Rhode Island College
Digital Commons @ RIC

Faculty Publications | Faculty Books and Publications

Summer 6-2006

In Search of America

Ellen Bigler
Rhode Island College, ebigler@ric.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.ric.edu/facultypublications

Part of the Ethnic Studies Commons, Latin American Languages and Societies Commons, and the Latin American Studies Commons

Citation
Bigler, E. (2006). In search of America: Latina/os (re)constructing the USA. *Revista da FAEEBA - Educacao e Contemporaneidade, 15*(25), 239-257.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Books and Publications at Digital Commons @ RIC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ RIC. For more information, please contact kayton@ric.edu.

IN SEARCH OF AMÉRICA: LATINA/OS (RE)CONSTRUCTING THE U.S.A.

Ellen Bigler, Ph.D. *

ABSTRACT

Taken collectively, Latinos are now the largest "minority" group in the USA. This chapter, with a focus on U.S. Latinos, explores the changing face of the USA in recent decades and the significance of this demographic change for the ongoing construction and negotiation of an American identity. The "culture wars" (e.g., debates over the canon, curriculum, and language) of the late 1980s and 1990s, and the contested role of schools in the arena of critical multiculturalism, are examined for insights into the bases of resistance to change. The author draws from her experiences in public schools as both a teacher and a researcher, as well as her experiences educating future teachers.

Keywords: American Identity – US Latinos – Racialization – Latinization – Borderlands

RESUMO

EM BUSCA DA AMÉRICA: LATINOS (RE)CONSTRUINDO OS ESTADOS UNIDOS

Considerados coletivamente, os Latinos constituem atualmente o maior grupo minoritário nos Estados Unidos. Este artigo, com enfoque nos Latinos dos EUA, explora a mudança da "cara" dos EUA nas décadas recentes e o significado dessa mudança demográfica para a subseqüente construção e negociação da identidade americana. As guerras culturais (i.e. debates sobre o cânone, o currículo e a linguagem) das décadas de 80 e 90, bem como o papel controverso das escolas na arena do multiculturalismo, são analisadas através de registros das fontes de resistência às mudanças. A autora utiliza suas experiências em escolas públicas, como professora e pesquisadora, além de ser educadora na formação de futuros professores.

Palavras-chave: Identidade Americana – Latinos nos EUA – Racialização – Latinização – Fronteiras

* Professor, Department of Educational Studies/ Dept. of Anthropology. HBS 217-1. Rhode Island College. 600 Mt. Pleasant Avenue. Providence, RI 02906 - U.S.A. Email: ebigler@ric.edu

we gave birth
to a new generation
AmeRícan salutes all folklores,
european, Indian, black, Spanish,
and anything else compatible…
(Tato Laviera, AmeRícan, 1985, p.94)

Latina/os[1] have long been invisible in the collective U.S. imagination. Their "invisibility" changed forever on June 18, 2003, when the U.S. Census Bureau announced that U.S. Latina/os[2] had reached a long-anticipated and symbolically significant milestone in the U.S.; Latinos were now the nation's largest "minority," displacing African Americans (EL NASSER, 2003). The news coverage on the significance of this event for understanding who we are as a nation spoke of Hispanics as if they were a monolithic population. Never mind that there is no pan-ethnic Latina/o identity and that the term "Latina/os" encompasses diverse groups, histories, generations, social classes, and even languages. And never mind that for Americans[3] in some parts of the nation the news was not exactly news – California, for instance, where as of July 4 2001[4] over 50 percent of all babies born were already Hispanic (MURPHY, 2003). The nation had crossed a threshold that pointed beyond all doubt to the growing latinization of the population.

In this chapter I examine the impact of the Latina/o presence in the U.S.A. through time, and the paradigms that they have challenged and/or helped undermine. Latinos have forced the nation to re-visit how the American West was "won" (and therefore how to characterize the building of the United States); to re-visit what constitutes "the" immigrant experience; to re-think how we see one another racially (beyond the black/white binary); and to re-conceptualize what constitutes the "border" and being "American" in an era characterized by increasing global interdependence.

An Enduring – and Marginalized – Latina/o Presence

Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, unlike their European counterparts, initially became part of the U.S.A. through conquest. The acquisition of Florida in the early 1800s brought people with Spanish roots into the nation. The first significant numbers of Latina/os to become part of the American population, though, were incorporated through U.S. acquisition of Mexican lands in the mid-1800s. Mexico lost almost half of its land and three-quarters of its mineral resources in the mid-1800s to its powerful northern neighbor (GONZALEZ, 2000). Texas' contrived secession and U.S. victory in the Mexican War were followed by the subsequent "purchase" from Mexico of what was to become the American Southwest. These acquisitions were a thin veneer for 19th century U.S. imperialism. As one Chicana (Mexican American) poet put it, "No crucé la frontera, la frontera me cruzó a mí" (ROSALDO, 1997). These realities, however, run counter to the historical narrative traditionally taught in U.S. history texts, depicting the U.S. as a nation of immigrants moving east to west into seemingly uninhabited spaces.

Mexicans in the U.S., while their experiences differed somewhat depending upon their state of residence, rapidly came to constitute a class of exploited laborers. Stigmatized, socially segregated, and politically marginalized, they

[1] This is a new term gaining popularity in the U.S. in order to include women (Latinas), also sometimes written as Latino/as.

[2] The umbrella terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" are often used interchangeably in the U.S. to refer to people of Latin American origin. "Hispanic" was introduced by the U.S. government in the 1970s, and then adopted in the 1980 census to identify U.S. residents who trace their ancestry to Spanish-speaking regions of the world. "Latino" gained popularity in the 1980s and 1990s, largely because more politicized community members felt it affirmed their Latin American (and therefore racially mixed) origins rather than privileging their Spanish roots. As such, it also can embrace the growing Brazilian population now in the U.S. A recent survey by the Pew Hispanic Center revealed that only 24 percent prefer to use the terms "Hispanic" or "Latino." Overall 54 percent preferred to be identified by their country of origin—though among American-born Hispanics that dropped to 29 percent, with 46 percent preferring to be identified as "Americans" (BUSTOS, 2002).

[3] I acknowledge the problems with using this term to refer to only people of the USA. There is however no suitable substitute in English.

[4] There is a delicious irony here. July 4 is the date that the 13 original colonies (all on the east coast, and populated by European, African-origin peoples and Native Americans) declared independence from Britain.

became what historian Rudolfo Acuña (1988) would later characterize as an "internal colony". Yet their contributions to the development of the American West were invaluable (TAKAKI, 1993); Mexican and Mexican American labor in agriculture and ranching, in mines and on the railroads played a significant role in the expansion of American capitalism into the Southwest. The numbers of Mexicans and Mexican American communities grew as U.S. employers, hand in hand with the U.S. government, sought to encourage migration to provide a source of cheap labor. The enduring racism and marginalization that these early Mexican-origin communities encountered from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s set the stage for the particular form of political activism that was to mark the 1960s and 1970s.

Puerto Ricans too became U.S. Americans through conquest. The U.S. defeated Spain in 1898 in the Spanish American War, acquiring Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam in the process. The government refused to grant Puerto Rican demands for independence, and, in fact, gave them less autonomy than they had experienced under the Spanish at the commencement of the war. Almost twenty years later, in 1917, the U.S. granted Puerto Ricans citizenship. Citizenship in turn made them eligible to migrate freely to the mainland. There they constituted a readily available labor pool in the Northeast and filled 12,000 jobs created by the war effort. The U.S. government inducted another 18,000 Puerto Rican men into the military for World War I, where they were obliged to serve in racially segregated units (DEFREITAS, 1999).

