

How the United States Racializes Latinos

White Hegemony & Its Consequences

♦♦♦♦♦ EDITED BY ♦♦♦♦♦

José A. Cobas ♦ Jorge Duany ♦ Joe R. Feagin

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José A. Cobas, Jorge Duany, and Joe R. Feagin

The editors agree with the goals of colleagues who want to affirm the dignity of women by modifying standard Spanish language terms. However, we do not follow in this book all of their specific language practices.

We observe standard Spanish grammar in respect to grammatical gender. We also adhere to standard Spanish grammar's rules on diacritics. Two exceptions are the names of individuals who do not use diacritics and the titles of existing publications.

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Designed and Typeset by Straight Creek Bookmakers.

To the late Bernard Farber and Joe Feagin
Eminent scholars, generous friends

José A. Cobas

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Contents

<i>List of Figures and Tables</i>	<i>ix</i>
Introduction: Racializing Latinos: Historical Background and Current Forms <i>José A. Cobas, Jorge Duany, and Joe R. Feagin</i>	1
1 Pigments of Our Imagination: On the Racialization and Racial Identities of “Hispanics” and “Latinos” <i>Rubén G. Rumbaut</i>	15
2 Counting Latinos in the U.S. Census <i>Clara E. Rodríguez</i>	37
3 Becoming Dark: The Chilean Experience in California, 1848–1870 <i>Fernando Purcell</i>	54
4 Repression and Resistance: The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin in the United States, 1848–1928 <i>William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb</i>	68
5 Opposite One-Drop Rules: Mexican Americans, African Americans, and the Need to Reconceive Turn-of-the-Twentieth-Century Race Relations <i>Laura E. Gómez</i>	87
6 Racializing the Language Practices of U.S. Latinos: Impact on Their Education <i>Ofelia García</i>	101
7 English-Language Spanish in the United States as a Site of Symbolic Violence <i>Jane H. Hill</i>	116

8	Racialization Among Cubans and Cuban Americans <i>Lisandro Pérez</i>	134
9	Racializing Miami: Immigrant Latinos and Colorblind Racism in the Global City <i>Elizabeth Aranda, Rosa E. Chang, and Elena Sabogal</i>	149
10	Blacks, Latinos, and the Immigration Debate: Conflict and Cooperation in Two Global Cities <i>Xóchitl Bada and Gilberto Cárdenas</i>	166
11	Central American Immigrants and Racialization in a Post–Civil Rights Era <i>Nestor P. Rodríguez and Cecilia Menjívar</i>	183
12	Agency and Structure in Panethnic Identity Formation: The Case of Latino Entrepreneurs <i>Zulema Valdez</i>	200
13	Racializing Ethnicity in the Spanish-Speaking Caribbean: A Comparison of Haitians in the Dominican Republic and Dominicans in Puerto Rico <i>Jorge Duany</i>	214
14	Transnational Racializations: The Extension of Racial Boundaries from Receiving to Sending Societies <i>Wendy D. Roth</i>	228
	<i>Contributors</i>	245
	<i>Index</i>	248

Figures and Tables

FIGURES

2.1	Hispanic/Latino Population in the United States, by Race, According to the Census, 2000 (in Millions)	44
2.2	Total Non-Hispanic Population and Hispanic/Latino Population in the United States, by Race, According to the 2000 Census (Percentages)	45
6.1	Changes in Naming and Silencing of the Word “Bilingual”	110

TABLES

1.1	Hispanic/Latino Ethnic Identity by Self-Reported “Race,” 2000 Census, Ranked by Proportion Identifying as “Other Race”	28
1.2	Self-Reported “Race” by Largest Hispanic Groups in Selected States, 2000 Census	30
1.3	Dominican Immigrants’ Answers to Three Racial Self-Identification Questions	31
1.4	Self-Reported “Race” of Children of Immigrants and Their Parents, by National-Origin Groups	33
4.1	Lynchings of Mexicans, by State	71
4.2	Mob Crimes	75
4.3	Alleged Crimes of Victims	76
4.4	Lynchings of Mexicans, by Decade	77
6.1	Region of Birth of Foreign-Born Population in the United States, 1910–2000 (Percentages)	104

6.2 English Proficiency of U.S. Latino Spanish Speakers (over Five Years of Age)	106
6.3 U.S. Latino Schoolchildren (Five to Seventeen Years Old): Home Languages and Number of English Proficient and Emergent Bilinguals	107
8.1 Percent Distribution of the Population of Cuba, by Race, 1899–2002	136
11.1 Top Five Central American Populations, and Other Selected Populations, in U.S. Metropolitan Areas, 2005	184
14.1 Nonmigrant Sample Stratification	231
14.2 Racial Terms Used in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic	233

INTRODUCTION

Racializing Latinos

Historical Background and Current Forms

José A. Cobas, Jorge Duany, and Joe R. Feagin

Despite its scientific disrepute, the concept of “race” remains a powerful social determinant in the United States. The racialization of Latinos refers to their definition as a “racial” group and the denigration of their alleged physical and cultural characteristics, such as phenotype, language, or number of children. Their racialization also entails their incorporation into a white-created and white-imposed racial hierarchy and continuum, now centuries old, with white Americans at the very top and black Americans at the very bottom. Thus, one can speak about the intense racialization of daily life, including health, housing, education, work, friendship, and marriage patterns. In this introductory chapter, we trace the modern concept of race in Europe from its origin in the fifteenth century and the racialization of Latinos and Latin Americans in the United States since the nineteenth century. We also provide a brief overview of the main contributions of the individual chapters of this volume.

