



## “Hispanic” Ethnicity, Race and Class

*Margarita B. Melville*

No me llares Hispanic  
His Panic or Her Panic  
ni de él, ni de ella  
No soy nobody's Panic.

¿Que vengo de Hispañola?  
– o de Paniclandia?  
¿O quizás me tienen pánico?  
¡No! Chale!! No me llares Hispanic.

En un pasado permití ser llamada  
Meskin, Greaser  
Chili Eater, Taco Bender y hasta Spic  
¡Pero ahora, chale! y menos Hispanic.

¡Mira, si quieres, llámame India  
Mexicana  
Raza o Latina  
con todo respeto,  
Porque la pura verdad es que soy Chicana!  
Concha Saucedo  
San Francisco, 1981

### Introduction

When we are tempted to flex our political muscles and tell John Q. Public to watch out for the new kid on the block because the United States' Census Bureau says that “Hispanics” are the fastest growing minority in the United States and soon will be the largest ethnic population in the country; when we work together to celebrate our similarities, our culture, our heroes; when we are wooed for our votes by appeals to issues and values which are said to be of primary importance to us; it is then that we find that we are more heterogeneous than many of “them”—or us—had imagined. Perhaps we are “one people,” whatever that might mean. But for many “Hispanics,” our differences outnumber and outweigh our similarities. Some of our ancestors

were among the original settlers in the hemisphere, coming from Asia to the American continents and their associated islands in several distinct waves sometime between 30,000 to 11,000 years ago. Others came from Europe, from Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Holland, Germany and England during the last five centuries. Some came from the Middle East, many from Lebanon, Palestine and Syria. Many of our ancestors were brought to these lands in chains from Africa, forced to labor as slaves in the fields and mines of the Caribbean, in Central and South America. Modern Asians also immigrated to and settled in Brazil, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, Peru and other Latin American countries, and must now be numbered among our ancestors.

Our Latin American and Caribbean origins provide us with many distinct national histories, some of which include long-standing hostilities among us and brutal oppression within the countries where we or our forebears originated. Heroes, saints, symbols, feasts and holidays are different. Some Hispanics commemorate the independence of their countries of origin from Spain on different days in September, reflecting different years in the early nineteenth century when their national struggles proved successful. Others, of course, celebrate their independence from Portugal, France, Holland and England. Two, Puerto Rico and Cuba, traded their independence from Spain in the final years of the nineteenth century to become part of the United States empire, a relationship that only Cuba has been able to sever, and that at great political and economic costs. For some “Hispanics,” Bolívar or San Martín is the primary hero, while for others it is Martí or Zapata, Túpac Amará, Sandino, Lautaro, Allende, Padre Hidalgo or O'Higgins. Some Hispanics place La Virgen de Guadalupe at the pinnacle of their religious devotions, while for others El Cristo de Esquipulas has no equal, and still others give primacy to La Virgen del Cobre. Some major Hispanic religious systems are cat-

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Sister and brother play in the fountain at El Mercado Center in downtown Phoenix. (Photo by Thomas B. Weaver.)

egorized as “santería,” “espiritismo,” “chimanismo,” “costumbre,” “umbanda,” as well as several distinct variations on Catholic, Protestant and Jewish themes.

Our immigration history and citizenship status in the United States is quite diverse. On the basis of place of birth, a majority of us was born in these United States, some with ancestry going back further than that of all Anglo Americans—in the original territories, in lands purchased from Spain (Florida) and France (Louisiana), or taken from Mexico in the Mexican American War—and can claim equality (if not superiority!) of rights with all other United States’ citizens. Some are citizens because of birth in a possession of the United States with commonwealth status—Puerto Rico. Others are political refugees, driven to our country by wars in which the United States played a major role in starting or underwriting. Others are economic refugees, unable to find sufficient work to sustain their families in their own countries. Some of the foregoing are naturalized citizens, permanent residents, temporary workers, or “undocumented” immigrants.

Some “Hispanics” do not speak Spanish, being monolingual in English, or Quechua, Quiché, Por-

tuguese, French, or Nahuatl. Some speak a mixture of English and Spanish, derisively labeled “Spanglish,” while others are functionally monolingual in Spanish, with a smattering of “street English.” Others are bilingual, trilingual or polyglots (for a more extensive discussion see the chapter by Arrieta). These differences are sometimes found even within families, so that one sibling might be a United States citizen, while another is “without documentation.” Some parents are monolingual in Spanish and their children speak English, peppered with a synopsis version of their parents’ native tongue. Grandparents can be indigenous, while the grandchildren are mestizos.

This incredible diversity makes it difficult to say what is the true nature of “Hispanic” ethnicity if, in fact, such a concept is grounded in cultural reality. Is it appropriate, we may ask, given these differences, to talk about “an Hispanic people,” as differences are leveled by the similarities of the problems we face?

A study conducted under the direction of Dr. Rodolfo de la Garza of the University of Texas called “The Latino National Political Survey” examined the views of 2800 Mexican Americans, Cuban Americans

and Puerto Ricans living in the continental United States. The researchers found that only 10% of the respondents identified themselves as either “Latino” or “Hispanic,” another 6% stated they were “Americans,” while better than 80% identified themselves by specific national origin. “The debate about whether Latino is the term or Hispanic is the term is not very useful,” de la Garza is quoted as saying (*San Francisco Chronicle* October 20, 1991a). “People don’t perceive themselves as being a unified population. They don’t call themselves the same thing. They don’t interact much with each other” (ibid.).

However we may identify ourselves, we cannot deny that the idea of a common “Hispanic” ethnicity is somehow a reality, if only because so many people and institutions use the term as a point of reference, including our federal and state governments. It is important, therefore, that we who might call ourselves “Hispanic,” or who are labeled as such by others, deal with this reality. It is up to us “Hispanics” to decide what this categorization of ourselves and our heritage means for our status in United States society, and how we should respond to the challenges it presents us.

## Searching for Definitions

The most direct way to initiate an exposition on any subject is to define the core concepts of the theme to be treated. In the present case, there are two such concepts: “Hispanic” and “ethnicity.” Although these two terms are used every day by peoples of many different status and persuasion, thereby giving the impression that their meanings are almost self evident, the reality is far different. Both are complex concepts that need more than a little explanation.

Let us begin with “ethnicity,” since that term denotes a concept that is more abstract than “Hispanic,” and thus carries far less political or social “baggage,” and will not, therefore, stir up the partisan animus that discussion of the latter term sometimes provokes.

Ethnicity is often confused with culture, an ethnic group with a cultural group. We talk of ethnic dances, ethnic foods, ethnic celebrations and ethnic heroes, when in reality we mean cultural dances, foods, celebrations and heroes. Every human being inherits his/her culture from “significant others” who for better or worse socialized that individual. The socialization process results in the internalization of a complex series of likes and dislikes, ideals and taboos, goals, principles and attitudes that are common to a particular people with a common language and common history. A people’s culture includes its way of looking at the world, at the supernatural, at parents, siblings, relatives and friends, and how one must behave toward

them; it also embraces the preferences these people have in clothes, foods, music, dance, literature, all those things we call “ethnic,” when we really mean “cultural.” Culture, then, embraces the universe of one’s learned behavior, including ways of thinking and feeling, acquired from one’s social group. At the same time, it must also be remembered that a social group’s culture changes over time, often from generation to generation, although this dynamism is a characteristic that frequently goes unperceived.

Why, then, is “ethnic” or “ethnicity” confused with “cultural” or “culture?” The answer lies in the fact that ethnicity is an expression of a particular cultural heritage, or some aspect of that culture, in a particular context. The particular context occurs when two populations, embracing different cultural heritages, interact, and their distinct cultures (or elements thereof) are compared and contrasted in order to maintain the cultural distinctiveness that differentiates them from each other.

Mexicans are not “ethnics” in Mexico, though all Mexicans in Mexico exhibit cultural traits recognized as Mexican. When those same cultural traits are brought to the United States, however, and are seen as different from Anglo cultural traits and define Mexican Americans as distinct from Anglo Americans, these same cultural traits become “ethnic,” and these immigrant Mexicans and their descendants—as long as the latter maintain or are forced to maintain some cultural traits that are considered to mark their Mexicanness—are themselves ethnics. There are, however, ethnics in Mexico, as anyone knows who has seen the cultural differences that exist and are maintained between interacting mestizos and indios. The enclaves of retired North Americans now living in Mexico, grouped together so they can interrelate among themselves in terms of their own cultural heritage, while relating to Mexicans only peripherally and in extremely structured ways, are also ethnics.

In more simple terms, then, a cultural group becomes an ethnic group when it decides or is forced, for one reason or another, to live in close contact with a different cultural group, and their differences—not necessarily all of them—are used to mark a social boundary between them. In other words, the concept of “ethnicity” embraces social discrimination, while “culture” does not. An Hispanic family name, a Spanish accent, or bronze-colored skin and black hair can be used by Anglo Americans as representative markers of Hispanic culture and sufficient evidence to trigger discriminatory behavior. Because social discrimination is the basic function of ethnic differentiation, it is more important to focus on ethnicity’s “why” than on its “what.” Why would any group try to maintain its cultural distinctiveness from another group with which it

interacts over a long period of time, sometimes for generations, or even for centuries? Why have Jews remained Jews for almost two millennia, while living among cultural groups as diverse as Russians, Ethiopians, North Americans and Peruvians, while Irish, Italians, Germans and others seem to integrate or assimilate readily in both North and Latin America to the point that they become indistinguishable from the culture bearers among whom they live? The answer lies in the defining element in the concept of ethnicity: discrimination—and the payoffs it provides to one or another of the discriminating populations.

