and expected with the passage of NAFTA and the Immigration Reform Acts of the 1990s (Mohl, 2003; Suro, 1998). Regardless of legal temporary work visas or not, these immigrants wish to take advantage of the abundance of low skill jobs the United States has to offer and remit money back to their countries of origin, or look to build a nest egg to retire on or help sustain a comfortable life while back in their home countries. As a result, inquiries about future plans were important for determining whether informants want to put down roots in Nashville, raise a family, and become part of the larger community or are only passing through. To determine whether Hispanic immigrants in Nashville wish to return to their countries of origin or continue living in Nashville three topics were pursued and discussed in the interview process: perception of American culture and assimilation; raising children in Davidson County; and future plans and goals.

The perceptions that an immigrant has about a particular place and its local culture will inevitably affect their choice to assimilate or self segregate. Therefore, I
asked what informants thought about the customs, culture, and people that make up the host society that they have moved into. The idea behind this inquiry is that an immigrant who has a positive opinion of their host society’s culture or way of life would be more willing to adapt. During this section of the interview, I discussed opinions and concepts of American customs and way of life in Nashville to see how immigrants in Davidson County perceive their cultural surroundings.

American pop culture has spread to almost every corner of the globe. Movies, music, and foods from the United States are well known throughout Latin America. As a result, most Hispanic already possess some perception of what it is to be “American.” In addition, even before arriving in the United States, many immigrants from Latin America have already forged opinions about the American way of life. To capture the concepts Hispanics immigrants have about the American way of life, I put forth a general question asking what immigrants thought about American culture and customs. Most respondents (19) have a positive opinion about American culture, while four say that they do not like the customs or mannerisms of Americans. Still, of those who have a positive opinion of culture in the United States, eight preferred their native customs, cultures, and way of life over that of the United States and would rather practice their culture over fully adopting American customs. Reasons for this preference varied. One participant’s concept of Americans was that they lacked respect for others and were rude overall; therefore, he felt he could not integrate permanently into the larger society while in Nashville. This participant’s perceptions were based on the experiences he had witnessed with Americans in public places, and in his work place. Other participants insisted the United States has weak family values when compared to Mexico. One perception given by a respondent
about Nashville was that it was extremely liberal. She felt the community, in general, lacked strong morals and a simple conservative structure for raising families. This participant longed for a more conservative way of life, one that she said could be found in her home state of Jalisco in Mexico.

Participants who responded positively to American culture gave similar answers as to why they liked it. Most mentioned that Americans seemed more derechos or law-abiding. But, with this answer, there was a common distinction as to whom the Hispanics were referring. Eight participants made remarks suggesting they saw two different American cultures. These participants viewed “Los Morenos” (Black Americans) as having customs and habits very different than White Americans. Moreover, these participants shared a negative opinion about the culture of African-Americans that they had encountered in the U.S. Reasons given included: lack of respect for laws, public behavior, and racism towards Latinos. These views are probably derived from several circumstances. Many Hispanics that took part in this interview live in areas that would be considered low income or located next to government housing that is occupied by lower class African-Americans. Therefore, the social position and low incomes of the Africans Americans that this group of Hispanics encounter could be the factors responsible for influencing informants’ perceptions of Black culture more than race itself. Less-than-perfect race relations are another factor that can contribute to opinions of African Americans in general. In recent history, tensions between Blacks and Hispanics have worsened due to African Americans’ belief—usually motivated by Black community leaders—that Hispanic immigrants are dislodging them from certain jobs in the national workforce (Mohl, 2003; Suro, 1998). Some black Americans view these
immigrants as a threat to working class African-Americans employed in low-skilled jobs. As a result, animosity, sometimes vocal, towards Latinos has emerged in different parts of the country and has partially contributed to the negative impressions Hispanics have about Black Americans when compared to Whites.

Impressions and beliefs about “White” American culture stem from the observations Hispanics have made since arriving in the United States. Hispanics said they thought many middle and upper class Americans strictly adhered to local laws. Several comments were made about how Americans were less likely to litter than citizens in Latin America, and that Americans always follow simple rules such as “stay off the grass” or “no jay walking” which they stated would likely not be obeyed by the majority in their counties. Some even found it humorous that Americans would be so obedient to such simple things. Additionally, several Hispanics thought American culture was more honest and talked about how much less corrupt the law enforcement and government were in the United States. Of course, Hispanics who have lived in different parts of the United States said that culture among Americans differed depending on the region. Some Hispanics thought that the mannerisms and customs in Tennessee were friendlier than the ones they had encountered in other parts of the country such as California, Chicago, or Ohio.