THE ORIGIN OF THE CONCEPT OF RACE IN EUROPE

In the fifteenth century, the Portuguese became the first Europeans to travel to Africa and establish trading posts on its western coast. They initially exchanged such goods as metal pots and wine for Africans’ gold and spices. As the demand

for enslaved Africans increased and made their transport more profitable than trade in nonhuman goods, enslaved Africans became the cargo of many Portuguese ships.

The Spanish nation-state was the first to colonize on a large scale indigenous societies in the Americas for their resources, but its growing wealth and military apparatus were soon countered by the imperial expansion of competing English, Dutch, and French nation-states. Early on, Spanish and English conquerors and enslavers in the Americas rationalized the oppression of indigenous and African peoples in both Christian religious terms (uncivilized, un-Christian) and physical-biological terms (ugly, apelike). The massive enslavement of Africans awakened the interest of European and North American scholars. Some of the latter had even invested in the slave trade, and many others began to accent European superiority and African inferiority. By the last few decades of the 1600s, British and other European thinkers were laying the groundwork for a hierarchy of biologically distinctive “races,” which developed more fully over the eighteenth century. England’s Sir William Petty, a leading anatomist, portrayed enslaved “blacks” as physically and culturally inferior to “whites.” Drawing on European travelers’ accounts of the Americas and Africa, Petty advocated a ladder-like ranking of unchangeable human “species” or “races” characterized by physical and social differences. He insisted that natives of the southern tip of Africa were the “most beastlike of all the souls of men with whom our travelers are well acquainted” (quoted in Shore, 2000:87; see also Feagin, forthcoming).

In Germany, the West’s leading philosopher, Immanuel Kant, taught philosophy and what would later become social science. His treatise, “On the Distinctiveness of the Races in General” ([1775] 1950), laid out one of the first hierarchical models of human “races.” Kant’s work, which he claimed was based on science, conceived “races” as “differences in the human genus” shaped by different environments. Races varied in physical traits such as skin color, physiognomy, and body type, as well as in psychological temperament. Kant paid special attention to “Negro” traits. A physiological process ending with the evaporation of the acids of phosphorous, Kant asserted, “makes Negroes stink.” Although in his racist view blacks were well prepared for physical labor, they were also “lazy, soft and dawdling” ([1775] 1950:22). This early white racial framing of people of African descent influenced most subsequent models of the racial hierarchy in Western societies.

Shaped by English thinkers such as Petty in the late 1600s and early 1700s, the first conceptualizations of “race” in North America developed over the next century on the basis of a belief in the supremacy of the “Anglo-Saxon” race, supposedly linked to superior Germanic groups (Horsman, 1981). Variations on this Anglo-Saxon myth were widely popular in North America. Thomas Jefferson, the most famous of the U.S. founders and a patrician slaveholder himself, was the first American intellectual to write extensively on racial matters. Jefferson led in creating self-satisfying rationalizations for the enslavement of African Americans. In a passage reminiscent of David Hume’s stereotyping of Africans (Morton, 2002) and of Kant’s overtly racist thinking ([1764] 1965), Jefferson argued that enslaved African Americans did not have any achievements that would demon-

strate their human equality: “But never yet could I find a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration; never saw even an elementary trait of painting or sculpture” (quoted in Gossett, 1997:43). A man with great influence over the next century, Jefferson read and was influenced by the earlier work of scientists such as Petty, including their negative views of black Americans. In Jefferson’s only intellectual book, the influential *Notes on the State of Virginia*, he articulated what Joe Feagin (2006:25, 28) has called the “white racial frame”: “An organized set of racialized ideas, stereotypes, emotions, and inclinations to discriminate. . . . Critical to the white racial frame is an interrelated set of cognitive notions, understandings, and metaphors that whites have used to rationalize and legitimate systemic racism.”