## Types of Discrimination

Discrimination practiced by one group against another has three basic motivational schemes which we can list as historical, sociological and psychological. Historical ethnic discrimination (or differentiation) is the result of a long-standing, non-competitive and generally mutually supportive relationship between two distinct cultural groups. Such a situation exists primarily in pre-industrial economies where one might find an agricultural population living in a mutually dependent and non-exploitative relationship with a cattle-raising people, such as in rural Sudan.

Sociological ethnic discrimination occurs where one group of culturally distinct people possesses political power or control over certain material resources which they do not want to share with some other ethnic group, and who single out putative, pejorative cultural traits of the deprived group to justify their exclusionary behavior. It also occurs on the part of the excluded population when they join together to form economic or political organizations to struggle for their share of these same resources, emphasizing positive cultural traits as criteria for membership. Such is the case with groups like the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the G.I. Forum, the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, and others.

Sociological ethnic discrimination is generally found in modern industrial societies, particularly those with capitalist economies where the reigning ideology is one of individualistic competition, where social inequalities are thought to be of the “natural order,” and exploitation of unorganized ethnic minorities is common. Often, sociological ethnic discrimination is intentional and manipulative, of benefit to a political or economic elite which makes claims to the ethnic loyalty of a subordinate class of co-ethnics in order to serve their own elitist interests. This occurs not only among Anglo Americans, but also among particular “Hispanic” national groups, as well as among the “Hispanic” population taken as a whole.

The picture becomes a bit more complex when we look at the motivation of those who are the objects of the elites’ manipulations. These subordinates may receive only psychological satisfaction for identifying themselves with, and granting support to, powerful co-ethnics, since their payoff is often limited to nothing more than an inchoate feeling of sharing in that power and, consequently, an increased feeling of self-esteem.

At other times, sociological ethnic discrimination is less manipulative, as when one prefers to relate politically and economically to members of one’s own group only because their common culture, much of which conditions behavior on a subconscious level, programs one to embrace mutually understood responses in their interactions. This is particularly true with regard to language, where verbal cues, double meanings and other linguistic devices cause confusion between individuals educated in different linguistic traditions, resulting in strained and sometimes antagonistic relationships.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* (1991b) reported that a federal judge had ruled that a South San Francisco meat packing plant had broken federal and state discrimination laws by insisting that all of its 24 employees speak only English in the workplace. The judge ruled that the company’s justification for the policy—promoting racial and ethnic harmony among the workers and improving plant safety and efficiency—amounted to “overkill” and did not constitute a bona fide business reason. The judge did not state, however, that the company’s rationale was totally irrelevant, implying that language differences can provoke hostility, as when the company complained that “some workers were using Spanish to speak derisively about employees who did not speak Spanish.” The company did not mention the possibility of the reverse—English speakers talking derisively about those who did not understand English.

Irish Americans and Italian Americans have both felt the fist of sociological ethnic discrimination in the past, often from each other. But now, both have largely weathered the storm and made peace with each other as they accommodate themselves to Anglo majority culture. Both groups, largely indistinguishable from Anglo Americans except by family names, have been allowed to move up the social ladder while newer immigrants—accompanied by the continuously repressed African Americans—take their place at the bottom where they perform poorly paid, menial tasks and swell the ranks of the under- and un-employed. Murguía (1989) contends that Mexican Americans move up the social ladder with more difficulty than non-Anglo, European immigrants but more easily than African Americans because the Mexican Americans are

closer to Anglo Americans in skin color and facial features than are African Americans. Nevertheless, since there is a continuous inflow of immigrants from Mexico into the United States who are relegated to the bottom rung, the Mexican American population as a whole is perceived by Anglo Americans as making no progress, a phenomenon Anglos attribute to the putative lack of ambition and foresight said to be characteristic of Mexican culture. If racial stereotypes play such a role in ethnic discrimination in the United States as Murguía notes, then we can expect that discrimination experienced by mahogany-brown Mexican Americans to be less than that suffered by Black Puerto Ricans, and to be greater than that encountered by white Cuban Americans. And such seems to be the case. This relationship between ethnic and racial discrimination is an important aspect of the subject matter developed in this article and will be treated more extensively in a succeeding section.

Psychological ethnic discrimination is, on the one hand, expressed by a materially superior population that proclaims the imagined transcendence of its culture as a way of justifying its exploitative attitudes and behavior toward a deprived population. It is also expressed by an ethnic population suffering social deprivation at the hands of a materially or technologically superior group where the subordinate population trumpets the putative superiority of its own cultural heritage as a way of maintaining its self-respect. Psychological ethnicity answers the question, "Who am I?" by referring to one's ancestors, immediate and remote, and to their history, generally described in terms of quasi-truths and myths that exaggerate their virtues and strengths and ignore their weaknesses and vices. Such a history is often tied into supernatural or cosmic beliefs, the idea that one's culture was dictated to one's cultural ancestors at some point in a prehistoric era by God or the gods. This is why a people's religious beliefs are often a major marker of their ethnic identity (Abalos 1986).

A revealing article entitled "The Three Roots of Cuban Heritage" by Florinda Alzaga (1980) is a good example of psychological ethnicity. In describing Cuban culture, the author states that Spain was the source of the Cuban trait of "honor." "The sense of honor is a Spanish ancestral legacy that continues to exist in us through time, safeguarding stable values deserving of respect: God, country, family, name, mother, woman. These are sacred concepts" (1980, 22). Alzaga then goes on to describe the other two "roots" of Cuban heritage, the African and Indian influences. But in doing so, the author reveals her own ethnic biases, referring to African contributions ("primitive culture" and "primitive religion") and the Indian legacy

(names of rivers, places, etc.) as coming from "them," as opposed to "us," the term she uses to reference those who, like herself, provide the Spanish elements. Davis (1987) says something analogous but from a different perspective when she criticizes the notion that the Dominican Republic's culture is essentially "White, Hispanic and Catholic," a concept which ignores its African roots. Ironically, she states that Dominican voodoo is an integral part of popular religion and national identity.

Keefe and Padilla (1987) describe the changes in Chicano culture which in no way have weakened the intensity of Chicano psychological ethnicity and self-esteem. They claim that there has been a noticeable decline among Chicanos in their use of the Spanish language and familiarity with Mexican culture, but that Catholicism has been maintained and extended family solidarity has been strengthened as elements of an ongoing process of Chicano self-identification. F. Padilla (1987), on the other hand, says that "Puertorriqueñismo" has given Puerto Ricans in Chicago a positive sense of identity which has enabled them to organize against ethnic oppression. The author states that the most important cultural element for Puerto Ricans—and other Spanish-speaking groups in Chicago—in maintaining their ethnic identity is not religion and family (though he grants their importance) but music, especially salsa, an aspect of Puerto Rican culture "not stripped away by American colonialism" (1987, 233).

Although these three types of ethnic discrimination—historical, sociological and psychological—are distinct in the abstract, we should not think that they are found functioning dependently of each other "on the ground." Many of the social circumstances that provoke ethnic discrimination are situational and transient, rendering ethnic relations dynamic and variable, affecting different members of the same ethnic group in different ways, and impacting the same individuals over time in a variety of forms. Mexican peasants who come to the United States for the first time to pick fruit and vegetables for wealthy California growers might consider themselves fortunate to receive wages superior to any they might earn in Mexico, and enter into an ethnic relationship—one which I have called "colonial ethnicity" (Melville 1983)—with those growers. However, if these farm workers choose to remain in the United States, they recognize as time passes that many growers take advantage of them, denying them recourse to the legal system, preventing them from forming unions to protect themselves, exposing them to chemical hazards that would be criminal if perpetrated against Anglo American citizens. They recognize that they are the victims of ethnic discrimination (sociological ethnic-

ity) that has nothing to do with their individual or group attributes.

Finally, the farm workers react, forming unions that highlight aspects of their own culture, with emblems of their Mexican Indianness and banners honoring their Mexican patron, the Virgin of Guadalupe. The farm workers' union is organized as an expression of psychological ethnicity, a shout of ethnic pride in their Mexicanness, their culture, their ancestors, in themselves. But the union is also an expression of sociological ethnicity, an attempt to gain effective political and economic power and control over their own lives on the basis of ethnic solidarity. It must be remembered, however, that not all Mexican Americans are farm workers, that some Mexican Americans are aligned with exploitative growers. On the other hand, not all Anglo Americans are growers, nor are all sympathetic to the growers. Different ethnic relations exist between different segments of both populations, an issue to be addressed further on.

## What Is in a Name?

The term "Hispanic" originally referred to the people of Spain. In the United States, however, the label has been indiscriminately applied to populations whose ancestors came to North America from a variety of Latin American and Caribbean nations, some of whom have little or no Spanish biological or cultural heritage, and who today cannot speak a word of Spanish. This is not to deny, however, that most of those so labeled possess cultural traits that, although they are not of Spanish origin, can be attributed to the Spanish conquest of, and slave trade in, the New World.