Puerto Ricans, like their Mexican American counterparts, suffered the consequences of a racialized social order in the U.S. that assumed Anglo-American superiority and the "racial" inferiority of racially "mixed" Mexican and Puerto Rican peoples. Assumptions of racial superiority on the part of U.S. Americans went hand in hand with assumptions of cultural superiority. Official government policy deliberately attempted to "Americanize" Puerto Ricans on the Island through establishment of a secular public school system. Students were taught U.S. heroes, holidays, symbols, historical narratives, and the English language (NEGRÓN DE MONTILLA, 1975). Ironically, Americanization – in essence cultural and linguistic imperialism – contributed to a legacy of resistance to Anglo-American dominance on the Island that continues to the present (ZENTELLA, 1981).

The U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico introduced American corporations to the Island and brought about economic shifts that displaced small farmers and propelled thousands of Puerto Ricans into a migratory stream between Island and mainland. By 1940 there were 70,000 Puerto Ricans on the mainland (PADILLA, 1985). "Operation Bootstrap," the U.S. government program begun in 1947 to transform Puerto Rico's plantation economy into an industrial one, created still further economic displacement. These shifts, alongside cheap air fares from the Island to New York City, were intended to encourage migration to meet demands for cheap mainland labor. The Puerto Rican "diaspora" was underway. The numbers of Puerto Ricans on the mainland reached nearly 900,000 by 1960, with the migrants concentrated overwhelmingly in the New York City metropolitan area (GROSFOGUEL and GEORAS, 1996). By 1990, the mainland Puerto Rican population, despite significant return migration, topped 2.5 million.

Cubans, the third largest Latina/o population, initially settled along the east coast in the late 1800s and early 1900s to work in factories. The demographics of Cuban immigrants changed dramatically, however, with Fidel Castro's ascent to power in 1959. Island elites fleeing Castro, poured into Miami. By 1965, 210,000 had entered the U.S. By 1973, another 345,000 had arrived (PORTES and BACH, 1985). Their refugee status, the warm welcome and U.S. government aid they received, their social and cultural capital, and their light skins[5] positioned them very differently from their Mexican Ame-

[5] Later waves of Cubans, in particular the *marielitos* of the 1980s, included more dark-skinned and working class Cubans. By then the Cuban enclave was well established and able to offer their own support (PORTES and STEPICK 1993).

rican and Puerto Rican working class counterparts. These early Cuban immigrants were able to parlay their many advantages in to economic and political strength, benefiting later immigrants and revitalizing Miami in the process.

By 1970, these three groups collectively comprised five percent of the U.S. population. Mexican Americans, the overwhelming majority, remained concentrated in the Southwest (with a growing number making their way to the Midwest), Puerto Ricans in the New York City region, and Cubans in the Miami area. In the three decades since, Latina/os have dispersed far beyond their traditional places of settlement, and their numbers have almost tripled as a consequence of increased (im)migration[6] and the higher birth rates of this relatively younger population. As of 2004, Hispanics[7] comprised 13.5 percent of the U.S. population and numbered 39.9 million (NEW YORK TIMES, 2004). There are more Hispanics in the U.S. today than are Peruvians, Chileans, or Canadians in their respective countries. Mexican Americans, numbering 20.6 million, continue to constitute the majority group, approximately 60 percent. Puerto Ricans on the mainland (roughly half of all Puerto Ricans) now number 3.4 million, and Cuban Americans 1.2 million. Other Latin Americans seeking economic opportunity or political refuge further swell the ranks of the Latina/o population. These include Dominicans (2.2 million), various Central American populations (4.8 million), and 3.8 million South Americans (INFOPLEASE, 2004), including possibly up to one million Brazilians (BALLVE, 2003).

The tremendous diversity within the Latina/o population is oftentimes obscured by the use of the umbrella term "Hispanic" in the media, or by the demographic dominance of Mexican Americans. The opportunity to be seen as being from one's particular country of origin can depend upon where one lives in the USA. As Davis (2001, p.20) points out, in Los Angeles "Salvadoreans, Guatemalans and Ecuadoreans – as well as indigenous immigrants like Zapotecs, Yaquís, Kanjobals and Mixtecs – struggle to defend their distinctive identities within a hegemonically Mexican/Chicano popular culture." In New York City, meanwhile, the dominant Hispanic population is no longer Puerto Rican. Dominicans are catching up to Puerto Ricans numerically, and Mexican immigrant communities are on the rise. These demographic shifts in turn make intercultural exchanges more likely. Fully half of the Spanish-surname marriages in New York City are intermarriages between people of different Hispanic backgrounds, in contrast to Los Angeles, for instance, where only 14 percent of married people of Mexican origin married non-Mexican origin Hispanics (see DAVIS, 2001, p.22). This variability underlines the point that Latina/os fail to fit any one mold; they bring differing cultures and histories to the U.S., and live different realities depending on a myriad of factors from time of arrival to race to generation to class to place of settlement. However, despite such variability, there are similarities in their experiences that situate them largely outside the so-called American "Melting Pot."

The American Melting Pot: Mobility or Marginality

> America is God's Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming! A fig for your feuds and vendettas (…) into the Crucible with you all! (Israel Zangwill, The Melting Pot, 1909, p.37)

Like other people of color[8], the U.S. Latina/o population set roots in a nation built upon profound racial inequalities. The nation's founders from the outset sought to limit eligibility for citizenship. Only white propertied males acqui-

[6] The term connotes both immigration and the Puerto Rican migration (as U.S. citizens).

[7] The U.S. Census uses the term "Hispanic" and does not count Brazilians among them.

[8] "People of color" is a term used currently in the U.S. to refer to non-whites, to reference their collective experiences of discrimination historically and their commonalities. It differs from the term "colored people," which was used along with "Negro" to refer to African Americans up until the 1950s and was replaced with the terms "Black" or "African American."

red the right to vote. In 1790, Congress passed a bill limiting naturalization to "free white (male) citizens," claiming itself a democracy while systematically denying the rights of citizenship to both people of color and women. It took another 75 years before slavery officially ended – and almost a century beyond that before racial segregation laws in the South were ruled unconstitutional. Mexicans incorporated into the U.S. after the Mexican War of 1848 soon lost rights granted them in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and were quickly overwhelmed numerically and ultimately subjugated by whites flooding into California in search of gold. Others fared no better (TAKAKI, 1993). Native Americans became a conquered people and suffered the consequences of oftentimes-genocidal policies. Chinese workers who struggled alongside Mexicans to complete the nation's first transcontinental railroad by 1869, found the open racism they encountered in their day-to-day lives codified in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act that forbid further immigration from China. Anti-miscegenation laws (forbidding marriage across racial lines) were on the books of many states as late as 1967, until the Supreme Court belatedly declared them unconstitutional.

Being "American" had quickly come to be constructed as being "white". Newly arrived Europeans danced along racial border lines. The religious and cultural "otherness" of the Irish, arriving in large numbers in the mid-1800s, and the cultural and "racial" differences of southern and eastern European immigrants, who poured into eastern cities between the 1880s and 1910s[9], made them suspect. While most settled in urban areas in ethnic enclaves, maintaining their native languages and customs, they were under tremendous pressure to abandon them. Racist and prejudicial attitudes of the "old-timers" were further legitimated by many scientists' arguments for the extant social hierarchy being grounded in innate differences. Madison Grant, a highly regarded anthropologist of the 1920s, for instance argued that the:

> … new immigration contained a large and increasing number of the weak, the broken, and the mentally crippled of all races drawn from the lowest stratum of the Mediterranean basin…. The whole tone of American life, social, moral, and political, has been lowered and vulgarized by… human flotsam. (HANDLIN, 1957, p.93-94, cited in: SANTA ANA, 2002, p.274)

Mobility

In a relatively short time, however, these populations moved from being viewed as questionably "white" to being accepted as part of the larger American community (DILEONARDO, 1992). The new European immigrants and their descendants benefited from a confluence of factors that worked to reduce their segregation and identity with their homeland cultures. Significantly, there was a steep decline in immigration from Europe beginning in the late 1910s, as nativist sentiments led to restrictive immigration policies designed to keep out the "unassimilables." This meant less replenishment of ethnic communities, a phenomenon furthered by the low numbers of immigrants arriving during the Great Depression and World War II eras. The children of immigrants, meanwhile, mixed with native-born children in schools, factories, and the military. Factory jobs that did not require education were widely available. Their significant voting power was courted by city political machines. Federal legislation supporting unionization in the 1930s and 1940s ensured that many blue-collar jobs paid a living wage. A booming World War II economy, the U.S. government-funded post-war GI Bill that provided free college educations for returning veterans, an expanding economy and higher education system, and an expanded middle class in the 1950s and 1960s[10] all worked to their

[9] Both the Irish and the southern and eastern European populations were considered racially "other" and a threat to the assumed superiority of the (white) American stock. See for instance Roediger (1991) and Gould (1981) on then-dominant social constructions of race and how these groups negotiated and contested the boundaries of the racial constructions they encountered in the U.S.A.