By the eighteenth century, an increasingly elaborate racialized discourse targeting African Americans, and to a lesser but significant degree Native Americans, was found in all major U.S. institutions—the economy, law, politics, education, and religion. By the latter part of the nineteenth century, the concept of race and the racial hierarchy in the United States were aggressively linked to the ascendant school of “Social Darwinism.” The English philosopher Herbert Spencer, creator of that term and most important thinker in its tradition, saw human evolution as the outcome of individual competition for survival (Spencer [1873], 1972). The “fittest” American groups would supposedly prevail over “inferior” ones, and in this manner humanity would cleanse itself of unfit “races.” Spencer argued that human competition occurred in varying environments and that human beings developed specific skills needed for survival. For him, this competition explained the purportedly higher development of the intellect among “white” Europeans, who had to rely on their wits to survive vis-à-vis groups such as African “Bushmen,” who were alleged to depend on their brawn, not on their intelligence. Spencer put it as follows: “That superiority of sight which enables a Bushman to see further with the naked eye than a European with a telescope, is fully paralleled by the European’s more perfect intellectual vision” ([1873] 1972:7). Spencer’s writings won wide use and acclaim among white leaders and intellectuals in the United States, and some of his books became bestsellers. His thought drew on and reciprocally fostered the dominant racist ideology that had already emerged in the United States.

By the late nineteenth century, the dominant racist frame had coalesced in the momentous U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which provided the basis for the “separate but equal” doctrine of Jim Crow segregation. Homer Plessy contended in his lawsuit that being forced by a Louisiana law to ride in a separate train car violated his constitutional rights. In an astonishing display of racial arrogance and highly specious thinking, the all-white Supreme Court justices justified their decision to uphold Louisiana’s law, claiming that the plaintiff’s complaint was based only on his erroneous perception and not on reality: “We consider the underlying fallacy of the [black] plaintiff’s argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction on it” (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896:551).

THE RACIALIZATION OF LATIN AMERICANS AND LATINOS

The first major cases of North American racialization involved Indians and, as previously noted, enslaved Africans. The latter's vilification seemed to increase as slave labor became ever more important in U.S. agriculture, especially with advances in cotton farming in the South by the late 1700s. Beyond African Americans and Native Americans, whites created systems of oppression for other "Americans of color," including people of Latin American origin. White American leaders and the rank-and-file have belittled the physical appearance, Spanish language, Catholic traditions, and family values of Latin Americans at least since the 1830s.

The Spanish colonies in North America suffered from sequential imperialistic domination and racialization by Spain and then by the emerging United States. Spain's whites had mixed with the Indian and African-descended populations of Mexico and other Spanish American colonies, which resulted in a racially heterogeneous (mestizo) population. In the aftermath of the 1840s Mexican-American War, moreover, the ever-expanding United States seized much of northern Mexico, thereby incorporating about 110,000 Mexicans into U.S. territory.

The U.S. racialization process has had a cross-border dimension within the Americas. By the mid-1800s, the U.S. racial hierarchy and its rationalizing frame had become extended as white entrepreneurs and political leaders brought in more non-European labor and territories. The white Americans' racial frame soon classified all Mexicans as a racially inferior people who could not govern themselves. In Texas and California, among other areas, whites often spoke of Mexicans as "niggers" or "dirty mongrels"; the notorious adventurer Stephen Austin, in particular, referred to them as a "mongrel Spanish-Indian and Negro race" (quoted in DeConde, 1992:29). Over the coming decades, Mexicans were further described by whites as a mixed-race people who needed to be taught the Eurocentric way to advance their inferior civilization (Horsman, 1981).

The vituperation against Mexicans could also be heard in the nation's capital. In 1848, Senator John C. Calhoun, a vociferous opponent of the proposed annexation of Mexico, injected the language of the white racist frame into his jeremiad against Mexicans:

We have never dreamt of incorporating into our Union any but the Caucasian race—the free white race.... I protest against such a union [the U.S. annexation of Mexico] ... Ours, sir, is the Government of a white race. The greatest misfortunes of Spanish America are to be traced to the fatal error of placing these colored races on an equality with the white race.... And yet it is professed and talked about to erect these Mexicans into a Territorial Government, and place them on an equality with the people of the United States.... Are we to associate with ourselves as equals, companions, and fellow-citizens, the Indians and mixed race of Mexico? Sir, I should consider such a thing as fatal to our institutions. (2007 [1848])

Clearly, the influential Senator Calhoun, a former U.S. vice president and secretary of state, put Mexicans "in their place" by insisting that they were not white but down the racial hierarchy among the "colored races."

As the oldest and largest group of Latin American origin in the United States, Mexicans have undergone the longest and most sustained history of racial oppression among Latinos. White American stereotypes of Mexicans emerged out of their earliest contacts in the U.S. Southwest during the first half of the nineteenth century. As Joan Moore and Harry Pachon (1985:4) have noted, “these first encounters with Mexicans tended to fix some basic outlines and to become the prototypes of later Anglo-Saxon images of all Hispanics.” For instance, many white settlers, interlopers in the northern provinces of Mexico, scorned their native inhabitants as backward, lazy, cowardly, fatalistic, superstitious, violent, dangerous, and cruel. In this stereotyped imagery, whites drew on the racist framing used for centuries against African Americans and Native Americans. Such negative characteristics were supposed to have been passed on, as a result of the racial mixture between Spanish and Indian. Derogatory terms such as “spic” and “greaser” were coined to describe Mexicans in Texas, California, and elsewhere. The myth of racial inferiority helped to justify the U.S. conquest of a large part of Mexico’s territory, as well as the low status of Mexican Americans in the racial hierarchy of the emerging Southwest. Although Mexican Americans gained U.S. citizenship after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, they were denied full access to their legal rights.