The use of the term "Hispanic" to group together peoples as distinct as mestizo Mexican Americans and Guatemalans, African Nuyoricans (Puerto Ricans in New York) and Dominicans, white Cuban Americans and Chileans, and indigenous Peruvians and Central Americans, not only obscures the ethnic and racial distinctions that exist among these and other "Hispanic" populations, but also hides their particular strengths and virtues, and ignores their special needs, burdens and shortcomings. The use of the term "Hispanic," then, is generally employed by non-Hispanics, rather than by those who are so labeled.

Officially, "Hispanic" was sanctioned for governmental use in the United States in 1968 when, at the request of Senator Joseph Montoya of New Mexico, President Lyndon Johnson declared the week beginning September 15 as "National Hispanic Week," an event to be celebrated annually. A "Congressional Hispanic Caucus" had first identified itself in 1960 in order to consolidate a block of congressional votes that

would cast ballots together on issues important to all "Hispanics." The label was not popularized, however, until the presidential proclamation forced it into the national consciousness, when it then became a substitute for more specific ethnic designations.

Montoya was one of only two "Hispanics" who have served in the United States senate (Vigil and Luján 1985). Both were from New Mexico where the term "Hispanic" is still widely used as a self-identifier. Spanish colonists, under the leadership and with the financing of Juan de Oñate, established their first settlement in what is today New Mexico at San Juan de los Caballeros near San Juan Pueblo in 1598. The Spanish Crown named Juan de Oñate the first governor of the province, a territory with little natural wealth that survived in large part because of the determined efforts of Catholic missionaries. Spanish relationships with the surrounding Pueblo Indians were those of slaveholders to slaves, creating much enmity and little miscegenation. Pope, a Pueblo Indian leader, led a revolt in 1680 in which his followers obliterated the Catholic Church in the territory, killed over 400 Spaniards, and drove the remainder of the colonists down into El Paso del Norte. Twelve years later, the Crown named Diego de Vargas governor of the province. It took four years for de Vargas' troops to pacify the Pueblo Indians, but, at first, amicable relations did not come with peace. An ethnic boundary had been drawn by the conquest and reinforced by Pope's revolt, distinguishing between the Crown's Pueblo subjects and its Hispanic citizens (Acosta-Belén 1988). This ethnic distinction then became the organizing principle of both political and economic activity. As the decades passed and Hispanics in New Mexico became more numerous, the paucity of environmental resources (mostly access to land and water) had a leveling effect on their economic status.

When mestizo Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821, the inhabitants of Spain's northern territories—far removed from the independence struggle and miscegenation—maintained their Spanish identity even as they inadvertently became Mexican citizens. A generation later, when they were transmogrified into United States citizens by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, they continued to identify themselves as "Hispanics," even though the economic condition of most was not very different from their Pueblo neighbors. But language and ritual were continually employed to maintain separate ethnic identities.

Today, the relationship between Pueblo Indians and Hispanics in New Mexico is largely peaceful and non-exploitative, but historical ethnic boundaries continue to be drawn by language and observed by ritual.

Rodríguez (1991) describes how the Matachine dance is one of many cultural artifacts that is used to mark the Pueblo-Hispanic ethnic boundary, even though it is performed by both peoples. Both groups agree that the dance is Christian or Spanish in origin, but the Pueblos claim it was brought to them from Mexico by Moctezuma, who is portrayed in the dance as El Monarca. On the other hand, the Hispanic villagers “attribute its introduction to colonizer Don Juan de Oñate or reconquest leader Don Diego de Vargas, since the drama portrays the advent of Christianity among the Indians by referring to the expulsion/conversion of the Moors, a paradigm the Spanish colonists readily projected onto their conquest of the New World” (Rodríguez 1991, 236); they, therefore, accord it much reverence. The Pueblos, on the other hand, perform the dance with much subtle mockery of its symbols, not giving it the reverence reserved for their own aboriginal, religious dances. “For the Pueblos, the coming of Christianity is a profoundly ambivalent event because it was central to their subjugation” (Rodríguez 1991, 247).

It is interesting to note here that although the distinction between Native Americans (the Pueblo Indians) and Hispanics is basic to the United States government’s categorization of its own citizens, Native Americans such as the Maya and the Quechua who come to the United States from Guatemala and Peru or Bolivia are promptly classified as “Hispanics” (Forbes 1988). The term “Hispanic,” then, can be seen as one based on political considerations, lumping together people with different languages, religions, histories and cultures. First, let us look at the various designations and their meanings which have been used in the past—and are still employed in many quarters—by the United States government, by North Americans, or by Latin American and Caribbean peoples themselves in the United States to identify those who are now lumped together as “Hispanics,” before we examine the political, economic and cultural consequences of this continuing shift in labels.

*Hispanic*: first used by Spanish colonists in New Mexico. It is the current designation in the Federal Register to identify people in the United States whose familial origins were in a Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking country of Latin America or the Caribbean. It is not clear whether people whose ancestors came to the United States directly from Spain or Portugal are included in this label, or how French-speaking Haitians or Kánjobal-speaking Mayas may be classified.

*Tejano/a*: Texas was an independent republic from 1836 to 1846. Among its citizens were many “His-

panic” residents who could trace their ancestry back hundreds of years in Texas. They, like the Hispanics of New Mexico, were identified as Mexicans for only a generation, dating from 1821. They felt and many still feel that Texas (Tejas) was/is their native land.

*Manito/a*: A shortened form of “hermanito/a” (brother/sister), it is a familiar designation for natives of New Mexico, where the lay fraternities founded by early Franciscan missionaries extended the designation to neighbors.

*Californio/a*: The early Spanish settlers of California (Hot Oven Land) and their descendants called themselves Californios to identify with the land of their settlement. However, this name is no longer used.

*Raza*: This term was popularized during Mexico’s 1910 Revolution and comes from José Vasconcelos’ idea of *La Raza Còsmica*, the blending of the best characteristics of Indian and Spanish heritage in Mexico. It is often used in preference to Latino or Hispanic to group people who are mestizo.

*Spanish-Speaking*: Early label used in the United States census to identify people of Mexican origin, which was then extended to peoples from any Spanish-speaking country.

*Spanish-Surname*: This was an easy identifier used to count Latinos/Hispanics on lists gathered by the Census Bureau beginning in 1950, intended to include English-speaking children of Spanish-speaking parents. It was discovered to be inadequate since it included Philipinos, Native Americans and Anglo divorcees who retained the surnames of their Latino ex-husbands, while excluding Spanish- and English-speaking offspring brought up by divorced or widowed Latina mothers still carrying their former husbands’ Anglo family names.

*Mexican American*: This name, with or without a hyphen, has been used to designate those whose families were already settled in the territories taken from Mexico in the Mexican-American War of 1846-48, and were given the choice of remaining in their homeland as United States citizens or of being deported to Mexico. These territories included what are now the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada and parts of Utah and Colorado. Today, this label includes those who have subsequently immigrated to the United States from Mexico with the intention of becoming residents.

*Chicano/a*: In the late 1960s, this name was adopted by militant Mexican American civil rights advocates. They chose a label that had a pejorative, lower class connotation within the Mexican Amer-

ican community. There have been a variety of suggestions regarding the origin of the name, but many organizers of the civil rights movement believed that the term was a shortened form of “Mechicano” or “Mexicano,” which emphasizes a mestizo identity (from the Mexica Indians).

*Mexicano/a*: In Texas, people of Mexican ancestry, even though they are English-speaking citizens, use this self-referent as a statement of ethnic pride, in response to the denigrating label “Meskin” used by some Anglos.

*Latino/a*: This is probably the preferred generalized self-identifier used by people of Latin American origins when they speak of themselves as a generalized group. It includes peoples who are indigenous to Latin America and excludes those whose ancestors came to the United States directly from Spain or Portugal. In California, it is frequently the label of choice due to the diversity of its Latin American population. The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the largest and oldest Mexican American social and political organization, when founded in Texas in 1929 used this label in place of “Mexican” in order to escape what was then considered a denigrating designation.

*Puerto Rican, Puertorriqueño/a*: People born in Puerto Rico or on the mainland with Puerto Rican ancestry. They are United States’ citizens by birth and can travel to and from Puerto Rico without visas.

*Nuyorican*: This referent is used by some of those born in New York City of Puerto Rican ancestry to underscore their cultural difference from recent arrivals from the island. New York City continues to be the destination of choice for most Puerto Ricans moving to the mainland, although there are ample numbers in other cities, particularly Chicago.

*Boricua*: Someone from the isle of Boriquen or Borinquen, the native designation for what is now known as Puerto Rico. Earlier inhabitants of the island were known as *Boricanos*, but are presently called *Boricua* (Bran 1988). It is a self-designation that emphasizes the struggle for a non-colonial status that rejects both Spanish and United States’ hegemony over them. The term is analogous to Mexican Americans’ usage of “Chicano.”

*Cuban, Cuban American, Cubano/a*: Even though most Cubans have come to the United States since Fidel Castro overthrew Fulgencio Batista in 1959, there are many whose families’ residency in the United States long predates that transforming event. Of all the Latin American immigrant groups, the percentage of Cubans to seek United States citizenship is by far the largest.

*Salvadorean, Salvadoreño/a*: The largest group among Central American refugees who fled to the United States during the 1980s. Until their country’s civil war finally ends, they are unlikely to reveal their residency intentions or their political strength.

