

USA

America
& Your
World
Today

B

erenice Estrada Mendez, 18, says she is happy that her family came to the United States. Sort of.

"It's rough for an immigrant girl," she says, "because I speak Spanish, because of my color. That limits my chances for success in this country."

Berenice was 11 when her family made the dangerous journey across the Sonoran Desert (*see sidebar*). She now lives in South Central Los Angeles with her parents and two brothers, Victor Hugo, 23, and Rufino, 14.

Each evening, Berenice rushes home from classes at the local community college to cook dinner for her father. He repairs factory machines.

Her mother works in a factory, printing T-shirts. She doesn't get home until nine o'clock each night.

"The job my mom has is not what she deserves," says Rufino, an eighth-grader at Los Angeles Academy Middle School. "And my dad is working hard every single day to survive."

With so many obstacles to face in their adopted country, why did the family risk their lives to come to the U.S.? "My family and I are fighting for a better life," says Rufino.

Valued Workers or Criminals?

Like the Estrada Mendezes, an estimated 11.5 million people live in the U.S. illegally. A growing number are from Mexico and Central America, where job opportunities are limited.

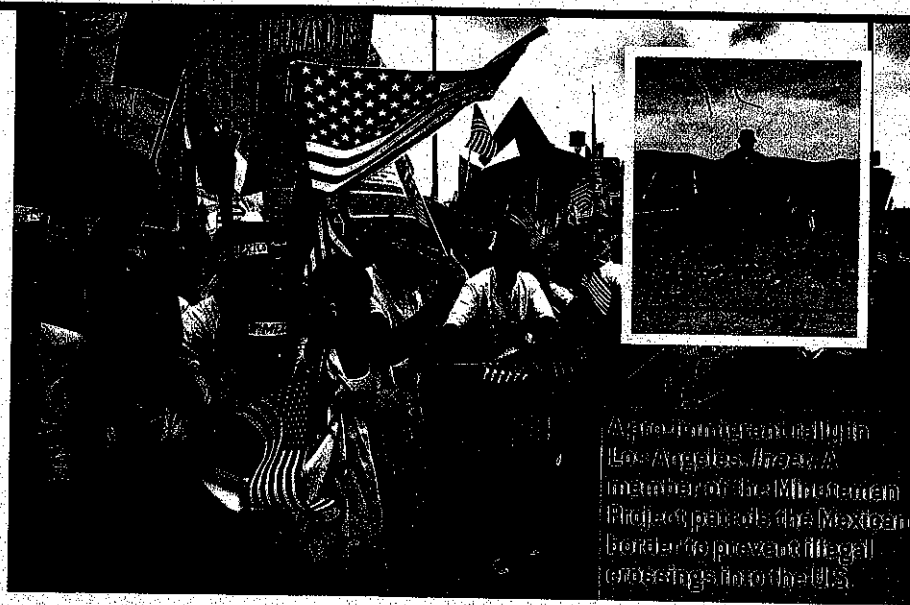
The new immigrants have sparked controversy. Are they criminals who should be sent home? Or are they a key part of the U.S. economy?

Berenice Estrada Mendez
Victor Hugo Estrada Mendez
Rufino Estrada Mendez

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IMMIGRANT
TEENS SAY
THAT THEY
SHOULD HAVE
A CHANCE TO
SUCCEED IN
THE U.S.

THE NEW



Carina Bandhauer, a sociology professor at Western Connecticut State University, says that an influx of immigrants is a good sign for a country.

"Places where immigrants go to are places with dynamic economies," she tells *JS*. "People aren't migrating [moving] to Haiti, for instance." (Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world.)

But polls show that a majority of Americans think that illegal immigration poses a serious problem. They say that it drains funds from education, health care, and law enforcement. They also worry about the lack of security along the 2,000-mile U.S.-Mexico border.

Congress Can't Agree

The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed an immigration bill that calls for a fence nearly 700 miles long to be built along the border. (See *map, p. 15*.) The bill would fine employers who hire **undocumented workers** (immigrants who enter the U.S. without official permission).

One of the bill's sponsors is Repre-

sentative James Sensenbrenner (R, Wisc.). He says the bill "aims to prevent another 9/11-type attack by disrupting terrorist travel."

Many immigrants have reacted strongly to the bill. Last spring, they staged protests across the nation.

Berenice led walkouts at her high school. "It's hard," she says, "[for] immigrants to show their potential—what we can do in this country, instead of working in factories and doing the low-paying jobs."

The U.S. Senate has passed a different version of the immigration bill. It would help some undocumented workers achieve legal status. President Bush supports this idea. So far, the House and Senate have not agreed on a final bill.

Berenice and Rufino say that they will keep working for immigrant rights. "It is very important for young people to get involved in politics," says Rufino. "We [need] to know what is happening, so that in the future we can change [laws] and fight for immigrant youths just like me." —*Suzanne McCabe*

Immigrants Overcoming

Berenice and Rufino vividly recall their journey across the Sonoran Desert (see *map, p. 15*). "I remember my family running away from the Border Patrol," says Rufino. "I was trying to jump a fence, and I didn't see it. *Crash!* I cut my face, and I was bleeding."