European Americans who annexed huge areas of northern Mexico by force already shared a strong racist framing of other peoples, mainly African Americans and Native Americans, as we saw in the previous discussion of founders like Jefferson, who died a few years before the Mexican-American War. That long-standing white frame, which by the 1840s focused on white supremacy and black (and Indian) inferiority, has long been adaptive, and its central racist doctrines have regularly been imposed on other “people of color.” The “Anglo-Saxon race” and its “Manifest Destiny” (a term created during this era) to rule the Americas were hailed enthusiastically as the Mexican “race” and the country of Mexico were increasingly berated.

The white-generated racial frame was applied not only to Mexico but to other Latin American countries as well. In the 1850s, President James Polk, who feared that the British might acquire Cuba, attempted to buy it from Spain. Ultimately Spain refused Polk’s offer, but in the interim several influential individuals expressed their concern. Noted journalist James Shepherd Pike wrote that the United States did not want a territory filled “with black, mixed, degraded, and ignorant, or inferior races” (quoted in Horsman, 1981:282). Various U.S. presidents—from Polk to Ulysses S. Grant in the 1870s—also considered acquiring all or parts of the Dominican Republic. But here, too, one of the main impediments to annexation was the Americans’ common belief that most Dominicans were of African origin or mixed race. For instance, in 1873, the pro-annexation American journalist Samuel Hazard wrote that “the great majority [of Dominicans] ... are neither pure black nor pure white; they are mixed in every conceivable degree” (quoted in Candelario, 2007:55). In the end, the U.S. government annexed neither the Dominican Republic nor Cuba, but Puerto Rico, which was perceived at the time to have a whiter population.

White feelings of superiority over Mexicans and other Latin Americans (as well as Native Americans) were well developed by the 1830s, when the current region of the southwestern United States was portrayed as “empty land” to be taken by white “settlers.” Disparaging images of Latin American peoples, which had consolidated during the Mexican-American War of 1846–1848, intensified during the Spanish-Cuban-American War, commonly referred to as the “War of 1898.” Mexicans and Native Americans, as well as Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Filipinos, were largely imagined by whites to be outside the “American” community. Highly negative, racialized portraits of all these conquered groups were popularized through paintings, caricatures, photographs, postcards, and films between the last third of the nineteenth century and the first third of the twentieth. After the War of 1898, the inhabitants of the newly acquired territories of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines were often pictured as dark-skinned, childlike, effeminate, poor, and primitive peoples (see Duany, 2002; Thompson, 2007)—once again, standard themes from the old white racist frame. A recurrent theme of these portrayals was that of “Uncle Sam’s burden”: the white man’s mission to “save” the black children—sometimes dubbed “picanninies”—of the former Spanish colonies in the Caribbean and the Pacific.

At least since the Spanish-Cuban-American War, the racial composition of Puerto Rico’s population has puzzled American travelers and public officials. Initially, many U.S. government reports (including those issued by the War Department and, later, the Census Bureau) insisted that the Puerto Rican population was predominantly of European rather than African origin. In 1898, an American travel writer, Trumbull White, called Puerto Rico “the whitest of the Antilles.” A year later, the census found that 61.8 percent of the island’s population was white. Other American observers remarked on the “surprising preponderance of the white race” in Puerto Rico, as the *National Geographic* magazine noted in 1900. In a widely distributed book, the geologist Robert T. Hill (1903:165) reiterated that “Porto Rico [sic], at least, has not become Africanized, as have all the other West Indies excepting Cuba.” Such reports helped to allay the common racist fear that the U.S. government had annexed a predominantly black population after the War of 1898. Such a view still surfaces in contemporary debates about the island’s political status, albeit indirectly. To many Americans, Puerto Ricans are not “pure whites” but racially mixed people.

U.S. racial discourses on Cuba long acknowledged that much of the island’s population was of European ancestry. Since the end of the nineteenth century, American travel writers and photographers have depicted a white Cuban elite that could eventually govern the country according to U.S. democratic standards. Nevertheless, high-ranking military officials such as General Samuel B. M. Young and Major George M. Barbour, who participated in the Spanish-Cuban-American War, described most Cubans as a degenerate, savage, irresponsible, ignorant, and stupid people. Governor General Leonard Wood, who oversaw the U.S. military occupation of Cuba from 1899 to 1902, wrote: “[W]e are dealing with a race that has steadily been going down for a hundred years and into which we have to infuse new life, new principles and new methods of doing things” (quoted in Pérez, 2006:139). In 1902, the U.S. government grudgingly recognized the