The majority of informants believe that Davidson County would be a good place to raise a family. Several respondents are already raising children in the U.S., while two more are currently mulling over how to bring their families to Nashville. Most feel that Hispanic children who have received an education from public schools in the United States have a slight advantage over children who attended public schools in Latin
America. Seventeen respondents said they wanted their children to attend schools in the United States, and five of them stated they would prefer a bilingual U.S. school. Seven others preferred that their children grow up and attend schools in their home countries. Opinions about their offspring’s assimilation into American society were mostly similar. Informants who wanted their children to go to American schools said they did not have a problem with their children assimilating somewhat, but wanted their children to be bilingual and retain their Hispanic culture. Currently, three of the Hispanics interviewed said they were pursuing ways to bring their families to the United States. Of the seven informants who wanted to raise their children in Mexico, most would like their children to be bilingual, yet they wanted their children to grow up in their traditional customs and social networks.

Historically, many of the Hispanic immigrants moving into the southern United States have been young males who could be considered sojourners, migrating back and forth from Mexico or Central America to the United States. This pattern seems to changing, albeit slowly. Over 60 percent of Hispanics interviewed would like to or currently have plans to stay and make their life in Nashville—depending on the outcome of immigration reform. Eight informants wanted to return to their countries; seven in the near future. The goals given by Hispanics were usually were not very detailed. Most seemed unsure what the future held for them and commonly gave answers like, “Well, I would like to get married”; “I’d like to maybe buy a house”; and, “find a better job somewhere.” Occasionally, an informant would say they wanted to learn English sometime in the future, but, again, most of these informants did not have immediate plans to do so. The few exceptions to this were given by Hispanics who usually had been in
Nashville for several years and planned on staying and raising a family in or around Davidson County. Of these informants, some discussed interest in technical schools to learn specific trades such as electrician or air conditioning unit repair. One was already exploring how to start his own plumbing company to take advantage of the residential construction boom in the Nashville area. Homeownership was a common conversational topic, and a few participants are saving money to buy a house where they could settle down and raise their family in a safe neighborhood. All of these informants who had plans to live permanently in Nashville suggested that they would like to learn English to help them achieve their goal.

Interestingly, informants who were in their twenties, regardless of whether they wanted to stay in Nashville or not, did not have long-term plans. Some were married, others were single, and some were parents, yet all seem to convey the same message: They were not very settled and could relocate quickly if need be. Whether this is due to impending immigration reform laws or because younger generations are more itinerant or both is unclear. But, generally, this age group was more mobile than their older counterparts.

The enclave’s purpose is to serve Hispanics living in Davidson County; therefore, no other group knows this newly transformed section of town more intimately than Hispanics who live and work in it. With this fact in mind, I decided that I should discuss my hypothesis with participants to ascertain my Hispanic informants’ own perception about the Latino enclave in Nashville. Participants were asked a simplified version of this thesis’s hypothesis: Is a Hispanic enclave interfering with the assimilation of Hispanics into the larger host society in Nashville? This was an important question
because it gave informants a chance to explicitly reflect upon the concept behind this research. Informants who live in the enclave in question were given the chance to express what they personally thought about an area of town they function within. Forty-four percent of the informants agreed with the idea that an enclave could be slowing down integration. Several older participants or participants who have lived in Nashville for a substantial period of time stated that they have watched this nascent Hispanic community grow from a few restaurants and a tortilla factory into a Latino corridor that recreates life from Mexico and Latin America. Likewise, they were usually the most vocal about how it allows Hispanics to exist and live easily without adapting to the larger Anglo culture. Most targeted the younger and newly-arrived when explaining which Hispanic immigrants are resisting assimilating. Ironically, some of these same informants lived or worked inside the enclave and did not speak English.

The general theme of my thesis was not totally understood by all who took part in the interviews. Eight participants were not sure or did not exactly understand the question. Although the word assimilation has a cognate in Spanish, as well as the word adaptation, the concept of immersing or integrating into a host society was not always clearly understood by all informants. But to informants who didn’t grasp the totality of the question or were not sure what effect the enclave has, all agreed that the enclave makes everyday life and finding work in Nashville easier. This sentiment was actually expressed by almost all participants. Six respondents, who answered that the enclave was not impeding assimilation, were asked if life has been made easier for them by the enclave. In summary, all responded yes that it does allow them to live without adjusting to a different culture.
In summary, by examining the in-depth responses of all 25 Hispanic immigrants who participated in the interviews, a clearer picture of the function of Nashville's Hispanic enclave begins to emerge. One can begin to see how this enclave could affect the speed of immersion and acculturation into the host society. As for other large immigrant groups arriving in the United States, as well as native-born minorities, ethnic or racial enclaves create a safe haven for people who are culturally different (Kaya, 2005; Miyares and Gowen, 1998; Suro, 1998). The emergence of an enclave along Nolensville and Murfreesboro road has created a culturally independent section of the city that serves a burgeoning Hispanic population, thus allowing Hispanic immigrants to relocate into Davidson County without experiencing culture shock.