[10] See *American Conversations*: Puerto Ricans, White Ethnics, and Multiculturalism (BIGLER, 1999) for a summary of the differing experiences and thus different outcomes for white U.S. Americans and Puerto Ricans in the 20th century.

advantage. Marginalized people of color, though, were largely unable to take advantage of much of this.

The vision of the U.S.A. as a bubbling caldron, a "melting pot" where all people blended and lost their distinctive ethnic characteristics, had a firm hold on the social imaginary for well over half of the 20th century. Accompanying this metaphor was an almost religious faith in the American Dream, with the nation seen as a land of opportunity for all, where hard work would provide the route to upward mobility. New immigrants and their descendants, so the story went, would progress through hard work up the social class ladder, marching along a linear path, abandoning their foreign customs, tongues, and loyalties, and assimilating into the American mainstream.

The brunt of the descendants of the waves of southern and eastern Europeans who entered at the turn of the 19th century did indeed achieve upward mobility. It was not hard work alone though that made possible their success – or explained the failure of populations of color to rise in the social hierarchy.

Marginality

Descendants of turn-of-the-century European immigrants did not experience the enduring consequences of racialization and racial discrimination that have long haunted people of color in the U.S. Like Native Americans, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, and African Americans, Latina/os endured prejudice, discrimination, and oftentimes legalized segregation.[11] Chicanos in the Southwest were politically, economically, and socially marginalized. Puerto Ricans in the New York area in the 1950s and 1960s found themselves on the economic and social margins of society, heavily concentrated in the secondary labor market and deteriorating inner cities. Public schools for both populations were inferior. Like other people of color, they were essentially excluded from the American melting pot.

The ensuing residential and occupational segregation they experienced, hand in hand with the ongoing ethnic revitalization that occurs as Latina/os maintain connections to their homelands and newcomers arrive on a regular basis, enhanced the likelihood of developing a distinct identity and ethnic solidarity. As Nelson and Tienda note:

> (R)esidential and occupational concentration – are especially crucial to the formation of ethnic group solidarity in that they produce common class interests, lifestyles and friendships. When the ethnic experience includes rejection, discrimination and oppression, the elaboration of ethnic ties provides a ready system of support for groups distinguishable by race, national origin or language. (1997, p.9)

While the maintenance of identity and language is understood as a voluntary phenomenon, and most certainly does have an element of choice attached to it, it is also a product of a different reality for Latina/o communities when compared to the experiences of early 1900s southern and eastern European immigrants. Identity may seem a voluntary phenomenon, but we can also speak of the "structuring" of ethnic identity[12].

Despite second-class citizenship, men from these marginalized groups fought valiantly for democracy in World War II[13]. What they found though upon their return, though, was that they were still denied full citizenship in their own country. Mexican American soldiers on leave dressed in zoot suits, for instance, became victims of mob violence in California while police stood idly by. A decorated Mexican American

[11] It is far beyond my capacity given space limitations to trace the experiences of these groups in this paper. For an excellent and succinct insight into U.S. history seen from the side of the oppressed, see Ronald Takaki's *A Different Mirror* (1993).

[12] But at the same time the boundaries are porous, Latina/os are a diverse lot, and as recent studies substantiate, there are many ways to "be" Latina/o and to characterize the Latina/o experience. See for instance García-Colón, 2004. We must therefore avoid overgeneralizing when trying to encapsulate "the Latina/o experience."

[13] Soldiers from these groups, including Japanese Americans whose own families were interned in the U.S. during the war as potential security threats, were among the most decorated groups.

soldier was denied burial rights in a military cemetery because of his race. These wartime experiences gave impetus to the long-simmering struggle for equal rights, and alongside the impact of colonial independence struggles in the 1950s, gave birth to the various civil rights movements of the 1950s, and 1960s.

Turning Points: From "Greaser [14]" to "Chicano," from "Spic [15]" to "Boricua"

The two largest and oldest U.S. Latina/o populations, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, "invented" (KLOR DE ALVA, 1997) new identities in the U.S. that affirm that they are "neither/nor" (i.e., not Mexican and not U.S. American), but rather something else. These "inventions" took different forms in the two communities, reflecting their different realities and histories.

Mexican Americans had long found themselves suspended between two poles, accepted as neither Americans nor Mexicans. They were "pocho," too Americanized to be Mexican, and too "Mexican" in the U.S. to be American. The terms "Mexican" or "Greaser," were routinely used disparagingly by whites in the southwestern U.S. while the "polite" term to refer to someone of Mexican descent was "Spanish" – reflecting the valuing of the Spanish (and therefore European) side of Mexicans' roots. Mainland Puerto Ricans were also derided on returning to the Island for their perceived loss of Puerto Rican culture and the intermixture of English into their Spanish. In both Mexican American and Puerto Rican communities, light skin and "white" features were valued more highly.

The 1960s marked an important moment in the nation's history. The Black Civil Rights Movement began as a push for integration into the U.S. American mainstream, but the slow pace of change and the resistance African American activists encountered produced a new set of leaders, among them Malcolm X, who argued instead for cultural nationalism and challenged assimilation as the goal. "Black Pride"[16], with its rejection of mainstream aesthetic values and representations, gave impetus to other similarly positioned groups. "Negroes" became "Blacks"; Mexican Americans became "Chicanos"; and Puerto Rican mainlanders began to refer to themselves as "Neoricans" or "Nuyoricans." These terms affirmed their differences, and represented the emergence of new "politicized" peoples, born of a fusion of Spanish, Indian, African and American roots[17].

Chicano and Puerto Rican communities organized and challenged mainstream "cultural deficit" depictions of their communities and the unquestioned assumption that they were positioned like European immigrants to assimilate into the mainstream. Instead, many argued, they were better understood as "internal colonies." Challenging the need to abandon their languages and cultures to be accepted as "Americans," they rejected the vision of the U.S. as a melting pot and the desirability of being assimilated.

In the Mexican American community, farm worker organizers César Chávez and Delores Huerta fought for the rights of workers to unionize. Utilizing ethnic pride, shared religious beliefs, and a sense of community and history to organize Mexican and Mexican American farm workers (ACUÑA, 1988), their actions sparked the Chicano Movement. Young and politically active Mexican Americans took up the Farmworkers' banner to fight for their rights. Reborn "Chicanos" – originally a derogatory term used to refer to lower class members of the community – they organized to reappropriate lands taken improperly from Mexican Americans, to organize youth, to form new political parties, and to celebrate their cultural roots.

---

[14] The term is a derogatory one used in the U.S. to refer to someone who is of Mexican origin.

[15] The term "spic" is derogatory, and Puerto Ricans were frequently referred to as spics.

[16] It was not totally new in the 1960s. Marcus Garvey in the 1920s taught a similar doctrine with his "Back to Africa" movement.