formal independence of the Cuban Republic, but only after imposing the Platt Amendment on the Cuban Constitution, allowing the United States to intervene freely in the island's internal political affairs until 1934.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, large numbers of Latin Americans began to move to the United States, in addition to those who already lived in the territories annexed after the Mexican-American War. In the Southwest, Mexicans were quickly dispossessed from their lands through legal and illegal means. New Mexico was a site for numerous conflicts between whites and Hispanics whose ancestors had lived there for generations. After 1880, thousands of Mexicans moved to the railroad, mining, and agricultural centers of Texas, Arizona, and California. In the Southeast, black Cubans worked in the cigar industries of Tampa, Key West, and other Florida cities, where they were routinely segregated from whites under the Jim Crow laws. In the Northeast, especially in New York City, Cubans joined Puerto Ricans and Spaniards in what was to become one of the leading U.S. Hispanic communities. They settled primarily in working-class enclaves such as Spanish Harlem and the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Although few in number, these pioneers set the pace for the massive migration from Latin America to the United States during the twentieth century. As their totals grew, U.S. Latinos—often called “Spanish,” “Hispanic,” or “Spanish American”—became increasingly racialized as a separate minority group.

Throughout the twentieth century, Latinos were consistently portrayed in the white-controlled U.S. media as unwanted and disreputable aliens. As Otto Santa Ana (2002) has argued, the image of a “brown tide rising” has characterized much of the media's discourse on migration from Latin America, particularly from Mexico. Moreover, Leo Chavez (2001) has shown that Mexican immigrants are typically considered an external threat and an internal enemy of the United States. In general, popular representations of U.S. Latinos continue to emphasize their lower-class origins, dark skin color, and foreign language and culture. Even today, Hispanics—especially undocumented immigrants—are often portrayed in terms of a thinly disguised white racist framing based on nineteenth-century Social Darwinism. For instance, the common notion of “illegal aliens” (or “wet-backs”) serves to justify their treatment as animals without any human rights. The racial connotations of current public policies designed to “stem the tide” of undocumented immigrants, primarily from Mexico, China, and other Latin American and Asian countries—but not from Canada or Ireland—may be covert but are nonetheless very powerful. Similarly, the post-9/11 security efforts to “close the borders” of the United States have targeted Middle Eastern-looking and other dark-skinned persons, including Latinos.

Immigrant and “foreign” status has again become central to the racialized identification of Latin Americans. From its beginnings in the 1600s, the white racial frame has insisted that “Americans of color” (initially Indians, then Africans) are not only inferior biologically and intellectually but also uncivilized, dangerous, and foreign to the “American way of life.” This anti-foreign view has been extended to Latin American immigrants in more recent decades. “Illegal,” an epithet meaning “foreign and dangerous,” has become a regular part of the United States' vernacular, but only in reference to Latin American immigrants.

Unauthorized entrants from countries such as Russia or Israel, and there are many, are not designated as “illegal.” Citizens of other Western countries who violate U.S. immigration laws and regulations are excluded from the “illegal” category and are not routinely abused and targeted by the U.S. government.

In Phoenix and other southwestern cities, Latinos and Latin American drivers who display what law enforcement authorities perceive as “illegal” clues, such as an old car with “Mexican trappings” or the playing of certain kinds of music, are routinely stopped under the pretext of a traffic violation, yet with the main purpose of checking their immigration status. Indeed, the salience of this “illegal” imagery in the anti-Latino version of the contemporary racial frame has resulted in many bodily injuries and even in the deaths of immigrants, especially those targeted by white supremacists and xenophobes. Today, racialized framing and violence are facts of life for Latinos coming into and living in the United States. During the nineteenth century, Latinos and Latin Americans were often considered inferior “mongrels” who had to be saved by the Anglo-Saxon race. Today, Latinos are frequently treated as “problems,” such as welfare chiselers or irresponsible propagators of children. They are often considered a serious menace to U.S. culture.

As Clara Rodríguez (1997) and Arlene Dávila (2001) have thoroughly documented, U.S. Latinos are stereotyped as having a particular physical appearance characterized by olive or brown skin and dark, straight hair. Their body type is ambiguously located by whites as somewhere between the dominant images of whiteness and blackness (see Mendible, 2007). Similarly, the U.S. government, mass media, police, and other major institutions increasingly refer to “Hispanics” as distinct from both non-Hispanic whites and blacks. Although all Latinos have been racialized, each group has followed its own path toward racialization, depending on its historical background, socioeconomic characteristics, and mode of incorporation into the host society. The following chapters focus on several groups of Latin American immigrants in the United States—including Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Colombians, Peruvians, and Chileans. Overall, their experiences suggest that Latino (including the closely linked term “Hispanic”) has become a color-coded category. This process has many nuanced consequences and dimensions, as the savvy contributors to this volume consistently show.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In this book, we analyze how Latinos, both in the United States and in their countries of origin, have been racialized in various ways. Here, noted Latin American, Latino, and U.S. social scientists address the extent and costs of U.S. racial hegemony at home and abroad. In particular, our collaborators examine the multiple histories, causes, forms, and consequences of the racialization of Latinos and Latin Americans. Immigration restrictions, instauration of U.S.-style racism, violence, suppression of the Spanish language, and intergroup conflict are some of the racially based developments discussed in this volume.