The interviews reveal that Nashville has become a “gateway city” for Hispanics entering the United States. Younger generations of Hispanic immigrants are now bypassing the historical gateway cities of last century and are choosing Southern cities such as Nashville as their first destination in the United States. The abundance of low skilled jobs and word-of-mouth through existing social networks about employment opportunities and favorable living conditions has attracted immigrants to the area. Chain migration is certainly luring Hispanics to the Nashville area. Family and friends many times help newly-arrived immigrants find jobs and housing in the area. These social networks create a cushion for immigrants and allow them to establish themselves in the city regardless of language barriers.

Informants indicated that the enclave has, indeed, replicated many cultural aspects of their native countries. Their answers to questions about lifestyle preference and everyday choices such as where to shop, eat, go to church, and seek entertainment
demonstrates that many Hispanics strongly prefer to function inside the comfort zone the enclave provides. Furthermore, informants illustrated the enclave provides not just basic necessities and services needed for survival in a foreign country and culture, but offers multiple options for Hispanic consumers. As a result, the urgency to adapt to American culture seems to have been greatly reduced for both sojourners and Hispanic immigrants who wish to make Nashville their permanent home.

Lack of concern about assimilation was most noticeable with informants under the age of 30, regardless of how much time they had lived in Nashville. Younger participants overall had the weakest English skills, were more likely to lack American or non-Hispanic friends, and stated that they preferred to eat, relax, and spend time in Hispanic restaurants, bars, and nightclubs. Additionally, all negative opinions about existing cultures and customs in the United States came from this age group, suggesting that younger Hispanic immigrants were probably more likely to resist assimilating into the larger host society. I found this interesting because it was opposite to what I had expected. Originally, I assumed that older participants would be less interested in adapting to a new way of life than younger participants. On the contrary, older participants were more likely to have a positive opinion about adaptation and assimilation. Likewise, in-depth discussions with participants over 30 about consumer preferences reveal that these age groups are usually more open to shopping and eating in non-Hispanic establishments.

The opinions and perceptions given by participants on job advancement with respect to English skills demonstrate one advantage that assimilation can give Hispanic immigrants. Bilingual employees, participants reported, were more likely to have
opportunities for job promotions regardless of legal status. Therefore, this should be a motivator for immigrants relocating to Nashville to take advantage of free or inexpensive English classes offered by churches and nonprofit organizations. Instead, it seems many Hispanic immigrants may have become somewhat complacent and less concerned about acquiring English skills. Although work and family schedules can be deterrents, responses from informants show strong indications that a direct link between the Hispanic enclave and a lack of motivation for learning English does exist.

**Participant Observation**

Participant observation was the final method that I used to study the relationship between the enclave and assimilation of Hispanic immigrants in Nashville. For the duration of ten months, I took every opportunity available to involve myself in the daily lives of Hispanics who live or function within the enclave. I wanted to gather data by immersing myself with Hispanics who live in the enclave, as well as observe and contextualize how they move and operate in Davidson County. The strategy was to gain a more intimate familiarity with Hispanic immigrants living in Nashville than I could with semi-informal interviews alone. Furthermore, since some of the interview subjects who took part in the interviews were the same people I spent time with over the observation period, this approach gave me a chance to validate their answers to the questionnaire by comparing those responses to their actual everyday behaviors, patterns, and habits. Additionally, this method allowed me to experience first hand the services and functions the enclave provides Latinos, giving me a visual concept of how Hispanics have recreated a cultural landscape and community in Davidson County.
By the end of the summer of 2005, I began to establish friendships with Hispanic students who I was teaching or tutoring in conversational English. Most were young men and women under the age of 30, with the exception of one lady who was over 40, married, and the mother of three children. All were immigrants and had moved to the United States from Mexico, and most possessed only limited amounts of English. As my rapport with these immigrants strengthened, informants began to invite me to their homes on the weekends, to watch television or for *cena* (supper). Eventually, the invitations began to include more than just eating a meal, and were extended to include all days of the week. By the end of August, I had built a close relationship with three individuals who, as gatekeepers, gave me access to numerous Hispanic gatherings, events, and celebrations, as well as an ample number of opportunities to observe the habits and behaviors of Hispanic immigrants in Nashville on a daily basis. These social events created another avenue for me to investigate the level of acculturation or assimilation individuals are achieving while functioning in the enclave.

During my participant observation, a balancing act was created between trying to get as socially close as possible to the groups that I was studying and trying to keep enough distance so that I could stay objective. In most cases, it was usually harder to be accepted in the social circles to which I wanted to gain entrance than to keep from becoming too immersed. Due to my positionality and ethnic differences, I was aware that I was almost always viewed as an outsider when I sat down at the table to eat a casual meal or while attending gatherings with Hispanics. At times, I felt that my presence made some individuals who did not know me well uncomfortable. Breaking the ice and trying to make people feel as though their actions or conversations were not being
scrutinized was a constant issue that I dealt with. My goal was to avoid reactivity—people changing behavior because they think they are being watched. Therefore, I usually did not mention that I was studying or observing the actions or mannerisms of individuals when we were in an informal setting, such as watching a futbol (soccer) match, during meals or a barbeque, having a drink at a bar, going to dance clubs, or participating in any casual activity.