*Guatemalan, Guatemalteco/a, Chapín*: The second largest group of Central Americans, largely of Mayan ancestry, in the same political limbo as most Salvadoreans.

*Nicaraguan, Nicaragüense*: a smaller group than the Salvadoreans and Guatemalans, generally of upper class status, that fled the Sandinista revolution. Many live in Florida and share political views with the Cubans.

*Chilean, Chileno, Peruvian, Peruano, Dominican, Dominicano, Honduran, Hondureño*: to name some of the more numerous groups who have continued to immigrate in recent years for both political and economic reasons.

*Haitian, Miskito, Garifuna*: are Caribbean groups of African ancestry who immigrate with more or less freedom. (See Gonzalez’s 1988 study of the Garifuna and their immigration patterns).

*American*: this is an appropriate label for peoples of Latin American origin who are citizens of the United States, but it is mainly used by those who wish to assimilate to the European- or Anglo-American mainstream and submerge their Latin or Caribbean background. It is generally employed by those individuals who show no biological traits of indigenous or African heritage, and reflects the role race plays in formulating ethnic identity.

## Ethnicity and Racism

The term “racism” can be considered shorthand for the phrase “pejorative social discrimination based on phenotypic (observable biological) characteristics.” While it can be argued that social discrimination based on linguistic or cultural differences (ethnicity) may sometimes be socially and temporarily useful—as when cross-cultural communication becomes difficult or impossible because verbal and behavioral cues are frequently misinterpreted—no such justification can be made for maintaining a system of social discrimination based on racial characteristics alone. When racial and cultural boundaries coincide, however, as they very often do, the problem becomes complicated. Cultural differences are then portrayed as products of biology rather than socialization, justifying pejorative stereotypes that fix on superficial physical characteristics.

The value of race as a classificatory system is scientifically worthless. There are no biological characteris-

tics that pertain exclusively to one race, nor is there any one race that does not embrace a whole panoply of cross-racial characteristics. Some racial classificatory schemes use the color of skin, others the color or shape of the eye, still others concentrate on the length and width of the nose, or the color and texture of the hair. Any attempt to make a quantitative or qualitative assessment of a group of people according to one or more of these biological characteristics would quickly reveal that the variation within a given category, as well as the similarities between categories, make the task objectively impossible. Even employing by itself the single, most widely used racial indicator—skin color—does not provide measurable results. Within the “black” category as defined in the United States (which follows what is recognized as the Northern European racist tradition) can be found individuals with white (or pink!) skins who are classified “black” because of wiry hair texture, and individuals with varying degrees of African and European ancestry. In the state of Louisiana, for instance, individuals are classified “black” if it can be shown that they have 1/32 African ancestry. In the Southern European tradition (as exemplified in the Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking Latin American and Caribbean nations) persons of mixed genetic heritage are classified as “colored,” neither “white” nor “black.”

Some researchers (Berreman 1991; Nash 1989) maintain that there is no essential difference between ethnic and racial discrimination in that both are used as markers of social stratification, a system which divides a society’s members into categories “which are differentially powerful, esteemed and rewarded” (Berreman 1991, 30). Most social scientists recognize a distinction between what is commonly called an “ascribed status” and an “achieved status,” the former referring to categories in which one is placed because of characteristics that are considered innate and “therefore shared by those of common birth”—biological and cultural characteristics—, while the latter refers to categories that one supposedly achieves on one’s own merits, such as education, occupation and income—one’s “class status.”

Barrera goes to some length to categorize a variety of theories that are thought by their authors to explain racial social inequalities, including what he calls biological deficiency theories, cultural deficiency theories, class-caste theories, colonial theories, internal colonialism theories and Marxist theories (1979, 174-219). Barrera’s interest is to establish theoretical clarity, a goal he achieves by emphasizing the differences in these diverse explanations of racial and ethnic discrimination. His theoretical preference is “internal colonialism” to explain the social status assigned to Mexican Americans and African Americans in the United States. Despite

these theoretical differences, however, Barrera recognizes that both racial and ethnic discrimination are part of the same exploitative social structure. Van den Berghe (1971), on the other hand, claimed that ethnic discrimination should be distinguished from race and caste discrimination because the concept of ethnicity contains real and important cultural and social characteristics, while race is based on irrelevant physical differences and caste on artificial differences in social roles. Berreman, however, disagrees, and sees the differences between these systems as pertaining only to how assignment to discriminated categories is made, while the purpose and functioning of these systems—discrimination for purposes of exploitation—are the same.

In deciding which of these perspectives we should embrace, it must be remembered that the categorization of any phenomena—including that of the differences found in human beings—is based on the belief that the similarities between distinct phenomena assigned to a single category are more important than are their similarities. In other words, we can separate ethnic discrimination from racial discrimination if we believe that the characteristics used as a basis to justify the discriminatory behavior are more important for the purpose of the discrimination. But if we believe that its purpose—the exploitation of a less powerful group—is the same for both and is more important than the group characteristics used to justify it, then we can put both types of discrimination in the same category.

Berreman’s perspective is one that this author largely shares. Where racial discrimination occurs, the ultimate justification by its practitioners is the attribution of behavioral and intellectual deficiencies that are linked to biological inheritance. One seldom hears an argument justifying racial discrimination on the basis of skin color alone. The argument is almost always made that skin color signals the existence of a variety of pejorative behavioral or intellectual characteristics, such as sloth, irresponsibility, criminal tendencies and so on, characteristics that others might attribute to culture and socialization, but not for that reason are any less innate. Thus it is that Murguía (1989) makes the point that those Mexican Americans who are closer to Anglo Americans in skin color and facial features can move up the social ladder more quickly than can Mexican Americans with more pronounced Native American racial features. Is this racial or ethnic discrimination? The point is that it matters little which it is if our interest is focused on discovering the functions of social discrimination.

## Hispanic Racism

Chroniclers of Latin American and Caribbean peoples often claim that racism is not an Hispanic prob-

lem. A close look at the facts, however, seems to indicate otherwise. It is true that Latin American and Caribbean history and current practice demonstrate that in comparison to the Northern European variant of racism, which includes what exists in the United States, Hispanic racism is less virulent. Nevertheless, racism is part of the Hispanic cultural heritage and is evident among "Hispanics" in the United States.

One does not have to be a firm advocate of the *Leyenda Negra* (the "Black Legend" that claims that the Spanish conquistadors brutally eliminated millions of Indians) (Sanchez 1991) to recognize that Spanish and Portuguese racism played a major role in creating the social structures of colonial America which were responsible for the deaths of millions of Native Americans and, in many respects, still influence the state of affairs in contemporary Latin American and Caribbean countries. Although an unassailable estimate is impossible to make, many observers suggest that the native population of Mesoamerica (Mexico and Central America) declined by approximately 25 million in 1519 to about one million by the beginning of the 1600s (Gibson 1966; Cook and Borah 1960; Helms 1982). This decline is attributed to a variety of causes, including the inadvertent introduction of European diseases for which the immunological system of the natives was unprepared, famine, war, displacement, overwork and the brutality of the conquistadors and colonists in exacting labor and tribute.

Depending upon one's personal bias, one or the other of these causal agents can be given greater or lesser emphasis. F. Padilla (1987), for example, believes that Spanish colonialism was rather benign, and that the agrarian capitalism imposed by the United States put traditional cultures at risk. Gregory Cerio says that the "Black Legend is a cultural legacy from the same people—English, German, Dutch, French—who fought Spain for 300 years" (1991, 48). Cerio goes on to debunk *A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies* by the colonial friar, Bartolomé de las Casas, while ignoring the Native American memories and accounts of the conquest, their many suicidal rebellions over the centuries against superior Hispanic forces and the racist legacy that continues to exist today in those countries that contain large Native American populations.

There can be no doubt that Spanish and Portuguese racism and brutality played a significant role in the decimation of the various native peoples found in the Caribbean and the Americas by the conquistadors and those who followed them. The historical record regarding Spanish practices is much more extensive and detailed than is that of the Portuguese, but indicative extrapolations can be made.

The historical and ideological underpinning of the colonizing project and its racist bias began approximately in 850 A.D. and continued until 1492, when the peoples of the Iberian peninsula, led by independent nobles and warriors, waged an on-and-off war to push Muslim invaders back into North Africa from whence they had come in the years 711-718 A.D. The marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella of the royal houses of Castile and Aragon in 1469 was a major step in the political unification of these independent noble states and in the formation of what is today a major part of the Spanish nation. The process, however, was arduous. Many noble families continued to maintain personal armies and a desire for independence. Only by granting them titles, tax exemptions and land in the major cities where second residences were established and social contacts leading to marriage alliances multiplied, were Ferdinand and Isabella able to overcome the centrifugal tendencies of the Spanish nobility.

In this process of nation building, the ideology of militant Catholicism, an ideology grown strong in the 600-year war against the Muslims, became the binding force of Spanish nationalism. Its most powerful expression was found in the Spanish Inquisition, firmly supported by Ferdinand and Isabella, aimed primarily at "infidels"—Muslims and Jews. In 1492 alone, Torquemada, Isabella's confessor and the Inspector General of the Inquisition, expelled 200,000 Jews from Spain. Jews, like Muslims, were given the choice of either converting to Catholicism—and thereby becoming Spaniards—or remaining faithful to their beliefs and ethnicity, subject to imprisonment and deportation. But for those who did convert to Catholicism and remained in Spain, second-class citizenship was their lot. Social status, government positions, licenses, university education, military, clerical and mercantile guilds were all closed to those who could not demonstrate "pureza de sangre," the absence of Jewish or Muslim genealogy. And although these exclusionary rules could be bent, and at times broken, it was only done when no competing "pure-blooded" individual was available to apply for the opening. These concepts, then, of "pure blood"—winning noble status as warriors, the right to demand tribute from subjects, militant and violent Catholicism—were all carried to the New World by the conquistadors and the colonists who followed them.