Historically, Mexicans were the first sizable group of Latin American origin to be incorporated into the United States as a racialized and subordinated group. Yet, as Laura Gómez points out, many U.S. scholars have insisted that Mexican Americans are not a “race” but, rather, just another “ethnic group.” She asserts that the failure to recognize the racialized status of Mexican Americans has contributed to the misperception that the history of U.S. race relations chronicles white-on-black oppression only. This limited view has interfered, for example, with the recognition of the important role played by Mexican Americans in the “who is white” question.

Racialization often entails minimizing historical, cultural, and linguistic differences among peoples from the same region—including, for example, those in various Latin American countries. Such labels as “Hispanic” typically collapse diverse peoples into a single overarching group according to criteria devised by the dominant white majority. In two separate chapters, Rubén Rumbaut and Clara Rodríguez discuss the byzantine histories of the broad panethnic labels applied to groups referred to today as “Hispanics” or “Latinos.” From their beginnings, these categories subsumed culturally and geographically heterogeneous groups with separate identities and histories. The great inadequacy of these labels has been demonstrated in censuses since 1980, as many members of the so-called Hispanic or Latino population refuse to identify themselves with any of the racial labels they are offered on census forms and instead place themselves in the “other” category. As Rumbaut argues, the creation of a catchall term for people of various Latin American and Spanish origins has contributed to their racialization in the United States. In her analysis, Rodríguez adds that Latinos often resist their classification according to U.S. racial categories that tend to pigeonhole them as “not white.”

The dilemmas of racial, ethnic, and panethnic definitions are prominent among Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and other Central Americans, who often become an “invisible minority” in the United States. Nestor Rodríguez and Cecilia Menjívar discuss racialized groups from Central America (especially Indians and blacks) who have been victims of massive killings in their homelands, perpetrated by national armies under the pretext of “anti-Communist” campaigns, often with the support of the United States. Like many other Latin Americans, these oppressed people have migrated, with and without documents, in search of a better and more peaceful life. Upon entering the United States, many blend with a local Latino community and experience the “anti-illegal” xenophobia and indifference or hostility of local governments. Rodríguez and Menjívar speculate that Central American immigrants are faced with two options: either become part of the pool of Latino “cheap” labor or join other Latin Americans and Latinos in a common cause to bring about change.

The adoption of a Hispanic or Latino identity, beyond the immigrants’ specific national and ethnic identities, is still an emergent and contested process. Many Latinos are increasingly embracing a panethnic label in an effort to resist widespread stereotypes and advance their plight as a racialized minority. Whether identification as Latino or Hispanic will eventually replace specific national markers such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Dominican remains unclear.

Zulema Valdez provides further evidence of the complicated nature of racialization in her study of business owners of Latin American origin in Houston. Her informants overwhelmingly identified themselves by national origin. At the same time, however, they used panethnic labels to express animosity against some Latino groups, and to disassociate their national origin from widespread U.S. stigmatization of Latinos.

Some sources of interethnic and interracial friction between groups classified as Latinos in the United States begin at home. Both Jorge Duany and Wendy Roth deal with racialization in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, but their foci are different. Duany examines the racialization of Haitians in the Dominican Republic and of Dominicans in Puerto Rico. In both countries, the victims face major economic and social obstacles because they are defined as “black” by their oppressors. Identifying the basic similarities and differences between the two cases, Duany argues that the precarious status of Haitians in the Dominican Republic and of Dominicans in Puerto Rico is primarily due to their racialization. The denigration of these groups externalizes racial prejudice and discrimination against foreign “others,” who are largely excluded from dominant discourses of national identity.

Roth argues that a white Americanized view of race has crept into Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, affecting even those who have never left their homelands. Traditionally, Dominicans and Puerto Ricans have thought of their racial mixture as part of their uniqueness, which distinguishes them from unmixed Americans. Nevertheless, U.S. attitudes exert a secondary but significant influence on the process of racialization in these countries. Not all Puerto Ricans and Dominicans blindly accept American racial categories; many actively resist their imposition from abroad. However, others accommodate the U.S. language of racial classification—even though it may conflict with the local framing that accents a continuous model of race with multiple intermediate categories between white and black.