Each Hispanic immigrant with whom I formed a strong bond was different in many ways from the others. Time spent in Nashville, education level, income level, morals and personalities varied tremendously among the Hispanics that became my close friends. Yet, when I was introduced to each one of my new friends’ extended social networks, I noticed that most of their friends and family—although different sets of people—mostly had similar cultural characteristics and backgrounds to the other Hispanic groups I met. These similarities were usually in regards to income level, education, and social status. As a result, some of the observations that I made about one immigrant’s social network usually mirrored that of another. Yet, the types of activities that I partook in depended on the immigrant. One immigrant always invited me to accompany her and her group of friends to church service during the week, while another only called me on the weekend to meet him and his friends at a Latino bar for a few drinks.

While joining Hispanic immigrants on family outings, running errands, attending church, or just going out on the weekend, my life began to revolve around Nolensville Road. I began spending large amounts of time, especially on the weekends, in many of the Hispanic establishments along this road. After a couple of months I had spent so
much time in the enclave that many of the employees in the businesses or members of the church that I frequented began to recognize me and converse with me in only Spanish (even when I was only accompanied by Americans). As a result, the people who worked in these businesses or went to the church became comfortable with my presence and talked openly either with or around me. Moreover, I became privileged to local *chisme* (gossip), opinions, and the everyday conversations of Latinos who function within the enclave.

Through casual conversations, I began to notice the existence of an ethnic community that culturally and linguistically functioned separately from the much larger Anglo culture. Most Hispanics whom I encountered seemed to carry out their everyday lives inside the enclave. Conversations about running errands such as going to the barbershop, grocery store, health clinic or accountant illustrated that the day-to-day tasks of Hispanic immigrants are centered geographically in and around the Nolensville Road area. When discussing a consumer experience, whether positive or negative, it seemed to have always occurred within the enclave. Sometimes if the experience had been bad, I would ask if they had tried a store that I was familiar with outside the enclave that carries a similar product or provides a similar service. Although there were some exceptions, most Hispanics would say that they had not tried many places in other areas of the city. Additionally, to my knowledge, none of my contacts ever took my advice about places outside the enclave. Conversations such as these revealed that many of the Latino immigrants in Nashville were mostly conducting business in one section of town, and they were reluctant to venture outside the area, even when there was reason.
Many business establishments outside the enclave seemed to be unknown or unimportant to many Hispanics (with the exception of Super Wal-Mart). For example, when my male friends would chat about buying an automobile—a common conversational topic—or taking their car or truck to a taller (a mechanic’s shop) they would always refer to a Hispanic dealer or auto shop located on or close to Nolensville Road. Likewise, excitement about the opening of new Hispanic restaurant or nightspot was usually only expressed when it was located along Nolensville Road. On several occasions, I would urge my friends to eat in a new or existing Mexican restaurant on my side of town or closer to downtown Nashville, and almost always these suggestions were quickly dismissed. The reasons for rejecting restaurants outside the enclave included comments on lack of quality or authenticity—even if the owners and staff were Hispanic. For example, when a new Las Palmas restaurant—a well known Mexican chain in the Nashville area with mostly American clientele—opened up in my neighborhood, I invited a couple of Hispanic contacts to dine there with me. Both contacts quickly told me that the food at Las Palmas was just a Tex-Mex imitation of real Mexican food. After that I never made another suggestion to eat in a Mexican restaurant outside the enclave. In reality, I always felt as if their low opinions or condescending comments about these places stemmed more from the fact these restaurants targeted a broader customer base than just Hispanics. This suggested to me that there is a strong preference among Hispanic immigrants for restaurants with exclusively Hispanic clientele.

The Latinos that I followed for my study also showed a strong preference for handling all simple tasks inside the enclave. When getting a haircut, my male friends would always choose barber shops in the enclave. On one occasion, a Latino friend
received a skin infection from a razor that had not been sanitized properly. I suggested to him that he should try my barbershop (located in a different neighborhood) because they had competitive prices and a good reputation. Yet, even though the prices in my barbershop for a basic haircut were equivalent to those of the barbershops along Nolensville Road, my friend stated that he would rather find another barbershop along Nolensville. I never really was able to get a true sense as to why he would patronize only barbershops in the enclave, but I believe that language, culture, and supporting Hispanic businesses in the enclave were the main deciding factors.