[17] The thrust for equal rights and cultural pride also took off in other oppressed communities, including American Indians and gays, who saw parallels in their own situations.

El Movimiento, the Chicano Movement, flourished between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s. The Southwest became "Aztlan," the mythical homeland of the Aztec peoples who Cortes conquered in the 1500s. Aztec legend held that a drought had forced the Aztecs out of their original homeland northwest of Tenochtitlán (central Mexico, now Mexico City); led by their gods they roamed until a divine sign appeared, an eagle perched on a cactus with a serpent in its mouth. Chicanos, turning Anglo claims on their head, thus claimed *themselves* as the original inhabitants of the American Southwest and positioned Euro-Americans as the outsiders. They transformed the Indian heritage of Mexicans from a source of shame into a source of pride and an affirmation of their hybrid roots. Chicanos "re-invented" themselves – not as hyphenated Americans, but as a people with a unique and valuable heritage and culture. Chicano artists appropriated Mexican imagery and the mural form for their public art; musicians and dancers resurrected "indigenous" music and dance and taught it to their children; social critics assailed the media for its lack of positive images of Mexican Americans; activists demanded – and obtained – Chicano Studies programs in the universities. A new generation of Chicano academics joined forces with academics from other oppressed groups and their allies to question media representations, school curricula and textbooks, and historical narratives that had long portrayed the nation from the perspective of the dominant Anglo-American group[18]. While the Chicano Movement was in decline by the mid-1970s, it left in its wake a powerful legacy of social change.

In Puerto Rican communities in the Northeast and Chicago, activists organized around issues relevant to their urban communities: decent housing, health care and community services, elimination of racial discrimination and police brutality, drug abuse programs, and better educational services for their children including support for bilingual education. Puerto Rican writers and artists explored and valorized their identities as a hybrid people. Their spiritual homeland was one rooted in an actual physical space, the island. Puerto Rico was "Boriquen," the Taino Indian name for Puerto Rico, and Puerto Ricans "boricuas" (KLOR DE ALVA, 1997). The Puerto Rican Young Lords Party, the most well-known political organization, sought to develop links between mainland Puerto Ricans and their island counterparts and advocated independence for the Island (YOUNG LORDS PARTY, 1971).

Puerto Rican activists also sought to build connections with their African American neighbors, joining forces to work for programs that benefited both communities. As Pablo Guzmán, a dark-skinned Puerto Rican activist succinctly put it:

> Puerto Ricans like myself, who are darker-skinned, who look like Afro-Americans, couldn't… (avoid seeing connections between the two communities), 'cause to do that would be to escape into a kind of fantasy. Because before people called me a spic, they called me a nigger. (YOUNG LORDS PARTY, 1971, p.74).

Those connections – based in shared experiences of prejudice and discrimination and grounded in their shared neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces and the Afro-Caribbean elements brought from the island – are visible today in much of the Nuyorican literature, music, language usage, and artistic production.

> melao was nineteen years old
> when he arrived from santurce (city in Puerto Rico)
> spanish speaking streets…
> malaíto his son now answered
> in black american soul english talk
> with native plena sounds (African-based Puerto Rican music)
> and primitive urban salsa beats. (LAVIERA, 1988, p.27)

[18] See for instance the New York State Education Department Ibero-American Heritage Curriculum Project (1987): *Latinos in the Making of the USA: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, which involved academics from various Latino communities and Latin American countries. It was originally conceptualized as a "celebration" of Hispanics to be released in 1992, marking 500 years of the "discovery" by Columbus of the "New World." The academics involved in the Project insisted instead that it also look critically at the experiences and situation of U.S. Latinos and the making of Latin America. The heated national response to the New York State Education Department's publication of a suggested "Curriculum of Inclusion" (see SOBOL, 1989), an analysis generated largely by minority academics, is also noteworthy.

The black/white racial binary that the U.S. was founded on – where one drop of "black" blood makes a person "black" – conflicts with notions of race that Latinos bring to the U.S. (RODRÍGUEZ, 2000). Puerto Ricans, among all Latinos, have felt the impact of racialization in the U.S. most profoundly. Indeed, different shades of color within the community have translated into different experiences (KLOR DE ALVA, 1997; RODRÍGUEZ, 1989). Dark-skinned Puerto Ricans must confront a society that sees them first as "black". Piri Thomas, a Puerto Rican writer, recounts in his autobiography *Down These Mean Streets* his painful discovery of what it meant to be dark-skinned when he applied for a sales job. Told that a job is filled, his light-skinned Puerto Rican friend who applies after him is hired for the position on the spot.

> I didn't feel so much angry as I did sick, like throwing-up sick. Later, when I told this story to my buddy, a colored cat, he said, 'Hell Piri, Ah know stuff like that can sure burn a cat up, but a Negro faces that all the time.' 'I know that,' I said, 'but I wasn't a Negro then. I was still only a Puerto Rican.' (1967, p.104)

The racial diversity of the New York Puerto Rican and Dominican populations, in turn, has promoted a "more reciprocal and fluid relationship" (FLORES, 1993, p.183) to African American culture. The cultural sharing and fusion that takes place is visible in mainland Puerto Rican music, dance, and language. Latino rap for instance creatively comments on these lived realities in intermingling Spanish and Black English:

> I rarely talk Spanish and a little trigueño (Spanglish)
> People be swearin' (Black English verb construction)
> I'm a moreno (black)
> Pero guess what? I'm puertorriqueño.
> Word 'em up.
> All jokes aside, I ain't tryin' to dis (Black English phrase equivalent to "disrespect") any race.
> (lyrics by KT, in FLORES, 2000, p.129)

Race is not a fixed biological essence but rather a set of socially constructed meanings that vary from one location to another (OMI and WINANT, 1994). These meanings are subject to change and contestation, as seen in the case of the counter-narrative launched by Latina/os and African American social movements beginning in the 1960s. "Race" in the U.S. – with only categories of "white" and now "nonwhite," – differs from "race" in the Caribbean and Latin America, where intermediary categories exist and "race" is not as fixed (RODRÍGUEZ, 2000). People in the same family can be classified as different races, depending on their physical appearance. Changes in dress or social class can alter perceptions of one's race. This fluidity runs counter to American ways of evaluating race, and the encounter with American categories can be disorienting for Latina/os. Jorge Duany, for instance (2003, p.274), recounts a colleague's story of how she moved from being an *india clara* (literally, a light Indian) in the Dominican Republic to being perceived as "black" in the U.S. Dominicans in the U.S. may choose to emphasize their "dominicanness" to avoid being taken for African American (DUANY, 2003). The experience of living in the U.S., though, can also result in a greater identification with African Americans, recognition of their common bonds, and ultimately greater opportunities for cultural exchange as both Puerto Ricans and Dominicans live and interact in close proximity with their urban African American counterparts. As Duany (2003, p.283-284) notes: "For many racially mixed immigrants (from the Caribbean), coming to America has meant coming to terms with their own, partially suppressed, sometimes painful, but always liberating sense of negritude."

As Puerto Ricans and "Dominican Yorks" on the mainland participate in these different realities, they become culturally differentiated from their Caribbean counterparts. The return to the idealized homeland can lead to disenchantment and psychic pain (FLORES, 2000), as they struggle with the clashes between the imaginary and the "real," and the disorienting identity claims of "here" and "there".