Although a more fluid racial classification system characterizes much of the Caribbean and Brazil, racial differentiation has recently increased in Cuba and among Cuban Americans. In particular, Lisandro Pérez discusses the multiple disadvantages faced by black Cubans, both at home and abroad. In the early 1960s, many white middle-class Cubans left for the United States as a result of the revolution led by Fidel Castro. In the 1990s, in the midst of a profound economic crisis, the Cuban government encouraged exiles to send dollars to their relatives. Having few relatives abroad, most black Cubans could not take advantage of family remittances. When Cuba’s tourism industry was reestablished, competition for desirable jobs intensified. Yet many foreign managers preferred to hire white Cubans, and black Cubans again found themselves excluded from employment opportunities. Black Cubans who came to the United States did not fare well, either. They were often segregated in black urban areas, apart from their white Cuban friends and acquaintances. Pérez’s prediction that racialization will persist among Cubans on and off the island is particularly relevant given the striking social, economic, and political disparities between Cubans at home and those in the diaspora.

Although the U.S. Census Bureau officially recognizes that “Hispanics can be of any race,” it tends to treat them as a separate race from white and black non-Hispanics. Similarly, the mass media reproduce the popular (especially white) view that Hispanics are racially distinct from other groups, such as African Americans. Xóchitl Bada and Gilberto Cárdenas address Latino–African American relations in Los Angeles and Chicago. They underline that African Americans and Latinos share major economic interests and goals on which they can work together. To build successful coalitions, Latinos and African Americans should focus on their common needs, such as opportunities to work for fair wages, and reduce their disagreement over issues such as bilingual education.

Relations between different groups of Latin American immigrants can also be tense. In their chapter, Elizabeth Aranda, Rosa Chang, and Elena Sabogal show that Latin American and Caribbean immigrants frequently characterize fellow immigrants as economic and cultural threats to U.S. national identity and security. Although Miami immigrants hail the city’s Latino cultural and linguistic environment, they harbor conflicting attitudes toward increasing migration from Latin America. According to Aranda and her colleagues, the racialization of Latinos—such as Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Colombians, and Peruvians in Miami—depends on their class backgrounds, national origins, and legal statuses, which in turn reflect the social constructs of “deserving” and “undeserving” immigrants. Thus, for example, some immigrants hold other immigrants responsible for growing income inequality and contracting public services, rather than blaming institutionalized racism and other structural sources of these trends. One of the main public concerns about the growing “Latinization” of cities like Miami has been the common (again, especially white) fear of the displacement of the English language by the Spanish language. Jane Hill contends that pressure against the public—and even private—use of Spanish and campaigns to proclaim English the “official language” of the United States are too copious to attribute to bona fide efforts to protect the status of English. In fact, she asserts, they are attempts to deride and ultimately squelch Spanish in the United States. “Mock Spanish,” despite its surface appearance as bonhomie, shares these goals. When whites use supposedly Spanish expressions, such as “No problemo,” in a linguistically disorganized way, they are appropriating and ridiculing one of the most important components of Latin American cultures: their language.

Ofelia García traces the history of pervasively negative attitudes toward the Spanish language and bilingualism in the United States since the mid-nineteenth century. She argues that Spanish was initially stigmatized as the language of the conquered and colonized as a result of the Mexican-American War (1846–1848) and the Spanish-Cuban-American War (1898). In the mid-twentieth century, the large-scale influx of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans (and, later, Cubans) expanded the need for bilingual education programs in the United States. In 1968, Congress authorized the Bilingual Education Act to improve the educational opportunities of the children of immigrants. But bilingual education’s checkered history has continued since then as well. Today, bilingualism is increasingly scorned in influential educational and political circles. García argues that the U.S. government has maintained a policy of

eradicating Spanish, by encouraging the shift to English and linking its use to poor and uneducated immigrants.

Violence against people of Latin American origin in the United States has been physical as well as symbolic. William Carrigan and Clive Webb address the mob violence visited upon by at least 597 Mexicans between 1848 and 1928. They argue that the lynching of Mexicans was one of the mechanisms used by local and national whites to consolidate their hegemony. These crimes occurred with the connivance of public authorities. Most notorious were the Texas Rangers, who by some estimates killed or seriously injured thousands of Mexicans. On one occasion, in 1881, they crossed the Mexican border illegally to apprehend a suspect, Onofrio Baca. The Rangers handed the prisoner to a white mob that quickly hanged him. Carrigan and Webb clearly document the intertwined histories of Mexicans and African Americans, particularly regarding racial violence by whites seeking to maintain full control of the racial hierarchy.

According to Fernando Purcell, Chileans were among the first to arrive in northern California after the Gold Rush began in 1848. Most Chileans thought of themselves as “white” but were racialized as nonwhites upon arrival. White U.S. miners did not want “foreign” competition, and conflict ensued. Chileans resisted but were victimized by the miners with the complicity of local authorities. Purcell argues that the shared experience of discrimination, as well as growing ties between Mexicans and Chileans during the 1860s, nurtured an early sense of a Hispanic American “race” in the San Francisco Bay Area. In short, the racialization of Chileans and other Latin American immigrants in California by whites fostered a panethnic Hispanic identity.