The tendency to choose establishments in the enclave for simple products that could be purchased in other places was apparent. When making simple purchases of small items such as calling cards, beer, or hygienic or beauty products, most Hispanics seemed more comfortable shopping in small stores inside the enclave. Although convenience could play a part in choosing these small stores, cultural factors could be involved as well. Many Hispanics, especially Mexicans, are accustomed to shopping in aborrotres, or small family owned stores that stock their shelves with simple everyday grocery items. Even in larger cities in Latin America where supermarket chains, wholesale stores, and Wal-marts can be found offering very competitive prices, aborrotres thrive as convenient destinations for simple goods. This is not to say that the stores that they were going to were always owned by Hispanics, but rather they were located along Nolensville or Murfreesboro Roads and usually had Hispanic employees working at the registers. In fact, several of these stores are owned by non-Hispanics, such as Indians or Asians. Yet, these owners seemed to know the demographics of their clientele well, and they usually stocked their shelves with Hispanic products. Also, many of these non-
Hispanic shopkeepers appeared to have picked-up basic Spanish phrases to communicate with Latino customers. I often heard, “Qué busca?” (“What are you looking for?”), or “Qué Pasa amigo?” (“What’s up, friend?”) when I was inside these shops. Consequently, when I entered one of these stores accompanied by a Hispanic friend, occasionally, an employee or even the owner would try to casually chat with me in broken Spanish.

Establishments along Nolensville Road that are owned by non-Hispanics yet carry Latino products demonstrate the influence Hispanic consumers have in the enclave. These non-Hispanic businesses have adapted their product line as well as the language used in their stores to match their customer base. Instead of buying American mainstream products or adopting the language of trade that would normally be used in these retail stores, Hispanics have persuaded these vendors through their purchasing power to accommodate their cultural preferences.

In the past few years, multiple nightspots have emerged along Nolensville Road to support the entertainment niche created by immigrants from Latin America. The commercial landscape along this major thoroughfare is dotted with neon signs advertising Mexican beers and marques in Spanish announcing Latin dance styles. The Hispanic enclave in Nashville offers immigrants a variety of bars, concert venues, dance clubs and even establishments that clandestinely provide illegal male-oriented vices such as prostitution. As a result, many Hispanics in Nashville see no need to venture outside of the enclave when looking for something to do after work or on the weekend.

If the cultural atmosphere in the enclave resembles that of Latin America during the day, then it’s transformed completely into Latin America at night. Several times each month I would accompany some of my Hispanic friends to these nightspots along
Nolensville Road. The smells, music, and ambiences of these places were almost complete replications of cantinas and discotheques that one would find in any large Latin American city.

The immigrants that I spent most time with had small a selection of establishments that they preferred over others in the enclave. They were usually attracted to certain places for the types of alcoholic drinks served, music played, and the social class and nationality of clientele that could be found there. It was explained to me early on that certain nightclubs were feo (disgusting or trashy) and that I would not be interested in entering them because the clientele was made up of chusma—a vulgar expression used to label a Hispanic person with low morals or lacking in etiquette. Also, some of the Mexicans that I accompanied on my weekend outings informed me that they preferred not to go to bars whose main patrons were originally from Central America, because they believed their customs and mannerisms were less cultured than those of Mexico. For example, one Friday night I had chosen a Honduran bar on the north side of the enclave as a place to meet for a few drinks. When my Mexican friend arrived and realized the nationality of the bar, he suggested leaving for a different bar, preferably a Mexican establishment.

Immigrants from Central America did not seem as particular about the nationality of the places they chose on the weekend. Although, I never went bar hopping with someone from Central America, I would occasionally meet or have a conversation with an immigrant from El Salvador or Guatemala in a Mexican bar or restaurant. Many said they liked the atmosphere and food in the Mexican establishments. This was probably due to the fact that many of the larger, more popular locales were owned and operated by
Mexicans, therefore, many of the immigrants from Central America had few options other than Mexican places when going out on the weekends. Additionally, the larger dance clubs along Nolensville Road cater to all Hispanic customers, such as Ibiza (a Latin dance club), and on Friday and Saturday nights there are always a large mix of Latinos from different nationalities side-by-side, intermingling. One of the largest and most popular nightspots in the enclave is a Puerto Rican discothèque called Coco Loco. This particular discotheque plays the latest fad in Hispanic music: Reggaeton. On any given weekend, this dance club is packed with Hispanics representing almost every nationality from Latin America.