> yo peleo por ti, puerto rico, ¿sabes?
> yo me defiendo por tu nombre, ¿sabes?
> entro en tu isla, me siento extraño, ¿sabes?
> entro a buscar más y más, ¿sabes?

pero tú con tus calumnias,
me niegas tu sonrisa
me siento mal, agallao
yo soy tu hijo,
de una migración
pecado forzado,
me mandaste a nacer nativo en otras tierras
por qué, porque éramos pobres, ¿verdad?
Porque tu querías vaciarte de tu gente pobre,
Ahora regreso, con un corazón boricua, y tú,
Me desprecias, me miras mal, me atacas mi hablar,
Mientras comes mcdonalds en discotecas americanas,
Y no pude bailarla salsa en san juan, la que yo
Bailo en mis barrios llenos de todas tus costumbres,
así que, si tú no me quieres, pues yo tengo
un puerto rico sabrosísimo en que buscar refugio
en nueva york, y en muchos otros callejones
que honran tu presencia, preservando todos
tus valores, así que,por favor, no me
hagas sufrir, ¿sabes? (LAVIERA, 1985, p.53)

The differing experiences and perceptions of mainland and Island Puerto Ricans could not have been more apparent than in their response to Mattel's release of "Puerto Rican Barbie" in 1997. Puerto Ricans on the Island were delighted; Puerto Rican Barbie was an affirmation of their existence. Mainland Puerto Ricans, on the other hand, were offended by her light skin, Anglicized features, and colonial-tiered dress. The divergent views were prominently displayed in Island and mainland Puerto Rican news coverage.

> Evidently both communities wrapped a different narrative around the plastic and made the Barbie a desirable playmate – silent, but endowed – to engage in the increasingly high-stakes game of interests and intrigue called 'Puerto Rican identity.' (NEGRÓN-MUNTANER, 2002, p.39)

Puerto Ricans' disruption of racial categories in this instance – and so many others— speaks to the emergence of new ways of being "Puerto Rican" on the mainland. Like Chicanos' insistence on defining who they are, it also reveals the socially constructed nature of racial categories, providing yet another rent in the fabric of American binary constructions of race.

From Melting Pot to Tapestry?

Latina/os have been major contributors to a seismic shift in the U.S., from celebrating the nation as a homogeneous melting pot to conceptualizing and (at least in name) valuing it as culturally pluralistic, a "tapestry" or a "salad" made up of diverse and distinctive ingredients that taken together comprise a whole, with all contributing to the "mix." U.S. history and literature texts in schools today are more "multicultural" and sensitive to cultural stereotyping than texts in the 1960s (REINHOLD, 1991). More accurate and balanced treatments of Mexican-U.S. relations may still all too infrequently make their way into high school U.S. history texts (ROSALDO and FLORES, 1997), but there has been movement. Schools can no longer punish students for speaking Spanish on school grounds, as happened into the 1960s (CRAWFORD, 1995). Schools are now required to provide students assistance learning English since the 1973 Supreme Court case *Lau vs. Nichols*. Teachers in training are required to complete coursework on multicultural education. By 1997, the renowned American historian Nathan Glazer, who had earlier characterized the calls for affirming cultural pluralism and the emphasis on the oppression experienced by minority groups as divisive, epitomized the shift by proclaiming in print that "we are all multiculturalists now."

Backlash

The transition has not been a smooth and unidirectional one. The profound critique launched by people of color, women, social historians, and other academics and activists confronted a sustained counterattack beginning in the 1980s. It is a culture war that continues to the present day.

In my own ethnographic research in upstate New York in the early 1990s[19], in which I examined community and school discourses regar-

[19] See *American Conversations* (BIGLER, 1999) for a fuller treatment of the community conflict over multiculturalism and bilingualism.

ding educational and economic success and Latina/os' perceived inability to make progress in these areas, I repeatedly found Latina/os compared unfavorably to earlier white European immigrants. Their greater economic marginalization was seen not as owing to forces largely beyond their control – discrimination, loss of manufacturing jobs, globalization, impoverished homelands – but rather as the product of their unwillingness to work hard and sacrifice. Outspoken community elders – descendants of the turn-of-the-century southern and eastern Europeans – envisioned welfare as something that individuals abused to avoid work[20]:

> [Hispanics] seem to feel that they are owed something (…) [They should] exercise their rights and return to their native homeland. America, love it or leave it." (Letter to the Editor)

> [Latinos are responsible for] 90 percent of all troubles in Arnhem. (…) You people aren't wanted here – go get welfare somewhere else. (Letter to Latino community activists, read at a school board meeting)

> I can't understand why the Hispanic population doesn't want to be educated (…) Do you think that (…) [European immigrants] were just handed everything? No, they worked hard. (Speaker #13, public forum)

Latina/os' insistence on maintenance of a distinct ethnic identity and their use of Spanish in public were held to be choices that represented their unwillingness to "become" Americans:

> Why are these [Puerto Rican] kids doing this? Why are they not speaking English when they can? Why aren't they trying to fit into the mainstream? (…) There's never going to be an American identification if we all have our own areas. They're not different than earlier waves. They worked, they learned the language, and that was your key to success. (Debra Moskowitz, Euro-American Spanish language teacher, age thirty)

> Keep your heritage and language, speak Spanish at home or with your friends, but learn to speak English in school and the outside world if you want to succeed. [Loud applause from the audience.] Whether you like it or not, this is an English-speaking country (…) I myself am learning Spanish because I want to. You have to want to learn English. (School board member, public forum)

> They [Latinos] come here, they want their own ways, they want to change our ways. And our ways is our ways, and if they want their own ways, they should go back to wherever they came from. (Talk show caller)

Latinos, these older Euro-American citizens claimed, were confronting neither more nor less than what their own grandparents had confronted.

> If there's been racism in Arnhem school district, maybe I'm naïve, I don't know about it. I didn't feel it. . . . The Italians were called guineas and wops, so what's new, what's the difference? (Retired teacher, public forum)

> (Speaking to a guest who is upset about her daughter being called "nigger") Let me tell you something. Just like the one lady said, they were all – what are the Italian people called? Grease balls, wops, and everything like that. (…) [Did] they make a big fuss over it, and have trouble in the community over it? (…) I think it's [the complaints in the Latino community about their treatment] turning a lot of people that did like the Costa Ricans, the Puerto Ricans, the Hispanics, I think it's turning them the other way a lot. (local talk show caller)

What went unacknowledged in these community discourses were the structural factors and the ongoing racism facing Latina/os, differentiating them from earlier immigrants.

The Latina/o community challenged the picture painted by the white ethnic senior citizens. "Difference" was not problematic; they portrayed it as a positive quality and something that the nation was founded on. Spanish language maintenance was not a hindrance, but rather a strength.

> Nowhere in the U.S. Constitution is English the official language. (…) They left it open so that people who wanted to come (…) didn't have to

[20] The mid-1990s welfare reforms that put in place policies profoundly limiting people's access to welfare were envisioned as the catalyst for putting people back to work, and initially deemed a success. The reality was otherwise: it was the expansion of work opportunities in the late 1990s boom that meant that people could leave welfare. With jobs once again in jeopardy, the perceived success of the cutbacks appears to have been overly optimistic.

> worry about speaking English to fit in. (…) The "English Only" movement is only gonna damage the greater culture (…) because we're such a mixture of many, many cultures. (Latina/o college student, public forum)

> We should learn from other ethnic minorities who regret that they can't speak their native language. (…) We don't want our children to have that same regret. (Latina/o community agency leader, newspaper interview)

It was racism and exclusion, they argued, that damaged the self-esteem and chances for Latina/os' upward mobility:

> The self-esteem of Hispanic students is suffering in our schools, because we hear every day of negative messages about who we are and why we are here (…). We want to achieve (…) to organize as a group (…) [to] deal with the prejudice (…) constructively. (Latina/o high school student, public forum)

> Without that information [ethnic contributions to the United States], children are handicapped – they are defenseless – and information about their heritage is needed to arm them (…). If they hear nothing (…) then they think, 'I must be nothing.' (Latina/o community leader, newspaper interview)

The debates in this particular community had their own local "accent," but they were held against the backdrop of a larger national debate about language, the telling of history, and how to explain the prevailing sense of decline in the nation's wellbeing. The impact of de-industrialization and the move toward a service economy were being more intensely felt as economic restructuring threatened the traditional livelihood of blue collar male workers. Minorities simultaneously were entering the middle class and previously "white" institutions in greater numbers because of the successes of the civil rights movements and demanding changes. Conservative whites, threatened by earlier gains like government-supported affirmative action programs and bilingual education, organized to oppose what they viewed as "reverse racism," "government handouts," and divisive language and education policies they perceived as pandering to minorities. English Only and Official English movements gained ground[21]. Conservative intellectuals like historian Arthur Schlesinger joined the raucous debate in publishing *The Disuniting of America* (1991), which argued that the promotion of multiculturalism was dangerous to democracy because it threatened the unity of the nation. Racial tensions were palpable, albeit in a new form.