It was only natural that these ideas formed an underpinning for the colonizing project and produced a colonial social structure that was racist, ethnocentric and sexist in practice and intent. Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, one of the most vocal of colonial spokespersons, stated the case: "In prudence, talent, virtue, and humanity, they (the Native Americans) are

as inferior to Spaniards as children to adults, women to men, as the wild and cruel to the most meek, as the prodigiously intemperate to the continent and temperate, and, as I have almost said, as monkeys to men” (Hanke 1974, 84). There is no question that Ginés de Sepúlveda is speaking here about biological differences when he mentions the Amerindians’ “inferior” humanity, as well as when he compares the differences between Spaniards and Indians to those between men and women, and then “almost” puts indigenous peoples on a level with monkeys.

Domingo de Betanzós, the first superior of the Dominican Order in New Spain, is quoted as having said, “I have spoken somewhat on Indian capacity in general, not saying they were wholly incapable, because I have never said that, but rather they have very little capacity, like children” (Hanke 1974, 19).

One has only to glance at Fray Bartolomé de las Casas’s *Breve Historia General de las Indias* to understand the decades-long struggle carried out by “El Protector de los Indios” and the persecution he suffered at the hands of both civil and ecclesiastic authorities for his strong opposition to the enslavement of Native Americans—a stand that came only after he himself gave up his slaves and pursued the priestly vocation. One of his opponents, an unnamed friar, proclaimed to the royal court that “God had condemned the Indians to total extinction because of their bestial sins,” a statement that served as a pretext for revoking the crown’s order against their enslavement which de las Casas had managed to obtain.

In 1537, Pope Paul III issued an encyclical, *Sublimis Deus*, often called the “Magna Carta of Native American Rights,” defining the Amerindians once and for all as human beings capable of salvation. In 1542, the Spanish Crown decreed *Las Leyes Nuevas*, outlawing the *encomienda* system—a system which granted Spanish nobles the right to extract tribute in work and in kind from whole communities of Indians—and the virtual enslavement that resulted therefrom (Hawkins 1984). But legal prohibitions, especially those enacted by authorities at several months distance, often had little effect in the far-off colonies. And, it might be reasonably argued, they were never intended to do otherwise. But as the Native American population continued to decline—some of the Antilles becoming completely devoid of their Amerindian population—the colonists turned to Africa as a source of slave labor.

Much is made of the mitigating influence of miscegenation that produced a mestizo population in those areas where substantial Native American populations survived the initial onslaught of the conquest. There are many factors, however, that can explain this process without negating a racist mentality among the

colonists. The fact that few European women accompanied the first waves of adventurers meant that sexual liaisons between Spanish men and Amerindian women were inevitable, producing mixed “race” offspring. Since one of the basic tenets of the conquest ideology was the conversion of the “pagan” Indians to Catholicism, the Church objected to the crown’s legal prohibition against marriage between Spaniards and Amerindians, a law that forced the colonists and their concubines “to live in sin.” In 1501, the crown lifted the prohibition due, in part, to the Church’s insistence. This did not mean, however, that an *hidalgo* (an *hijo de algo*, or son of something) who took an Indian wife retained the respect of his peers. The preferred state between *hidalgos* and *indias* remained one of concubinage, with the consequence of bastard status for their offspring. “Consequently, the latter half of the sixteenth century witnessed the growth of a sizable population of persons who had no legal place within the official system of ‘white’ and ‘Indian’\.” (Helms 1982, 172).

Even in twentieth-century Mexico, the term “mestizo” remained synonymous with “bastard,” “a stigma that was to disappear only after the Revolution of 1910 rehabilitated Indian culture” (González Navarro 1970, 145). Yet, despite this rehabilitation, Mexican racism persists. In a fascinating book by Lomnitz and Pérez-Lizaur (1987) entitled, *A Mexican Elite Family, 1820-1980*, the authors state that the Gómez family (a pseudonym) continues to claim that their ancestors were light-skinned, blue-eyed Spaniards who made their wealth as *hacendados*, when in reality they were mestizos who came into their fortune through trade and manufacturing. In this, the Gómez family claims are quite representative of much of Mexico’s upper class.

Vásquez attributes much of the miscegenation in Peru to the War of Independence, the eight foreign wars in which Peru participated after independence, and the “over 100 conspiracies, disorders, insurrections, mutinies, and revolutions” between 1825 and 1900 (1970, 76). “This phenomenon of forced internal migrations (due to the wars and civil disturbances) served to stimulate both national sentiment and racial mixture on a sociological as well as a biological level” (Vásquez 1970, 75). The dangers of war have always had a leveling effect on the social distinctions that otherwise occur between soldiers fighting on the same side. As the old saying goes, ‘No one ever looks at the skin color of the person who throws him a lifesaver.’ Despite this process of miscegenation, however—or perhaps because of it—Peruvian officials sought to promote immigration “which gave preference to European (that is white)—parenthesis in the original—immigrants and discriminated against others” (Vásquez 1970, 78).

The argument is often made that the distinction in contemporary Latin America between mestizo (or *ladino*) and Indian is based on cultural differences—that is, ethnicity—and not on biological or “racial” characteristics. Consequently, it is held that any Indian who wishes to be considered mestizo can do so by simply laying aside his/her cultural heritage and behaving like a Europeanized mestizo.

Such a blanket claim misses the mark, however. Hoetnick (1967) maintains that racism seems to disappear in Spanish- and Portuguese-America only when the Anglo American variant of racism—distinguishing between two castes, White and non-White—is used to analyze the social practice of Caribbean and Latin American nations. When three categories are used, however, following social practice—White, Mestizo/Colored and Indian/Black—a different picture emerges. Then, it can be seen that a marked increase in education, money, power and European-like culture can enable a “pale” Indian or a light-skinned African to move into the mestizo/colored race, or an almost white “mestizo/colored” person to move into the “white” race. It is quite another thing to say that a dark-skinned Indian need only make cultural modifications to be considered a mestizo, and for a mestizo to acquire money to be considered “*de alta sociedad*.” A quick look at the governing elites throughout Spanish and Portuguese America over the centuries, including contemporary times, indicates that the vast majority would be considered “white,” or at least falling on the light end of the mestizo/colored spectrum.

Another aspect of Hispanic racism can be found in the status of Africans and their descendants in colonial and post-colonial Latin American and Caribbean societies. Africans were brought in chains, as slaves, by the boatload to the Western Hemisphere by Portuguese, Danish, Dutch, English, French and Spanish traders, as a commodity to be bought, sold and exploited. To claim that one or another of these nationalities did so in a more humane manner than the others seems to reflect a racist mentality in and of itself. Spanish and Portuguese colonists and native-born *criollos* sought African slaves to work their fields and mines only after they had exploited the indigenous populations to the point of no return. The Danish, Dutch and English colonists sought African slaves after they had driven the native inhabitants from their lands or had intentionally exterminated them. Hoetnick (1967) claims that there are many studies which show that the differences in treatment of African slaves in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies as opposed to that implemented in English and Dutch colonies depended, not upon the slavers’ cultural differences, but upon economic and demographic variations. Quoting E. Williams, Hoetnick

says that “Cuba (Spanish) and Trinidad (English) in 1789 had largely self-sufficient economies which permitted the existence of ‘paternal slavery and benevolent despotism’” (1967, 26). He then goes on to say that Mintz “demonstrated similarities between eighteenth-century Jamaica and nineteenth-century Puerto Rico, where booms in the sugar economy led to increased importation and harsher treatment of slaves” (1967, 26).

Racial discrimination continued into the post-colonial period, as one might expect. Martínez-Alier (1989) detailed 199 cases where special licenses were requested for interracial marriages in Cuba between 1810-1882. The nineteenth-century Cuban government unsuccessfully attempted to keep the white, colored and black “races” biologically separate but ran into the Catholic Church’s insistence that free choice of spouse be respected in order to enter into a sacramental marriage. The rise in the numbers of “interracial” marriages was a function of the entrance of a large “colored” population into the economic and political life of the nation. Officially and culturally, white women were supposed to be subject to the whims of their male relatives who were charged with safeguarding the females as transmitters of blood-purity, while, at the same time, colored and black women were considered the legitimate targets of these same white males’ sexual advances.

Just as was done with their Amerindian subjects, Iberian males established sexual relationships, some temporary, some permanent, with their female African slaves, while largely refusing to have these unions sanctioned by the Church or civil society. Again, these relationships produced offspring, colored/mulattoes, who found themselves in a legal limbo. “Marriages between poor Europeans and daughters of well-to-do colored families were frequent. Wealthy Brazilians of the highest class, however, did not favor marriages with persons whose mixed descent was ‘very apparent.’ Relationships with such persons usually took the form of a long-standing liaison” (Hoetnick 1967, 33). Quoting Wagley, Hoetnick notes that the Brazilian upper class is European in physical appearance with very few exceptions. “Acceptance in this highest social stratum is determined by racial criteria to a much larger degree than in lower social groups. The ‘middle class’ is also predominantly European in appearance, although many colored have gained access to it. The ‘lower class’ consists overwhelmingly of people with dark skins” (Hoetnick 1967, 35).