Bars and nightspots outside of the enclave were rarely considered when deciding on a place to go on a weekend night. Occasionally, I would suggest a pub or nightclub that caters to Americans in another part of town, but I usually received an answer such as, “well, maybe next weekend.” There are different reasons for not venturing too far from Nolensville Road. I began to notice that on the weekends some of the Hispanic men that I had came to know enjoyed returning to places were they might see latinas (women of Hispanic heritage) that they knew or had met on a previous night. Some of these men were married and had families in Mexico, and to them, the bars in the enclaves were places with familiar customs that were hundreds of miles away from their homes where they could meet and possibly initiate extramarital affairs with Hispanic women. Additionally, restaurants and nightspots located in the enclave are less likely to check the age of customers ordering alcoholic beverages. Therefore, Hispanics who do not have proper identification or are under the legal drinking age in Tennessee usually can avoid the hassle of being “carded” if they are in a Hispanic establishment on Nolensville Road.
Language also played a factor in where Hispanics preferred to go. It was conveyed to me that after a long week of work, many immigrants did not feel like trying to converse in English with bartenders or others in bars or nightclubs. In addition, the music and rhythms found in Latino nightspots create a comfortable and culturally familiar atmosphere that most Hispanics find relaxing when looking for a weekend diversion. These factors, along with the cultural and social customs to which Hispanic immigrants were already used to, reinforce the inclinations many Latinos have to remain inside the enclave. Therefore, Nolensville Road serves a cultural oasis for Hispanics who are not interested adapting or acculturating to the larger society in Davidson County.

Hispanic families that live outside the enclave function outside the enclave to a greater degree and seem to be more flexible as to where they shop. One family that I spent a great deal of time with lived far outside the enclave in a mobile home community. Yet their community was still largely made up of Hispanic immigrants. The children in the family had learned English through the public school system, and the parents could speak some conversational English. Their attitudes towards assimilation were usually more favorable than those of my informants. They enrolled their children in organizations such as the Boy Scouts and a children’s choir sponsored by the Nashville Metropolitan School System. In addition, they enjoyed eating in restaurants as a family and shopping in businesses outside the enclave on a regular basis. Usually their reasons for shopping in the enclave were to purchase certain food products that could not be bought in the larger chain grocery stores, such as special cuts of meat or a particular drink or spice.
Although this family may make less frequent trips to Nolensville Road, the area still played an important role in their lives. They are active members of a Protestant Hispanic church located in the enclave. The church building (Fig 18.) was formerly occupied by a mostly white American fellowship and was later given to a much smaller group of Hispanic immigrants of the same denomination (Church of Christ). This particular family is extremely devoted to the development and growth of this new congregation, and they are seen as important community leaders inside the church.

Figure 18. Grandview Iglesia de Cristo (Grandview Church of Christ) is one of several former Anglo protestant churches that have been turned over to a Hispanic congregation. (Photo by author)

Although none of the church leaders spoke fluent English, the church decided to initiate free weekly English classes that are open to the public. Due to their lack of
qualified English teachers, the church had to recruit people from outside its membership to come in and conduct these classes. It seemed the congregation preferred to use only Americans of the same denomination. I was the only exception to this religious preference. Since the Church of Christ ministry has a large following in Nashville, as well as a prominent church affiliated college, Lipscomb University, the church is able to recruit many English teachers from larger Anglo congregations of the same denomination. As with other Protestant churches in the enclave, these classes seemed to serve two purposes: to boost English fluency among the congregations and to create an incentive for other Hispanic immigrants in Nashville to visit their fellowship. Like the other Protestant churches who offer free English classes, this church will undoubtedly realize an increase in membership from this program.

The church’s membership is entirely composed of Hispanic families. Nationalities represented included Mexicans (the largest group), Hondurans, and Salvadorans. All church services and functions are held in Spanish, and all informal church gatherings are catered with Latin American food. The church seems to recruit membership from Hispanic immigrant populations who were formerly Catholic. These individuals seem to be looking for community to replace the families and social networks left behind in their former countries. In fact, many immigrants in this congregation refer to each other as family even though they are not related and had only known each other for short periods of time.

Social bonds among church members are strong, and, as a result, friendships outside the congregation seem to be few. Most of the church’s members live inside or close to the enclave and participation in weekly church activities is high. Almost every
day of the week some sort of activity is held in the church, followed by meals that are prepared by female churchgoers. Hence, this Hispanic fellowship spends much of their free time together in the enclave. Consequently, social relationships outside the enclave, as well as church’s congregation are extremely limited, and most seem to engage socially only with other church members. These observations coincide with Hardwick’s (2006) suggestion that religious networks play an important part in where immigrants decide to relocate and how they maintain ethnic bonds.