Into the 21st Century

While the economic boom beginning in the mid-1990s helped to momentarily quell some of the more strident voices, the subsequent economic downturn and the psychological and economic impact of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center Towers have contributed to a climate of uncertainty and greater potential for conservative movements. Latinos, whose demographic growth is being highly publicized, make an easy target.

Latina/os surpassed African-Americans as the second largest "racial" group in New York City in 1996; California joined New Mexico in becoming a "majority-minority society" in 2000; and in seven of the ten largest cities Latina/os now outnumber African Americans (DAVIS, 2001). Calls to close the borders against the "brown tide rising" have become louder.

California governor Pete Wilson in his re-election campaign, for instance, spoke of "hordes of Mexican immigrants," "invaders" that "pour" into the U.S., and of California as a state "awash under a brown tide" (SANTA ANA, 2002, p.286-287). Books like *Alien Nation* (BRIMELOW, 1995), which argues that the American people are in danger of being engulfed by foreigners, hit a responsive chord among many Americans. With a sense of social and economic vulnerability on the rise since the late 1990s, nativist forces have found new villains. African American "welfare queens," purported to be living off the fat of the land, have been

[21] See Bigler, 1999 for an analysis of this period, and an up-close ethnographic study of a community locked in conflict over multiculturalism and bilingual education.

displaced by the "flood" of Mexican immigrants as the culprits likely to bring down the nation. The well-read magazine Foreign Policy recently printed excerpts from Who Are We by Samuel Huntington (2004b), Chairman of the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies, in which the author sounds the alarm against Hispanic immigration. "One index foretells the future," he warns ominously, "In 1998, 'Jose' replaced 'Michael' as the most popular name for newborn boys in both California and Texas" (HUNTINGTON, 2004a, p.38).

> The persistent influx of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages. Unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture, forming instead their own political and linguistic enclaves – from Los Angeles to Miami – and rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream. The United States ignores this challenge at its peril. (HUNTINGTON, 2004a, p.30)

Responding to the outcry over Huntington's article, Patrick Buchanan, well-known spokesperson for right-wing causes and editor of The American Conservative, concurred:

> Will the U.S. Southwest cease to be truly American by mid-century? Is Mexifornia reality and Mexamerica[22] a certainty? (…) It is impossible to see who, or what, is going to stop the invasion of the United States before the nation's character is altered forever, and we become two nations with two languages and cultures – not unlike the Palestinians and Israelis on the West Bank. (BUCHANAN, 2004)

Huntington further argued that working class and middle class "white nationalism" in response to loss of jobs, government affirmative action programs, and perceived cultural and linguistic threats from the expanding power of Hispanics may be moving the U.S. toward racial conflict without precedent in our history. Continuation of large-scale immigration:

> … could divide the United States into a country of two languages and two cultures…. There is no Americano dream. There is only the American dream created by an Anglo-Protestant society. Mexican Americans will share in that dream and in that society only if they dream in English. (HUNTINGTON, 2004a, p.44-45)

Such arguments reflect an ignorance of, or willingness to ignore, our immigration and national history and the changing international scene. Hispanics are not "invading" the United States: The percentage of the U.S. that is foreign born today, 12.4 percent (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2005), is lower than in 1890, when 14.8 percent of Americans were foreign-born (SUÁREZ-OROZCO and ORFIELD, 2004). Three in five Hispanics are native-born U.S. citizens, and over 20 percent of immigrants were naturalized by 2002 (DANIELS, 2004). Hispanics are not rejecting education and choosing to remain impoverished: Immigrant children are completing more years of school than did immigrants a century ago (SUÁREZ-OROZCO and ORFIELD, 2004). Latin American "fatalism" is not about to create a separate cultural divide within the nation: Three-quarters of English-speaking Latina/os (the same percentage as the general population) disagree with the statement "It doesn't do any good to plan for the future because you don't have any control over it" (SURO, 2004). As for the charge that Hispanics are not hard-working and in pursuit of the American Dream, while most came to the U.S. with nothing, 78.6 percent of Hispanics today live above the poverty line (DANIELS, 2004). A recent survey by National Council of La Raza (2004) found that fully 90 percent strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement "If you work hard, you will succeed in America," and 89 percent strongly agreed that "It is important that Latina/o children get a college education."

Finally, while Latinos do tend to value speaking two languages, they are not the first American immigrants to want to maintain their native language. German immigrants – the very model of successful assimilation – from the colonial era through the early 1900s created lar-

[22] The terms "Mexifornia" and "Mexamerica" combine the words Mexico with California and America, signifying the "takeover" by Mexicans.

ge linguistic enclaves with German-language instruction in public schools. In 1880, four of every five students of German descent in St. Louis, for example, attended bilingual schools (SURO, 2004). Germans by World War I were economically and socially integrated into the U.S. Only the extreme anti-German sentiments of the war era led them to abandon their language and oftentimes their very names.

Unfortunately for the nation, given the need in a globalized economy for speakers of other languages, Latina/os do not appear to be retaining their language significantly better than earlier groups. The 2002 National Survey of Latina/os found that among second-generation adults, only seven percent relied on Spanish as the primary language. Half had no Spanish skills at all, and the rest were bilingual. Learning English is considered essential; eighty-six percent strongly agreed in the National Council of La Raza Survey (2004) that "The ability to speak English is important to succeed in this country," and 84 percent agree that "The government should support and expand the numbers of programs to help immigrants learn English." Hispanics also recognize the need to come together themselves if change is to occur; eighty-eight percent agreed that "It is important for the Hispanic community to work together to build political power."

Toward New Paradigms

Past models for understanding the immigrant experience are no longer viable for many of today's newcomers, who are better conceptualized as "transnationals." The globalization that has proceeded apace in recent decades has set millions of people around the world into motion, as neoliberal policies displace peoples and First World countries hold out some meager measure of hope to the dispossessed. One could argue that what the U.S. is witnessing is a "harvest of empire" (GONZALEZ, 2000). U.S. actions have helped put in place policies and people that promoted inequalities in its hemispheric neighbors and ultimately economic instability that drives immigration (as with other colonial powers). Mexican workers who moved at the whim of U.S. government needs, and Puerto Ricans shuttling back and forth between the Island and mainland in search of survival were perhaps the earliest transnationals. They are now joined by a multitude of people who hold multiple allegiances that straddle physical borders.