Safa (1988, 144), in referring to the differentials that have enabled Cuban Americans to adapt to United States society in ways that Puerto Ricans have not, mentions that until the Mariel boatlift in 1980, Cuban

immigrants were "largely white and middle-class in origin." The relationship that existed between white racial characteristics and the middle- and upper-class economic situation of the pre-1980 Cuban immigrants on the one hand, and that which existed between African-descent and low economic status among the majority of those who arrived in the Mariel boatlift, on the other, cannot be considered accidental or incidental. Race was an important marker of educational and economic opportunity in pre-Castro Cuba, as it remains today throughout Latin America and in the Hispanic Caribbean.

## Class as a Function of Ethnicity and Race

A theoretical, abstract distinction between groups formed either on the basis of ethnicity/race or those based on what is called "class" (a group of individuals possessing similar levels of economic and political resources) is not difficult to make. But to apply that distinction unambiguously to concrete incidents of discriminatory social behavior is another matter entirely.

Griswold del Castillo (1984) wrote a book about the urban pressures on the Chicano family in the United States Southwest in which he used both ethnicity and social class as determining factors of social interaction. He had such a difficult time, however, in stating which was the operative principle independent of the other in given social situations that he used Gordon's concept of "ethclass" to cover both (Gordon 1964, 51-54). Despres (1975, 196ff), Vincent (1974), Benedict (1962), Cohen (1969, 193-4), van den Berghe (1974) and Hetcher and Levi (1974) all viewed ethnicity as a mechanism for implementing social stratification (differential class access to economic and political power) even while recognizing that class divisions often cross-cut ethnic boundaries. Although the concept of class is more complex than those of ethnicity and race, we can remove some of this confusion for our purposes by attempting to define "class" as it is used in the United States and elsewhere.

People in the United States are assigned to the "lower," "middle," or "upper class" according to annual income and an estimation of their economic assets. Related to these two factors are other, less clearly quantitative characteristics, such as education and occupation. These, in turn, can lead to further divisions, such as upper, middle and lower lower class; upper, middle and lower middle class; and upper, middle and lower upper class. These multiple class distinctions are made according to the reigning ideology which states that social classes are 'open,' meaning

that movement between classes is a consequence of personal merit. As we have already seen, however, Berreman, for one, believes that class is a non-birth ascribed (assigned) status and is not "achieved," except in rare cases (1991, 30).

Marxist ideology, on the other hand, distinguishes between two basic classes, the bourgeoisie or property-owning class (capitalists), and the proletariat or working class. There are variations or distinctions within these classes, as well, such as the petite bourgeoisie (shop owners, artisans, professionals, etc.) and the lumpenproletariat (uprooted peasants, under- and un-employed, etc.). The basic categorization, however, remains twofold. The distinctions are based on the idea that class participation is for all practical purposes closed, assigned by birth (property inheritance or lack of same), and to one's willingness—or lack thereof—to exploit the weaknesses of others. According to Marxist theory, then, the working class can become masters of their own destiny only by overthrowing the ruling class, those who own "the means of production."

A more inclusive concept for analyzing a ruling class at the top of a society's social pyramid, as far as this author is concerned, is to use relative degrees of social power possessed by the society's different groups in order to determine the line of demarcation between them. The concept of social power includes not only control over others that results from ownership of large economic resources, such as the means of production, but other resources upon which the possession of economic resources themselves depends. Dealing with this concept, however, can lead us into complex abstractions and far afield, but I believe that a cursory glance at its implications will go far toward explicating not only the purpose of, but means by which, ethnic/racial discrimination occurs.

Max Weber, probably the seminal sociological theorist of the twentieth century, defines social power as "the chance of a man (sic) or of a number of men (sic) to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action" (Weber 1948, 180). Weber goes on to say that "economically conditioned power is not, of course, identical with power as such" (ibid.), disagreeing with both Marxists and free market sociological theorists such as Talcott Parsons. He also states that power may be valued "for its own sake." C. Wright Mills (1935), following Weber's lead, stated that the "power elite" is made up of the corporate rich, as well as the top military officers and professional politicians. Stalin has been quoted to have once asked how many divisions of military troops the Pope commanded. Mao is also cited as having stated that "all power grows out of the barrel of a gun."

**The Cisneros family celebrating the Fourth of July at the Encanto Park in Phoenix. Mom and Dad watch as older brother Frank, Jr. pitches to younger brothers. (Photo by Thomas B. Weaver.)**

These quotations recognize that if a class of large property owners does not have supporting military or police power, its control over economic resources will not survive. What Stalin and Mao did not recognize in the foregoing quotations, however, is that a class need not possess the guns, but merely have the resources to defend the privileged class's position. Such resources can include: a religious ideology and a loyal following that might justify the hoarding of excessive wealth (certainly the Pope possessed such loyalty); intellectual abilities needed to employ economic resources successfully (knowledge, specially technical); charismatic leadership (e.g. Fidel Castro); traditional faith in the legitimacy possessed by politicians operating within an ongoing political system; the economic resources necessary to buy the loyalty of an army or a group of officers.

We can now see an essential difference between ethnicity/race categorizations on the one hand, and class distinctions on the other. Ethnicity/race, or the attribution of the same, is a principle whereby a group of people is recognized, or recognizes itself, as belonging to the same social category because of some

observable, biological and/or cultural trait. Class, or the attribution of class, is the recognition that a group of people has a marked degree of social power that distinguishes them from other groups in their society in possession of greater or lesser degrees of the same power.

The question now arises as to the nature of the unifying principle that bonds together the members of a given social class. Is the possession of social power or the lack of it sufficient to motivate the people of a given class to unite and/or stay united? Or do people need other principles such as the commonality of physical appearance, ethnicity, gender, age, generation, occupation and so on, to bond them together in their search for, and their determination to hold on to, social power? When Marx said, "Workers of the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains!" he was stating his belief that the search for social power could transcend ethnic and racial differences. This may be true on some occasions and under particular circumstances, but a successful cross-ethnic, intra-class struggle for, or defense of, social power is often followed by

ethnic tensions that loosen the bonds of solidarity previously developed.

In other words, ethnicity and race are principles of social solidarity that are utilized in the never ending struggle for power in pluralistic societies. Ethnicity/race are the means and social power the end, much as groupings based on family, lineage, gender and age are used in more homogeneous societies for the same purpose. Each society and every subgroup in a society can be analyzed in terms of its access to the resources—many of which are economic—on which the possession of social power rests.

## Class in Colonial Hispanic Society

Helms makes a strong case defending the premise that ruling class status in colonial Mesoamerica did not depend on much more than perception. "In both Spain and Spanish America, monetary wealth traditionally did not influence social position and, in fact, many members of the lesser Spanish nobility, the knights or *hidalgos*, were often in serious financial straights" (1982, 168). She further states that social status depended upon "family position and religious orthodoxy and of individual pride and self-perception" (*ibid.*, 169). Hoetnik concurs: the prestige of families of Spanish colonial origin "was based more on ancestry (*abolengo*) than on economic position or political influence" (1971, 112). Rama states that: "(A)lthough the socio-economic structure of Latin America developed after the rise of capitalism and its open society of classes, the pattern of stratification that took root there, and that survives today in certain areas, more nearly resembled a caste system . . . Thanks to the presence of lower caste elements in the patriot armies and the collapse of the colonial regime, a new society could begin to evolve" (1970, 28).

Obviously, Helms and other observers have missed important elements in the status equation because they interpret caste as stemming from rigid racial and ethnic boundaries based on nothing more than an ideological conviction, while ignoring the full nature of the underlying structure of power relationships. They also look at class stratification as an easing of caste-like boundaries facilitated by the growth of wealth, without examining the nature of the power resources upon which the acquisition and possession of wealth depended. Once we recognize that they are referring to the militarily victorious Spaniards and their legitimate—as recognized by the Catholic Church—American-born descendants (*criollos*), we can talk about the particulars of "family position" and "self-perception" among that group. However, we must start with the premise that these people took power and became the ruling class by using force against indigenous popula-

tions. They maintained this position by the continued willingness and ability to return to the use of force, as the suppression of numerous indigenous uprisings over the centuries demonstrates. The principle of unity among the colonists and *criollos* was their common Hispanic ethnicity and white "racial" characteristics. Once this is conceded, we can look to the intracaste status differentiation among them which, according to Helms, did not depend upon the possession of economic resources.

"Religious orthodoxy," which Helms mentions as a primary Hispanic determinant, is virtually the same as *pureza de sangre*, the claim to family lineage going back to ancestors who had participated in the struggle to expel the Moors from the Iberian peninsula and who had received a title of nobility for their efforts. In other words, family status depended upon one's claims—sometimes unverifiable—to noble or quasi-noble rank as recognized by the Spanish Crown, which itself made claims to the legitimacy of its existence and decisions in terms of the "divine right of kings"—granted by the papacy in recognition of a *fait accompli* and for the payment of alms—and backed up by its undisputed military power. So again, we see that ruling class status was underpinned by the crown's recognition of such status or the belief of such recognition, confirmed by appeals to divine approval and the force of arms. It was then only a question of turning that status to one's economic advantage, which was the basic reason that the conquistadors or colonists had left Spain in the first place.