Social networks of Hispanics were almost exclusively Latino. All Hispanics that I came in contact with showed a preference for close friendships with other Hispanics—and from the same nationality. Not one Hispanic that I came in contact with had a close friendship with a non-Hispanic American. Most relationships with non-Hispanic Americans were the result of acquaintances from the workplace. Of course, language was the most obvious reason for lack of non-Hispanic friendships (other than myself). But another factor seemed equally important: many Hispanics simply were not interested in mingling with Americans. While most said that they would not have a problem with socially gathering with non-Hispanic Americans, I noticed during my participant observation that almost none took the initiative to converse with native Nashvillians in public social settings. Moreover, most Hispanics I came in contact with were generally not interested engaging in social events or gatherings that culturally were not Hispanic. This could explain why in the many of the nightspots in Nashville one can see patrons from almost all of Nashville’s ethnic communities having drinks at the bar or dancing on the dance floor with the exception of Hispanics—who undoubtedly are Nashville’s fastest growing minority.
During the participant observation phase of my research, the relationship between myself and my Hispanic contacts became symbiotic; while I was allowed to observe day-to-day lives in the enclave, Hispanics used me as a translator and as their medium between them and the larger American society that surrounded them. My services as a translator were solicited when situations arose between a Hispanic and non-Spanish speaking American. In most cases, these situations were of a business nature, and the non-English speaking immigrant was either not able to communicate sufficiently, or was worried about being taken advantage of—an act that I did witness on occasion. But most of the situations where Hispanics had disagreements, complaints, or believed they were being swindled by a business or individual stemmed from lack of understanding standard procedures, policies, and language. This was usually due to Hispanics entering business agreements without being able to read and interpret fine print or stipulations of a contract.

As a translator, I accompanied or placed phone calls for Hispanics who, on their own, could not conduct important transactions in English. For example, I communicated on behalf of Hispanics with landlords, insurance agencies, tax accountants, car rental businesses, and employers. In most cases, Hispanics felt that they could avoid hassles and extortion if a white American male communicated for them. In some instances, this was true. Problems or disputes with employers or companies that had been ongoing for days and even weeks usually could be resolved in a matter of minutes when both parties conversed in the same language. Frustration resulting from communication barriers was felt by both parties involved. Often, Hispanics were disgruntled because they believed that they were being swindled. On the other hand, many companies and agencies that had disputes with Hispanics would become frustrated because they felt Hispanics wanted
them to make unreasonable concessions or they believed that the complaints and
demands put forth by Hispanics were irrational. On one occasion, I had to speak with an
insurance adjuster about a claim one of my Hispanic friends was trying to file over his
wrecked car. The insurance company would not pay the claim because my friend’s uncle
had improperly towed the wrecked car with his pickup truck. The agent was trying to
explain that the policy states that the insurance company will not pay a claim if a vehicle
is not towed by a licensed wrecking company. The claims adjuster had become very
aggravated with my friend because my friend wanted the company to pay for all
damages, including some that seemed to have occurred during the improper towing. My
friend was convinced that the insurance company was trying to take advantage of him
because he was Mexican.

The Hispanic enclave in Davidson County recreates a familiar Latino culture that
allows Hispanic immigrants to carry on lives similar to those they had in their countries
of origin. Through participant observation, I was able to witness how the enclave
provides almost every necessity for Hispanic immigrants ranging from basic goods to
entertainment to religion and social networks. As a result, the enclave does make life
easier for arriving immigrants who do not wish to change culturally or linguistically.
Likewise, I witnessed first hand how the enclave could be an impediment to assimilation
or acculturation. Most of my Hispanic contacts who lived and functioned almost solely
in the enclave were, for the most part, unable to handle important affairs (government,
legal, or business) outside the enclave or in English. Therefore, during my ten month
observation, I experienced (culturally and linguistically) a Hispanic community that
functions inside but separate from the larger established Anglo community.
Chapter 8

Conclusion

Assuming that the Hispanic boom continues in the United States, Nashville will undoubtedly be a destination for Latino immigrants looking for work for years to come. Likewise, the enclave described in this study will go on serving the needs of arriving Hispanics. The purpose of this study was to examine how the enclave serves Hispanics in Davidson County and how it influences and affects assimilation into the mainstream. Through in-depth interviews with immigrants and others closely involved with Hispanics, participant observation, and other fieldwork this research shows that the Hispanic enclave in Davidson County does hinder the assimilation of Hispanic immigrants that operate inside it. Findings from interviews, as well as participant observation, indicate that many Hispanics are to some extent self-segregating and seem to prefer recreated social networks and spaces similar to those from their countries of origin. Moreover, results from this study show that many immigrants, especially the younger adult immigrants, do not seem to be concerned about assimilating into Nashville’s mainstream.

The findings from this study reveal that chain migration and Nashville’s healthy economy are the principle factors that attract Latinos to the area. Once in Nashville, social networks as well as civic, private and religious organizations usually help immigrants become established and find employment. The Hispanic enclave itself seems mostly to replicate the culture left behind. Although the enclave undoubtedly aids in the prevention of culture shock and serves as a safety net for many arriving immigrants, it also seems to permit those who function in it to become complacent in regards to assimilation. This complacency could have a significant impact on the assimilation, as
well as the economic and educational progress of both the first-generation of immigrants and their offspring. Further research on the assimilation progress of second-generation Hispanics who grow up in southeastern Nashville would shed more light on the intensity of this impact. Equally, additional long-term studies of Hispanics who operate in the enclave could determine whether immigrants and their children continue living and functioning in the enclave after years of residing in Davidson County.