> Transnational identities cross over territorial boundaries and national culture in ways that are difficult to grasp from a traditional ethnographic perspective (APPADURAI, 1991, 1990). Recent approaches to transnational communities have begun by discarding the conventional image of immigration as a form of cultural stripping away and complete absorption into the host society (ROSALDO, 1989). Rather, immigrants belong to multiple communities with fluid and hybrid identities that are not necessarily grounded in geopolitical frontiers but perhaps in subjective affiliations. Border crossing becomes an apt image for not just the physical act of moving to another country but also the crossover between cultures, languages, and nation-states in which transnational migrants participate. (DUANY, 1994, p.2)

Older notions of the nation-state, of impermeable borders, and citizenship must be rethought in the current era when one of every hundred people around the world are living in a country other than their country of birth (FRITZ, 1998). Latinos are deeply insinuated into the fabric of this new globalized world as transnational networks and communities continue to expand. Sixty-one percent of Mexicans have a relative currently residing in the United States, and remittances from abroad are Mexico's third-largest source of income (THOMPSON, 2002). The number of Latin American countries allowing dual citizenship jumped in the 1990s from four to ten, including Mexico in 1998. U.S. Latinos with dual citizenship are voting in federal elections in their home countries, or even running for elected office. Regardless of whether people hold dual citizenship, they retain connections to their homelands; remittances from the U.S. to the Dominican Republic for instance grew from 25 million dollars in 1970 to almost 800 million dollars in 1995 (VÉLEZ-IBÁNEZ and SAMPAIO, 2002).

Latina/os are by definition adept border crossers and border straddlers. They cross racial borders, cultural borders, language borders, physical borders. They re-invent themselves as "not neither," as Sandra Maria Esteves (1984, p.26) puts it, continuing to maintain their claims to the right to distinctive identities, to exist in the "borderlands." Those "borderlands" are visible in contemporary Latina/o literatures and the arts. Chicano artist and social critic Guillermo Gómez-Pena, poet Sandra Maria Esteves, Chicana activist and author Gloria Anzaldua, Nuyorican ethnographer Juan Flores, all examine and embrace "the 'Border' – everything that represents the interpenetration of social formations and stands between simple choice of national identity – as a distinctively Latino and dialectical epistemology" (DAVIS, 2001, p.18).

> Being Puertorriqueña
> Americana
> Born in the Bronx, not really jíbara[23]
> Not really hablando bien
> But yet, not gringa either. (SANDRA MARIA ESTEVES, Not neither, 1984)

Creatively playing with English and Spanish, Guillermo Gómez-Pena reflects in his artistic manifesto on what "The Border Is" (1993):

> Border culture means boycott, complot, ilegalidad, clandestinidad, contrabando, transgression desobediencia binacional…
> But it also means transcultural friendship and collaboration among races, sexes, and generations.
> But it also means to practice creative appropriation, expropriation, and subversion of dominant cultural forms.
> But it also means a multiplicity of voices away from the center, different geo-cultural relations among more culturally akin regions….
> But it also means regresar, volver y partir: to return and depart once again . . .
> But it also means a new terminology for new hybrid identities and métiers
> Constantly metamorphosizing….

To live in these borderlands can be painful, and Anzaldúa (1987, p.2-3) paints vivid images of that pain with words:

> 1,950 mile-long open wound
> dividing a pueblo, a culture,
> running down the length of my body,
> staking fence rods in my flesh,
> splits me splits me
> me raja me raja
> This is my home
> this thin edge of
> barbwire.
> [This open wound that is the U.S./Mexican border is]
> … where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture.

Straddling that border, poet Aurora Levins Morales sees the emergence of a new hybrid self, and can affirm her "wholeness":

> I am a child of the Americas
> a light-skinned mestiza of the Caribbean
> a child of many diaspora, born into this continent at a crossroads.
> I am not african. Africa is in me, but I cannot return.
> I am not taína. Taíno is in me, but there is no way back.
> I am not european. Europe lives in me, but I have no home there.
> I am new. History made me. My first language was spanglish.
> I was born at the crossroads and I am whole. (1986, p.50)

Latina/os have challenged traditional analytical frames that assume they will travel a unilinear path of language and cultural loss, cultural identity shift, and disappearance into the larger social body. This is in part an outcome of their unique histories in a racialized society. It is in part a response to the differing conditions of contemporary immigration and the economic restructuring in a globalizing society that favors bi-national or transnational identities. It is in part the product of a series of endless choices they make and the stories they tell themselves and others. As Stuart Hall reminds us, identity is "'production,' which is never complete, always in

[23] "Jibara" is a term used in Puerto Rico to reference the "genuine" Puerto Rican. In the past it meant someone who was a "country bumpkin."

process" (1990, p.222). Challenging the national ideology of monoculturalism and assimilation, and forcing Euro-Americans to confront their own checkered past, they have encountered powerful opposition in the process. "Producing" themselves within the nation-state, they have contributed to a re-defining of what it means to be American. The "Latinization" of the U.S. goes beyond cross-over artists, food, and music that have entered the mainstream; these are only the most visible elements of a nation in transition. Latinos are forging cross-national alliances, revitalizing spent urban areas, remaking urban ethnoscapes (DAVIS, 2001). "AmeRícan," proclaims Nuyorican poet Tato Laviera:

> AmeRícan defining myself my own way any way many
> ways Am e Rícan, with the big R and the accent on the í (1985, p. 95)

As always, the U.S. is being "reinvented" from forces within and without. But these new realities co-exist with a nostalgia for an idealized past. What remains to be seen is whether "America becoming[24]" will embrace the diversity and potential of the growing numbers of Latinos and become the nation that it has so long claimed to be. The "threat" to the nation for the foreseeable future will not be Latinos, but rather the failure of the national will to create a more equitable[25] and just society that can deliver on the promise that is America.

REFERENCES

ACUÑA, Rudolfo. Occupied America: A History of Chicanos. (3ª ed.). New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1988.

ANZALDUA, Gloria. Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza. San Francisco, CA: Spinsters/Aunt Lute.

APPADURAI, Arjun. Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy. Public Culture, v. 2, n. 2, p. 1-24, 1990.

_____. Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology. In: FOX, R. (Org.). Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1991, p. 191-210.

BALLVE, Marcelo. Regaining Mexican Citizenship – New California Media, 2003. Available at: <http://www.uis.edu/multicultural student affairs/aprmay03_CB/ourstory-2.html>. Accessed on 5 July 2004.

BIGLER, Ellen. American Conversations: Puerto Ricans, White Ethnics, and Multiculturalism. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999.

BRIMELOW, Peter. Alien Nation: Common Sense about America's Immigration. New York, NY: Random House, 1995.

BUCHANAN, Patrick. Commentary on HUNTINGTON, Samuel, The Hispanic Challenge. Available at: <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/files/story2530.php>. Accessed on 12 July 2004.

BUSTOS, Sergio. Hispanics Dislike Label. Gannett News Service. Available at: <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0779064.html>. Accessed on 14 July 2004.

CRAWFORD, James. Bilingual Education: History, Politics, Theory and Practice. Los Angeles, CA: Bilingual Education Services Inc., 1995.

[24] The phrase "America Becoming" was used as part of the title of a report on the state of racial relations and racial equity in the U.S., commissioned in the 1990s by then-President Bill Clinton

[25] A review of statistical data underlines the critical nature of this situation. Almost twenty-two percent (21.9) of Hispanics live below poverty level (2004), compared to 8.6 percent of non-Hispanic whites. Information available at <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/income_wealth/005647.html>, accessed September 6, 2006. Only 57 percent of Hispanics have a high school or beyond education (2003) compared to 89 percent of non-Hispanic whites. Information available at <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/education/001863.html>, accessed September 6, 2006.

DANIELS, Roger. Commentary on HUNTINGTON, Samuel, The Hispanic Challenge. Available at: <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/files/story2530.php>. Accessed on 12 July 2004.

DAVIS, Mike. Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. City. New York, NY: Verso, 2001.

DEFREITAS, Gregory. The Emergence of the Hispanic American Labor Force. In: GALLAGHER, Charles (Org.). Rethinking the Color Line: Readings in Race and Ethnicity. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999. p. 237-275.

DILEONARDO, Micaela. White Lies, Black Myths. Village Voice, New York, v. 37, p. 29-36, 22 September 1992.

DUANY, Jorge. Quisqueya on the Hudson: The Transnational Identity of Dominicans in Washington Heights. New York, NY: Dominican Studies Institute, City University of New York, 1994.