Helms, however, despite her "perception is status" thesis, implicitly recognized the role of armed force for establishing membership in the colonial ruling class: "In the New World, as members of the conquering society (*sic*), even the humblest emigrant automatically regarded himself as a superior member, a 'noble' of colonial society. As such he also felt entitled to an 'honorable' life free from demeaning manual labor or technical crafts, which could be performed instead by those of darker skin who had been conquered" (Helms 1982, 169).

It was a question, then, of how much control one could rightly demand over indigenous labor, and this, in turn, depended upon one's recognized claims to nobility, backed up by the arms of Spain's colonial army. Therefore, one leaves out important elements of the social status/class equation by maintaining, as Helms and others have, that class status was not calculated in economic terms. It is true that recognition of claims to nobility did not depend upon the possession of economic resources at any particular point in time, but possession of economic resources did depend upon recognized claims to nobility. It is also true that over a generation, if a family was unable to maintain its

possession of economic resources, such as slaves, quasi slave-labor, or land, with an approximate equivalency to its claims of nobility, those claims tended to lose their legitimacy.

For these reasons, after the dissolution of the *encomienda* system in 1548 which had given the colonists legal, direct, slave-like control over entire indigenous populations, it then became necessary for the colonists and their criollo descendants to gain possession, with the help of armed force, of large extensions of land in order to dispossess the native populations and thereby indirectly force them to work for the new Hispanic property owners. And when these indigenous populations were gravely diminished for reasons mentioned earlier, African slaves were brought to replace them. As the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries progressed, many of those Hispanics who had lost their noble ranking—or who had never possessed it to any significant degree—turned to occupying large extensions of marginal lands to raise herds of cattle and sheep. It was an occupation that allowed them to avoid the more demeaning aspects of manual labor and maintain the bogus claims to Spanish nobility.

Many historians agree that the growing size of the mestizo and mulatto populations in comparison with the more static numbers of *criollos*, the wars of independence that brought many of these socially marginal elements into military service, as well as the rise of industrial capitalism, brought about the dissolution of the colonial caste (closed) hierarchy and gave rise to the postcolonial class (quasi-open) society. But caste notions of racial and ethnic superiority did not disappear with the end of Spanish and Portuguese hegemony, as a study of Guatemala, Peru, Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil, Paraguay and the Dominican Republic, to name the more obvious examples, would quickly indicate. Spanish and Portuguese Latin American and Caribbean societies remain highly stratified along class lines, with a caste-like boundary demarking the edges of the ruling class, as well as the one which separates the middle class from indigenous and African populations. Personal merit has very little to do with class status or class mobility in any of the Hispanic societies of Latin America or the Caribbean. Bogus claims to Spanish ancestry and nobility continue to pervade ruling class mentalities, as Lomnitz and Pérez Lizaur demonstrate (1987).

## Inter-Class Relations and Hispanic Ethnicity in the U. S.

How do class differences affect potential unity among “Hispanics” in the United States? When I am

asked my ethnic identity, I respond that I am a Chicana. Yet, over the past fifteen years, I have taught many Mexican American students who have admitted to me in private that they had sometimes represented themselves as being of Spanish, Colombian or Argentinean origin. Why have they been embarrassed about their Mexican heritage, while I am not? The stereotyped presumption is that if you are Mexican in the United States, you or your ancestors are part Indian, swam across the Rio Grande in Texas or climbed a fence in California to get into the United States, were penniless and have been working as unskilled or farm laborers ever since. If you are Spanish, Colombian, or Argentinean, on the other hand, the presumption is that you are probably “white,” came to the United States by plane, could pay your own way, are somewhat sophisticated, and probably of middle- or upper-class background. By claiming to be Spanish, Colombian or Argentinean, rather than Mexican, these students were sacrificing their national or ethnic/racial identity in order to claim middle or upper-class status. In my discussion with these students, I became aware of the fact that I could easily admit to my own heritage because, as a relatively “white” (or pink!) university professor, my own middle-class identity was relatively secure. The students did not have that advantage.

It is understandable that these Mexican American university students were concerned with their class status. United States ideology pretends that its society is primarily a meritocracy. But our national culture grants highest social standing and secular reverence to those who are male, white, Anglo Saxon, Protestant and in possession of sizable amounts of wealth, even though the roots of that wealth might be financial legerdemain, outright theft, force, or the exploitation of the weaknesses and ignorance of the working class. “Conspicuous consumption” is a major marker of one’s social class, if ethnic/racial boundaries do not intervene.

Although David Duke, as a past Ku Klux Klan member, was not a representative or spokesperson of North American culture, he made a powerful showing in his run for the governorship of Louisiana in 1991 and expressed openly the values that play more than a marginal role in structuring the United States power/class pyramid. During an interview in 1985, Duke had this to say about “Hispanics”:

Spaniards, white Spaniards, I have no problem with. (Pro golf star) Steve Ballesteros is as white as anyone. He’s dolichocephalic (long-headed), you know. He’s very Caucasoid, and there’s many Spanish like that. The prob-

**The Arellano family paddling in a boat at El Encanto Park on the Fourth of July in Phoenix. (Photo by Thomas B. Weaver.)**

lem—most of the Mexicans coming over are mostly Indian, mestizo, and a lot of Puerto Ricans, other South Americans, are a mixture of Negroes. So the Spanish, you’ve pretty much got to call them as you see them. (*San Francisco Examiner* November 10, 1991)

These ethnic/racist and elitist elements of American culture became more pronounced since the election of Ronald Reagan and George Bush to the presidency. If one who has not inherited substantial personal wealth and does not possess the physical characteristics of the “white” Anglo American norm, but desires the social power necessary for minimal self-respect in United States society, a university education is almost essential. In lieu of a university education, however, one can also obtain middle-class status by becoming financially advantaged, often by exploiting newer immigrants of one’s own ethnic/racial group. A more narrow road is to serve the power elite as a token ethnic/racial representative in order to convince one’s co-ethnics that the system is not rigged against them. Left unsaid is that

the system has room for only a small number of token representatives.

The relationship between class and “Hispanic” ethnicity can be examined in one of its many manifestations by looking at an important segment of the Cuban American community as it relates to other contingents of the so-called “Hispanic” melting pot. Pedraza Bailey (1985) studied Cuban migration to the United States to see why many Anglo Americans considered it a “success story,” while the influx of Mexicans was often looked upon as a “silent invasion.” The answer she found was in the way the United States government assisted the largely upper and middle class refugees for the first (post-Castro) waves of Cuban immigration, while, on the other hand, it aided or blocked Mexican immigrants, depending on the need for cheap labor. The United States government, seeing Cuban immigration as symbolic victory in the Cold War, gave cash and resettlement assistance to Cuban immigrants, including education programs such as retraining for professionals, college tuition loans, and relaxed requirements for American citizenship. Bilingual educa-

tion programs for Cubans were instituted as early as 1960 and served as prototypes for other areas of the country (Nelson and Tienda 1985; Portes and Bach 1985).

Safa (1988), citing Wilson and Portes, states that Cuban American incorporation into United States society differs from the assimilation and internal colonialist patterns of other immigrant groups, and is best characterized as an "economic enclave," such as those developed by Jewish, Japanese, Chinese and Korean Americans. "While other immigrant groups, both European and racial minorities, serve primarily as a source of cheap labor, economic enclaves tend to be characterized by a strong entrepreneurial element, beginning the first generation (connoting an obvious class difference)" (1988, 144). It was only natural to expect that the white, middle- and upper-class, political refugees from Castro's Cuba would be instrumental in forming an economic enclave in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale area, and then consolidate their political influence. They were merely replicating the cultural practices they had learned and employed in pre-Castro Cuba. These white, relatively wealthy, educated, anti-Castro elements have been able to politically dominate their community by means of wealth, political savvy, support received from the executive branch of the United States government, and on occasion, by threats and bombings (Torres 1988, 392).

The influence of a significant, wealthy and politically organized group of white Cuban Americans on the United States national political scene is demonstrated by the debate that took place among "Hispanics" in the middle and late 1980s over President Reagan's Central American policies. In March, 1986, the Florida State Commission on Hispanic Affairs visited Congress to lobby for Reagan's military-aid request for the Nicaraguan "Contras," the counter-revolutionaries. The Commission claimed to represent "not only Cuban Americans, but Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans and immigrants from throughout Latin America" (Garment 1986, 48). They obviously did not represent the victims of the Contras, almost exclusively Nicaraguan peasants.

During their congressional visit, the Commission ran across a group of "liberal" Mexican Americans lobbying against Contra aid, and a lively debate took place on the Capitol steps. A Commission spokesperson was later quoted as saying, "It has taken the Mexican Americans a while to face this issue. They (sic) thought of these concerns as being handled by the Cubans. But in the last two or three years, I've begun to see more concern" (Garment 1986). The fact that the Commission spokesperson used the third person pronoun "they" instead of the first person "some of us" indicates that the Florida State Commission on Hispanic Affairs really

represented Cuban American interests—and only those of a vocal minority, at that—and used the term "Hispanic" when it was convenient to inflate the perception of their numbers and prospective political clout.