This study also reveals the process of Hispanization along certain portions of Nolensville Road. In recent times, business names have begun to change from Anglo to Hispanic; cultural markers and signs in Spanish now distinguish proprietors as Latino; and the use of Spanish between employees and customers has become commonplace. Additionally, several longtime Anglo business owners have partially adapted to their new customer base by advertising in Spanish, and some have even gone so far as to learn Spanish themselves. Indeed, the ethnic character of this section of Nashville has become Latin in just fifteen years, and as long as national and local policies towards immigrants do not become too hostile this trend will most likely continue.

This study comes at an important time in the Hispanic immigration debate at all levels of government. The federal government, in an attempt to thwart illegal immigration and appease frustrated constituencies, has begun the construction of a barrier (both virtual and physical) along the most porous sections of its southern border with Mexico. Locally, in Davidson County, city officials have mulled over several bills regarding area Hispanics. The sudden increase of Hispanics in the Nashville area, as well as national concern over the rampant influx of illegal immigrants has prompted alarm among Nashvillians about the negative repercussions of unchecked immigration and
multiculturalism. To many, the immigrant rallies of 2006 might have looked more like a cultural invasion from south of the border than peaceful demonstrations for immigrant rights. In addition, the deaths of a Nashville area couple in a car accident involving an inebriated, illegal immigrant from Mexico and the increase of crime by some Hispanic immigrants has done nothing but fuel anti-immigrant sentiments. Already the Metro Council has considered bills that would make English the official language in Davidson County, prohibit landlords from renting to illegal immigrants, ban businesses from hiring undocumented workers, and having the Metro Police Department check the legal residency status of all arrestees.

Now more than ever, these actions demonstrate the importance for Hispanics to engage with the larger society. Self-segregation and lack of interaction among different groups of people creates an “us against them” mentality. This causes ethnic stereotyping where the mainstream, as well as those making public policy, may not distinguish Hispanic immigrants as individuals with basic civil rights, but rather as unfamiliar outsiders. Local governments as well as leaders in the Hispanic community have the obligation to find more practical ways to integrate the newly arriving Hispanics into Nashville’s mainstream society. A better approach could insure that Nashville’s nascent but growing Latino population does not follow a segmented assimilation pattern and reduce the impact of an already occurring culture clash. Local governments should try more to include rather than exclude Hispanic immigrants in policy making, and look for ways to develop a more cohesive community. Hispanic leaders and community organizations have a responsibility not only to Hispanic immigrants but also to the local community as a whole to educate immigrants on the importance of integration and
engagement with the host society. Therefore, they too must be open to the idea that not all newly arrived Latinos are assimilating and acknowledge that self-segregation is occurring.
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## Elementary Schools (Grades K-4)

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<td>Tusculum</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxwell</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt. View</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>18.0</td>
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</table>

## Middle Schools (Grades 5-8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>2002-2003</th>
<th>2005-2006</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apollo</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMurry</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wright</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antioch</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
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</table>

## High Schools (Grades 9-12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
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<th>2005-2006</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antioch</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glencliff</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Appendix A

Percentage of Students that Identify Themselves as Hispanic (K-12)
### Admission Requirements for Students in Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

**Appendix B**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>1. Proof of residence in the Borough of Nashville (permanent or temporary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Physical exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Birth certificate, passport, or legal permanent resident card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Immunizations record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. The student must be enrolled 5 years old by September 30, 2006 for Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Proof of Residence (Water, Electric, Phone bill or lease contract with parent or owner)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Somali**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somaliga</td>
<td>1. Foyinka Talaalba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Waadadda caamraadee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Waradda Dhaladida pasabaaboona, ama 1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Tabaabo week jirka middook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Fadda weesay, la diwaan gatigiyo 5 years old by September 30, 2006 for Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Saveyn baar yah 298.345</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Arabic**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>1. التسجيل في المدرسة محل العائلة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. يحملون جواز سفر أو تصريح واقع</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. حضورهم في معظم الدروس</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. التظلمات وال المتوكلين</td>
</tr>
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**Kurdish**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>1. Balorbe xan xalas, nek xalas, xalas, nek xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Kuran xalas, nek xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4. Xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6. Xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas</td>
</tr>
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<td>7. Xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas, xalas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Vietnamese**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>1. Gợi ý của nhà trường và các quốc dân</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Gợi ý của giáo viên</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Gợi ý của phụ huynh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Gợi ý của các tổ chức</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools**

3101 Rose Ave, Nashville, TN 37203
Tel: 615.248.9457  Fax: 615.785.2816