_____. Reconstructing Racial Identity: Ethnicity, Color, and Class among Dominicans in the United States and Puerto Rico. In: VÁZQUEZ, Francisco; TORRES, Rodolfo, (Orgs.). Latina/o Thought: Culture, Politics, and Society. New York, NY: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003. p. 274-289.

EL NASSER, Haya. 39 Million Make Hispanics Largest U.S. Minority Group. USA Today, 19 jun. 2003. Available at: <http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/census/2003-06-18-Census_x.htm>. Accessed on 16 July 2004.

ESTEVES, Sandra María. Tropical Rains. New York, NY: African Caribbean Poetry Theatre, 1984.

FLORES, Juan. Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity. Houston, TX: Arte Público, 1993.

_____. From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2000.

FRITZ, Mark. Pledging Multiple Allegiances. Los Angeles Times, 6 abr. 1998. Available at: <http://www.globalpolicy.org/nations/citizen/multple.htm>. Accessed on 15 July 2004.

GARCÍA-COLÓN, Ismael. Transnationalism, Panethnicity, and Segmented Assimilation: Latina/o Community Formation in the United States. American Anthropologist, v. 106, n. 2, p. 391-395, 2004.

GLAZER, Nathan. We Are All Multiculturalists Now. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.

GÓMEZ-PENA, Guillermo. Warrior for Gringostroika. Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 1993.

GONZALEZ, Juan. Harvest of Empire. New York, NY: Viking, 2000.

GOULD, Stephen. The Mismeasure of Man. New York, NY: Norton, 1981.

GROSFOGUEL, Ramón; GEORAS, Chloé. The Racialization of Latino Caribbean Migrants in the New York Metropolitan Area. Centro, New York, v. 8, n. 1-2, p. 190-201, 1996.

HALL, Stuart. Cultural Identity and Diaspora. In: RUTHERFORD, J. (Org.). Identity, Community, Culture, Difference. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990. p. 222-237.

HANDLIN, Oscar. Race and Nationality in American Life. New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1957.

HUNTINGTON, Samuel. The Hispanic Challenge. Foreign Policy. March/April 2004a, p. 30-45. Available at: <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/files/story2495.php>. Accessed on 17 July 2004.

_____. Who Are We. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2004b.

INFOPLEASE. U.S. Hispanic/Latino Population, 2000. Pearson Education, 2004. Available at: <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0779064.html>. Accessed on 14 July 2004.

KLOR DE ALVA, Jorge. The Invention of Ethnic Origins and the Negotiation of Latino Identity, 1969-1981. In: ROMERO, Mary; HONDAGNEU-SOTELO, Pierrette; ORTIZ, Vilma (Orgs.). Challenging Fronteras: Structuring Latina and Latino Lives in the U.S. New York, NY: Routledge, 1997. p. 55-80.

LAVIERA, Tato. AmeRÍcan. Houston, TX: Arte Publico, 1985.

_____. Mainstream Ethics (Etica Corriente). Houston, TX: Arte Publico, 1988.

LEVINS MORALES, Aurora; MORALES, Rosario. Getting Home Alive. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1986.

MURPHY, Dean. New Californian Identity Predicted by Researchers. New York Times, New York, 17 fev. 2003.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA. Hispanic Perspectives. Available at: <http://www.nclr.org/files/ 25235_file_Hispanic_Perspectives_NCLR_Zogby_Poll.pdf>, Accessed on 14 July 2004.

NEGRÓN DE MONTILLA, Aida. Americanization in Puerto Rico and the Public School System, 1900-1930. (2nd ed.) Rio Piedras, PR: Editorial Edil, 1975.

NEGRÓN-MUNTANER, Frances. Barbie's Hair: Selling Out Puerto Rican Identity in the Global Market. In: HABELL-PALLÁN, Michele; ROMERO, Mary (Orgs.). Latina/o Popular Culture. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2002. p. 38-60.

NELSON, Candace; TIENDA, Marta. The Structuring of Hispanic Ethnicity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives. In: ROMERO, Mary; HONDAGNEU-SOTELO, Pierrette; ORTIZ, Vilma (Orgs.). Challenging Fronteras: Structuring Latina and Latino Lives in the U.S. New York, NY: Routledge, 1997. p. 7-30.

NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT. The Ibero-American Heritage Curriculum Project: Latinos in the Making of the USA: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow. First Annual Meeting Conference Proceedings. Albany, NY: New York State Education Department, 1987.

NEW YORK TIMES. Two Minorities Spur Rapid U.S. Growth, New York, 15 jun. 2004.

OMI, Michael; WINANT, Howard. Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s. New York, NY: Routledge, 1994.

PADILLA, Felix. Latino Ethnic Consciousness: The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago. Notre Dame, In: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.

PORTES, Alejandro; BACH, Robert. Latin Journey: Cuban and Mexican Immigrants in the United States. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985.

PORTES, Alejandro; STEPICK, Alex. City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993.

REINHOLD, Robert. Class Struggle. New York Times Magazine, New York, 29 set. 1991. p. 26-29, 46-47, 52.

RODRÍGUEZ, Clara. Puerto Ricans: Born in the U.S.A. Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1989.

_____. Changing Race: Latinos, the Census, and the History of Ethnicity in the United States. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000.

ROEDIGER, David. The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class. New York, NY: Verso, 1991.

ROSALDO, Renato. Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1989.

_____. Cultural Citizenship, Inequality, and Multiculturalism. In: FLORES, William; BENMAYOR, Rina (Orgs.). Latina/o Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997. p. 27-38.

ROSALDO, Renato; FLORES, William. Identity, Conflict, and Evolving Latina/o Communities: Cultural Citizenship in San Jose, California. In: FLORES, William V.; BENMAYOR, Rina (Orgs.). Latina/o Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997. p. 57-96.

SANTA ANA, Otto. Brown Tide Rising: Metaphors of Latinos in Contemporary American Public Discourse. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002.

SCHLESINGER, Arthur. The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society. New York, NY: Norton, 1991.

SOBOL, Thomas. A Curriculum of Inclusion: Report of the Commissioner's Task Force on Minorities. Albany, NY: New York State Education Department, 1989.

SUÁREZ-OROZCO, Marcelo; ORFIELD, Gary. Comentary on HUNTINGTON, Samuel, The Hispanic Challenge. Available at: <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/files/ story2530.php>. Accessed on 12 July 2004.

SURO, Robert. Commentary on HUNTINGTON, Samuel, The Hispanic Challenge. Available at: <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/files/story2530.php>. Accessed on 12 July 2004.

TAKAKI, Ronald. *Iron Cages*: Race and Culture in 19th Century America. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990.

_____. *A Different Mirror*. Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1993.

THOMAS, Piri. *Down These Mean Streets*. New York, NY: Knopf, 1967.

THOMPSON, Ginger. Paychecks in U.S. Fuel Mexico's Economy. *The Press Enterprise*, Riverside Ca1ifornia, abr. 2002.

U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2005. Available at <http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?_lang=en&_ts=175472468670&_ds_name=ACS_2005_EST_G00_&_program=>. Accessed on September 4, 2006.

VÉLEZ-IBÁNEZ, Carlos; SAMPAIO, Anna (Orgs.). *Transnational Latina/o Communities*: Politics, Processes, and Cultures. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002.

YOUNG LORDS PARTY. *Palante*: Young Lords Party. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1971.

ZANGWILL, Israel. *The Melting-Pot*: Drama in Four Acts. New York, NY: Macmillan, 1909.

ZENTELLA, Anna. Language Variety among Puerto Ricans. In: HEATH, Shirley Brice; FERGUSON, Charles (Orgs.). *Language in the USA*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1981. p. 218-238.

Recebido em 02.08.04
Aprovado em 24.08.06