CONCLUSION

Together, the contributors to this volume demonstrate clearly and thoroughly how U.S. racialization is based on the centuries-old white racial frame—a white-generated worldview in which Latinos and Latin Americans appear as an inferior “race.” This racist worldview has been echoed in the halls of Congress, printed in newspapers, and proclaimed from pulpits since the first days of the United States. It has provided ideological support for the seizure of Mexican land, annexation of former Spanish colonies, military intervention in sovereign Latin American nations, and alliances with Latin American dictatorships.

At home, the white racial frame has been employed to cast a wide net under which Latinos and Latin Americans are dumped for better political control and economic exploitation by white officials and employers. It has given impetus to establishing English as the official language of the United States and to pointing an accusing finger at the Spanish language because its speakers are considered “foreign” and “un-American.” It has placed racialized groups in the position of enforcing the white racial frame for still other or newer racialized groups. And it has provided a vocabulary that racialized Latinos and Latin American immigrants can use to vilify each other, or other “Americans of color.”

Sometimes the ideologies in particular interpretive frames have unintended and beneficial consequences. But racialization is incapable of generating decency, compassion, or progress for any human group. It has been evil through and throughout its operations since the seventeenth century. Why does it persist? The white racial frame and its associated racial hierarchy serve the interests of U.S. white elites splendidly, and they have the resources to support and propagate this frame. As part of that racial frame, common sense makes injustice appear inevitable.

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CHAPTER I

Pigments of Our Imagination

On the Racialization and Racial Identities of “Hispanics” and “Latinos”

Rubén G. Rumbaut

Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a Colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion?

—*Benjamin Franklin (1751)*

“Race” is a trope of ultimate, irreducible difference.

—*Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1986)*

I have been telling my students since the 1970s that “race is a pigment of our imagination.” The play on words of the definition is meant as a *double entendre*, both to debunk baseless biological pretensions and to focus attention on the social, legal, and political construction of categories meant to put people “in their place” in hierarchies of power and privilege. “Race” is a social status, not a zoological one; a product of history, not of nature; a contextual variable, not a given. It is a historically contingent, relational, intersubjective phenomenon—yet it is typically misbegotten as a natural, fixed marker of phenotypic difference inherent in human bodies, independent of human will or intention. What is called “race” is largely the sociopolitical accretion of past intergroup contacts and struggles,

which establish the boundaries and thus the identities of victors and vanquished, of dominant and subordinate groups, of “us” and “them,” with their attendant conceits of superiority and inferiority and invidious taxonomies of social worth or stigma. As such, “race” is an ideological construct linking supposedly innate traits of individuals to their rank and fate in the social order. Racial statuses and categories (and the putative differences they connote) are imposed and infused with stereotypical moral meaning, all the more when they become master statuses affecting all aspects of social life. The dominant “racial frame” (Feagin, 2006) that evolved in what became the United States, during the long colonial and national era of slavery and after it, was that of white supremacy. Benjamin Franklin’s words in the epigraph above are illustrative; they were written in 1751, a quarter of a century before he signed the Declaration of Independence with no hint of irony, back when not even Germans were imagined to be “white,” mixing nativism and racism in what would become a familiar, habitual American blend.

How do “Latinos” or “Hispanics” fit in the country’s “white racial frame”? Are they a “race”—or, more precisely, a racialized category? If so, how and when were they racialized? Why has the U.S. Census Bureau insisted since the 1970s on putting an asterisk next to the label—uniquely among official categories—indicating that “Hispanics may be of any race”? Is it a post-1960s, post-Civil Rights Era term, not fraught with the racial freight of a past in which for more than a century—in Texas since 1836 and in the rest of the Southwest after 1848—“Mexican” was disparaged as a subordinate caste by most “Anglos”? (Almaguer, 1994; Foley, 2004; Montejano, 1987). The use of the label “Latino” or “Hispanic” is itself an act of homogenization, lumping diverse peoples together into a Procrustean aggregate. But are they even a “they”? Is there a “Latino” or “Hispanic” ethnic group, cohesive and self-conscious, sharing a sense of peoplehood in the same sense that there is an “African American” people in the United States? Or is it mainly an administrative shorthand devised for statistical purposes, a one-size-fits-all label that subsumes diverse peoples and identities? Is the focus on “Hispanics” or “Latinos” as a catchall category (let alone “the browning of America”) misleading, since it conceals the enormous diversity of contemporary immigrants from Spanish-speaking Latin America, obliterating the substantial generational and class differences among the groups so labeled, along with their distinct histories and ancestries? How do the labeled label themselves? What racial meaning does the panethnic label have for the labeled, and how has this label been internalized, and with what consequences? This chapter considers these questions, focusing primarily on official or state definitions and on the way such categories are incorporated by those so classified.

NEWCOMERS AND OLD-TIMERS

The classification of “Hispanic” or “Latino” itself is new, an instance of a pan-ethnic category created by law decades ago. But the groups subsumed under that label—Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Colombians, Peruvians, Ecuadorians, and the other dozen nationalities