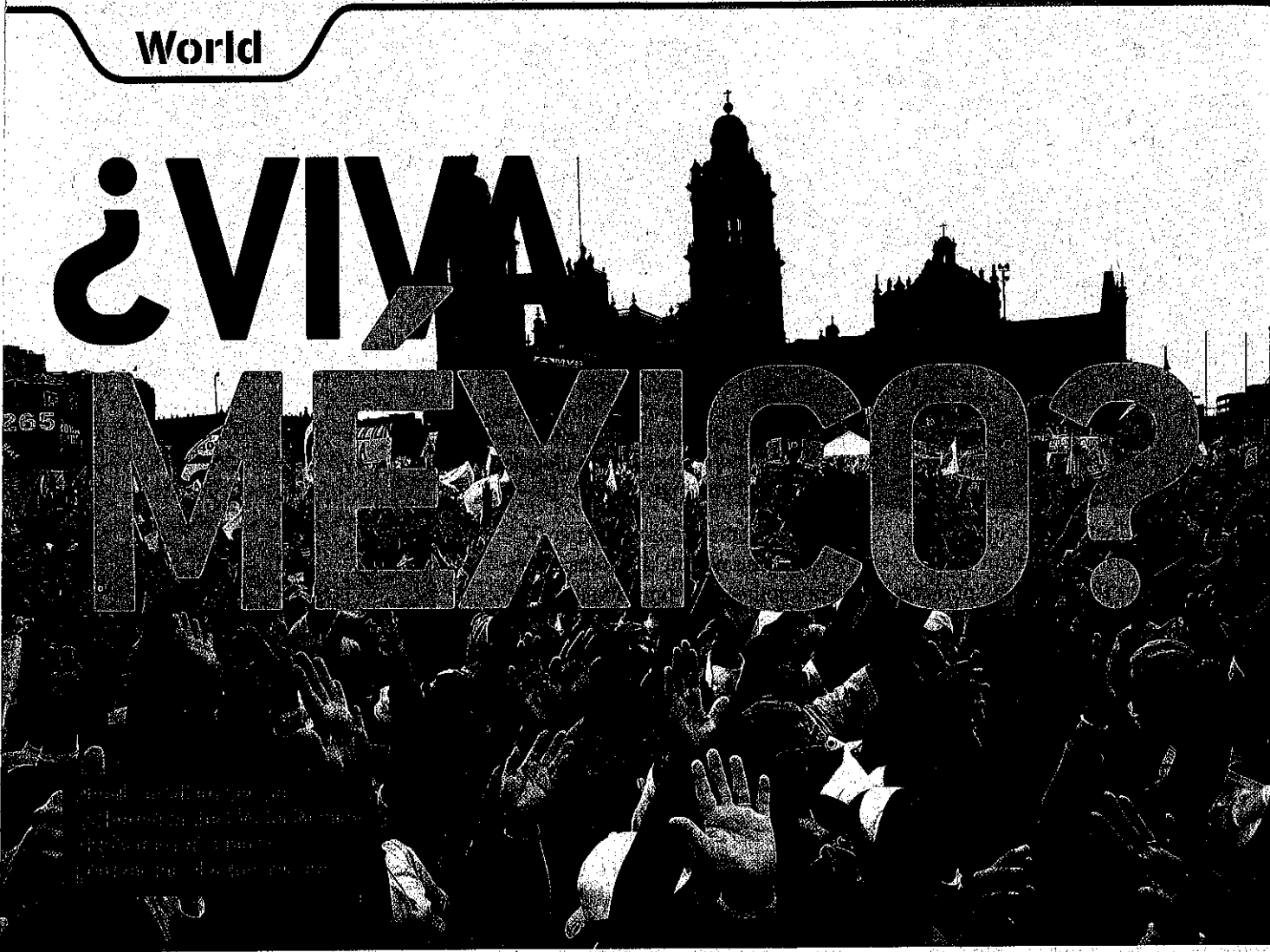
The family had paid a smuggler to lead them through the desert, on foot and by car. They slept a few hours each night. "It was very, very cold," says Berenice. "There were plants, animals, snakes. It was frustrating. You didn't know what to expect."

The trip took nearly a week. But, says Rufino, the struggle was worth it. "I want to [get] a good education in this country," he tells *JS*. "My family and I are fighting for a better life."

A wall of chain-link spans the U.S.-Mexico border.



AMERICANS



¿VIVA MEXICO?

Mexican teens talk about life, politics, and their love of home

by Ricardo Sandoval in Mexico City

Ricardo Parra, 13, and his sister Michel, 14, live in Mexico's capital, Mexico City. They share a large, sprawling house with their parents and several aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Music plays on various radios tucked into the small bedrooms. Here, a political debate is always in progress. The family's two dogs bark as if they want to join in.

In the Parra home and across Mexico, one of the hottest debate topics is the July 2 presidential election—and what happened afterward. Of the 41 million votes cast, fewer than 240,000

separated the winner from his rival. The rival refused to accept the results. He called for a protest that blocked traffic and disrupted business for weeks.

Ricardo and Michel are as interested as the adults in the political discussions. They know that earning enough money to support a family is hard for many Mexicans to do.

That is what drove their parents to **migrate** to Florida, where Ricardo was born. The Parras returned home because they missed their families. But while living in the U.S., they earned enough money to start their own taxi company in Mexico City.

In the presidential race, Ricardo, Michel, and their parents supported the losing candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the liberal party.

The teens' mother, Alma, remembers what it was like to be poor. She says that when López Obrador was Mayor of Mexico City, he tried hard to improve people's lives. As Presi-

Words to Know

migrate make illegal trade in goods; violation of official restrictions; and to move from one country or region to another to settle there.