The difference between the vocal, white wealthy sector of the Cuban American population and that of the substantially larger, mostly mestizo Mexican American population is one watched very carefully by non-Hispanics, particularly politicians. Senator Paula Hawkins of Florida, when questioned about a delay in passing an immigration bill in Congress, responded that the problem was "the Mexicans" (*San Francisco Chronicle* October 23, 1986). "Mexicans gum up everything because they walk over at night," the Senator said. "You can't see them. And they're not patriots by and large. They're not patriots like the . . . Cuban Americans." During the ensuing furor, Hawkins explained that she did not mean to question Mexican American patriotism. "They just have a different agenda," she explained (*ibid.*).

In 1984, the GI Forum, an advocacy group of Mexican American war veterans founded after World War II to lobby for their rights, proclaimed its support for President Reagan and his policy of military aid to the Nicaraguan contras. By way of explanation, Eduardo Bernaldez, national chairman of the Forum, stated—referring to a similar position by a companion organization, LULAC—that this new "method of operation is a conservative change, but in many instances that's the best way to get things done" (*Wall Street Journal*, March 19, 1986).

LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens), founded in Texas in 1929 to protect the legal rights of Mexican American citizens—but which eschewed Mexican American in its name because of the Anglo Texans' ethnic/racial prejudices against Mexico—had been involved and was successful in some benchmark struggles for civil rights in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s on such issues as education, voting rights and immigration. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, as much of its membership grew prosperous, moving into the middle middle-class, and some even into the upper middle-class, LULAC became more elitist. *The Wall Street Journal* (Moffett 1986) reported that "LULAC has become conspicuously silent on the kind of social and economic issues that once might have prompted a flurry of news releases and lawsuits."

In its place, MALDEF (Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund), and its sister-organization, PRLDEF (Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Educational Fund), have mounted notable legal campaigns to protect the rights of Mexican and Puerto Rican American citizens. The former was founded in 1968 in San Antonio and Los Angeles, the latter, in New York in

1972. They were established to use the legal forum to fight against systemic discrimination. These organizations have been decisive in changing many patterns such as school segregation and discrimination in the courts and in wage labor (Gallegos and O’Neill 1991).

The reaction of the United States government to the political and economic establishments in Latin America reflects the interests of our country’s industrial and property-owning elites. These events have repercussions, not only in the countries of Latin America, but they affect the migration of Latinos and reflect on the attitudes toward United States citizens of Latin American origin. The United States government would have us believe that revolutions such as those in Cuba and Nicaragua, uprisings such as those in El Salvador and Guatemala, elections such as those that brought Allende to the presidency in Chile were influenced by Soviet Russia and Communism, rather than lower- and middle-class rebellions against their national economics and politics. Today, powerful Latin and Caribbean military establishments perform minimal to non-existent roles in defending national sovereignty. Rather, their function, like that of colonial armies, is to protect the interests of their nations’ ruling classes aligned to overseas business and political interests against the demands of their impoverished peasant and working classes. Socialist and Communist revolutionary ideas may have been imported, but they take root where the fertile conditions of class exploitation actually exist. It is only natural, then, that we who look to Latin America and the Caribbean for our ethnic/racial identity, should find that class-consciousness is an important element in our cultural heritages.

### Intra-Ethnic Antagonisms and Cross-Cultural Solidarity

A subtle demonstration of intra-ethnic, cross-class antagonism is detailed in a book entitled *Texas-Mexico Conjunto* by Manuel Peña (1985). Peña states that *conjunto* music is emblematic of the Tejano working-class, that it is an expression of self-affirmation of working-class identity and opposition to the upwardly mobile, aspiring Mexican American middle-class with its self-consciously Americanized *orquesta* music.

Some intra-ethnic antagonisms are based on generational differences between those who were enculturated in another country and their children, who are exposed to the United States educational system. Such is the case of the opposition of second and third generation Mexican Americans to newly arrived Mexican immigrants in California, as reported by Montana (1986). She quotes a poll that found that 40% of Cali-

fornia Latinos (largely of Mexican origin) felt there were “too many” Mexican immigrants in California. “Working-class Mexican Americans, many of whom prefer to be called Chicanos, blame undocumented workers for lower salaries or the loss of jobs, the overcrowding of schools and health clinics, and the deterioration of neighborhoods. Many Chicanos, fearful of a loss of status in the wider community, don’t want to be confused with the newcomers” (Montana 1986, 1).

Even as we see these inter-class differences within the so-called “Hispanic community” and the self-serving agendas promoted by a minority who pretend to represent a monolithic Hispanic ethnicity/race, we can also observe class alliances that cut across ethnic boundaries. A relevant case study of cross-ethnic relations between African Nuyoricans and African Americans in New York City is illustrative of the relationship between racial and ethnic discrimination. Urciuoli (1991) demonstrates with a variety of examples that language is a stronger ethnic boundary marker between Puerto Rican migrants and Anglo Americans than between poor African Nuyoricans and poor African Americans. Much resentment occurs if a Spanish-speaking Anglo ignores ethnic differences and the prejudicial behavior patterns based thereon and speaks to a Puerto Rican in Spanish, while African Americans can move back and forth between English and ‘street-corner Spanish’ with no offense taken. “There is no fixed boundary between the Puerto Rican and black speech communities” (Urciuoli 1991, 297). In this case, ethnicity underscores or reinforces the class and racial distinctions between Anglos and Puerto Ricans, while ethnic differentiation is virtually obliterated by class and racial equality between poor African Americans and poor Nuyoricans. On the other hand, Puerto Rican women do emphasize their ethnic distinctiveness when it comes to discussing the role of a “good” mother lapsing into Spanish in the presence of African American women who are seen to frame their ideas of the maternal role differently.

F. Padilla recommends a cross-ethnic political strategy to Puerto Ricans and other Spanish-speaking groups in Chicago on the basis of class identity, advocating the formation of alliances with African Americans in order to combat the “internal colonialism” and “dehumanizing,” “competitive,” “materialistic imperialism” practiced by Anglo American society against ethnic/racial minorities (1987, 7, 232, 238). Such a strategy could take advantage of Chicago’s large, black, Puerto Rican community to more easily form these cross-ethnic alliances with Chicago’s African American population.

As a matter of fact, such an alliance has already worked in Chicago. Two Latinos were elected to the

Chicago City Council with the help of a Black-Latino coalition and promptly threw their political support to Mayor Harold Washington, an African American, in order to defeat Chicago's infamous Democratic Party machine. "In the process, they brought about what some have called the most dramatic shift in power in any American city this century" (Freedberg 1986). The coalition seems to have fallen apart in the interim, however, since the son of Mayor Richard Daley (the founder of the manipulative Democratic Party machine) became the Windy City's mayor.

Another example of cross-ethnic working class coalition is outlined by María de los Angeles Torres (1988). She explains that the Cuban American community in Miami as a whole does not deserve the elitist reputation that their vocal, rabidly anti-Castro, politically astute minority has gained for it. She cites Philip Foner, "America's leading labor historian," as saying that working-class Cuban Americans were in the United States long before Castro came to power and had helped the left wing of the American Federation of Labor during its early years (1988, 392).

## Conclusion

As the foregoing demonstrates, it is difficult to put a handle on the meaning of "Hispanic," other than its nominal association with that which comes from Spain. The wars of independence were fought throughout the Caribbean and Latin America during the nineteenth century in order to break the political and economic hold that colonialist Spain had maintained for better than three centuries. The emergence of a *raza* made up of a mixture of Spanish, indigenous and African biological and cultural elements over the previous 300 years had all but overwhelmed any purely Hispanic heritage—except for the pervasive use of the Spanish language as the area's *lingua franca*, and the largely counterfeit claims to Spanish nobility made by the Latino ruling classes and those aspiring to become members of the same.

If communities, organizations, coalitions and individuals in the United States are going to build power blocks on the basis of ethnic/racial identities or class interests to seek redress of grievances and to promote common agendas, participants must be aware that Latino, African, and Anglo professional politicians and wealthy, powerful, Anglo members of the ruling class, as well as Latino and African American aspirants to it, are capable of manipulating those blocks for their own interests. Whether these groupings are made up of Chicanos, Mexicanos, Nuyoricans, Latinos, Africans, working people, middle-class types, Hispanics, or some combination thereof, solidarity is only as permanent as

the goals which the group maintains and the makeup of its opposition. In other words, ethnicity/race and class identities are situational, changing as the circumstances they face change. These, then, are what are called sociological identities.

Many personal identities are situational-sociological in nature, as well. My identity is primarily that of a woman when I confront the sexist injustices of men in union with other men. I am a parent when I feel my children are not getting the best education they deserve. I am a "woman of color" when I deal with the university administration as I struggle to assist members of racial/ethnic minorities obtain the best education a university can provide. And I am a Chicana when I teach courses on Mexican Americans in the Department of Ethnic Studies. Yes, and on occasion, I might even feel called upon to be "Hispanic," depending on who are the opponents and what "Hispanics" are after.

However, if it is a question of my own personal identity, my psychological identity, how I think of myself in the deepest recess of my heart and psyche, I am a Chicana. For this label alone fully emphasizes my oppressed gender, my suppressed Mexican Indian roots and my chauvinistic Hispanic heritage, as these elements of my identity have been molded by my life in these sexist, racist and class-conscious United States.



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