

# Where Do We Belong?

by *María Teresa Ortiz*

I grew up in Mexico with the knowledge that I was Mexican. Now here in the U.S., I question where I belong and where my children are going to belong.

When I go back to my country, I am treated differently by the people. They don't see me as a Mexican; I feel they just see somebody that has some money and comes to their country to spend it. My children are met with many nicknames, which I don't like to hear used for them. This treatment is not only from strangers; it's also from old friends and some relatives. This makes me feel sad.

Here in the U.S., there are many things that make me feel excluded and I see the obstacles for Latinos to have a better life, even though we have some opportunities that many times we don't take advantage of. Being excluded by some people here doesn't hurt me so much; we don't have the same culture, the language, and other reasons. But being excluded by your own people hurts a lot. Having the feeling of being excluded in both countries makes me feel that my children and I are on the yellow line in the middle of the road.

I know that I have to work hard and learn the language to become part of this country. I will apply to become a U.S. citizen. In that way, I can have a better life for me and my family and I can help the family I left behind in Mexico. I have learned to love this country, too.

Yet, in my roots I'm Mexican; I am not American. My children's roots are not Mexican; they were born here and are Americans. We are not accepted completely in either country, but I know there are people who love us, no matter where we belong or where we are from. They just show their love for us. Thanks to these people.

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**M/F**

**Myth: Immigrants don't want to learn English or become Americans.**

**Fact:** Within ten years of arrival, more than 75% of immigrants speak English well; moreover, demand for English classes at the adult level far exceeds supply. Greater than 33% of immigrants are naturalized citizens; given increased immigration in the 1990s, this figure will rise as more legal permanent residents become eligible for naturalization in the coming years. The number of immigrants naturalizing spiked sharply after two events: enactment of immigration and welfare reform laws in 1996, and the terrorist attacks in 2001.

*Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Homeland Security (Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services)*

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