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## Shades of Whiteness: The Mexican American Experience in Relation to Anglos and Blacks

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In 1965, the Congress of the United States passed an amendment (the Hart-Cellar Act) to the Immigration and Nationality Act that abolished discrimination based on national origin and enabled, for the first time, large-scale immigration from all countries. Prior to 1965, the majority of immigrants to the United States originated from Europe; however, since passage of the amendment, increasing numbers of immigrants have come from Asia and Latin America. In fact, post-1965 immigration, which Pedraza (1996) labeled the “Fourth Wave of Immigration,” has led to a large increase in the Asian and Latino populations in the United States.

The influx of immigrants from Latin America and Asia has altered the racial landscape of the United States. Specifically, the new immigration has led to an increasingly multiethnic and multiracial United States (Farley 1996; McDaniel 1995). As a result of this increasing diversity, the social dynamics of everyday living in U.S. neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces are rapidly changing as well. This shift has not gone unnoticed by students of race and ethnic relations. In fact, at least two basic perspectives regarding the implications of these demographic shifts have emerged. In one account, largely espoused by conservative scholars and political pundits, demographic shifts portend the impending doom of white American culture and identity (Buchanan 2001; Brimelow 1995; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997). The driving force behind their concern is demographic projections that by 2050, whites will be a statistical minority in the United States. These analysts have framed these demographic changes as “a problem” of too many of the “wrong kind” of people (e.g., Proposition 187 in California).

The opposing account highlights growing racial and ethnic diversity as initiating new possibilities for coalitions among people of color (Jackson, Gerber, and Cain 1994; Lott 1994; Okazawa-Rey and Wong 1997). These commentators frame the demographic changes as a potential “antidote” to decades of racial exploitation of various racial and ethnic groups, as experienced by Asians (Almaguer 1994; Takaki 1989; Chan 1991), blacks (Franklin and Moss 1994;

Rawick 1972; Takaki 1993), Latinos (Almaguer 1994; Barrera 1979; Montejano 1987), and Native Americans (Cornell 1988; Takaki 1993; Thornton 1987) through conquest, colonization, and enslavement.

Both perspectives, ironically, have paid little attention to the complexities of race and ethnicity in contemporary society. In fact, each has treated race and ethnic categories as if they were fixed and stable. For instance, on the one hand the conservative point of view situates the large numbers of Asians and Latinos as a “problem” likely to dilute the power of whites. On the other hand, the progressive viewpoint sees the large numbers of Asians and Latinos as an “opportunity,” as people likely to dilute the power of whites. Both views become problematic if we view race through the lens of social construction. Indeed, some authors, in response to conservative analysts’ doomsday outlook, have argued that the social category of “white” is not likely to diminish as a result of increasing numbers of Asians and Latinos. Highlighting the way the category “white” expanded at the beginning of the twentieth century to incorporate new groups (e.g., Italians, Irish, Polish), they argue that “white” may well expand again, sustaining itself by incorporating many of these post-1965 immigrants into the “white” category (Warren and Twine 1997).

Making this picture even more complicated, new immigrants who arrive from Latin America in particular are already a diverse group in terms of racial categorization (C. Rodriguez 2000). For instance, immigrants from Latin America run the gamut in terms of racial identification from “black” to “white” to somewhere “in between” these two racial polarities. Hence it is very likely that some Latinos will become white over time while others will either be folded into existing racial categories such as the black category or will create new categories (see Flores-Gonzalez 1999). These realities call into question the conservative as well as the progressive perspective. The conservative perspective assumes that the white majority will not accept some Latinos as essentially white, and the progressive perspective assumes that Latinos will consider themselves as non-white. In short, to assume that the influx of these new immigrants will lead to outcomes as predicted by either the conservative or the progressive perspective is to obscure the real complexity that is likely to result from these groups’ arrival and incorporation into the United States’s racial schema.

In this chapter we seek to highlight the problems with these two views by exploring in depth the issue of whiteness with regard to one major group—the Mexican origin population. Although here discussed in the context of new immigration, those of Spanish heritage have been in what is now the United States since the 1500s. Before the Mexican War of 1846 to 1848, what is now the southwestern part of the United States was northern Mexico. Nevertheless, large-scale immigration from Mexico to the United States has been continuous in recent times, and this, in addition to natural increase, has led to the 20,640,000 people of Mexican origin counted by Census 2000.

## ADVANTAGES OF WHITENESS

MacIntosh (cited in Mahoney, 1997:331) provides a useful metaphor of what it means to be white in American society. She indicates that it is like having “‘an invisible weightless knapsack’ of provisions, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, compasses, and blank checks.” Her analogy is similar to Bourdieu’s ([1973] 1977) concept of “cultural capital” that explains the advantages of elite children in school. According to Bourdieu, children of the well-off have both a general background of knowledge as well as specific information taught to them by their parents which makes understandable what teachers present to them in school. Children without the right kinds of cultural capital valued by the middle and upper classes have a difficult time understanding what is going on in their classes, do not do well in school, and consequently drop out of school (more accurately, are pushed out). In contrast, the advantages of elite children enable them to succeed in school, and they come to believe that they do well in school “naturally.”

There is a class- and culture-based self-assuredness possessed by people of middle- or upper-class stature and who are white. For nonwhite nonelites, such an assuredness is either precarious or nonexistent. More generally, being poor and of color in the United States can best be described as a struggle. Externally, it is a struggle for place; internally, it is a struggle to validate the color of one’s skin and one’s culture. The result of differences between the ways in which lower- and working-class youth and middle-class youth grow up has been called “the hidden injuries of class” (Sennett and Cobb 1973), and these injuries are exacerbated if, in addition to social class, race is involved. Needing a term that designates a combination of race and class, we introduce the term, “raceclass,” paralleling Milton Gordon’s (1964) “ethclass” term. The concept of “whiteness” implies both European ancestry and a middle- or upper-class status, and with terms of color such as “Mexican American” or “black,” not only is (a largely) non-European ancestry implied but also a lower- or working-class status is indicated. Mexican Americans and blacks are objectionable to majority whites because of “raceclass,” the combination of lower-class status and color that the terms for the minority groups imply to the majority. To the extent that minority individuals reach middle-class status, they become less objectionable, although not completely, because race remains as a social barrier (Feagin and Sikes 1994).

## SHADES OF WHITENESS

There are many forms of whiteness. As one author points out “whiteness may well work in distinct ways for homeless white men, golf club membership owning executives, suburban soccer moms, antiracist skinheads, and/or union-card carrying factory workers” (Lewis 2003b). Hence we can talk about the “shades of whiteness.” Despite this diversity, however, in the pathways through which

whiteness gets enacted daily, there remains what Lewis has labeled “hegemonic whiteness.” Hegemonic whiteness captures the simple fact that in any given epoch certain forms of whiteness become dominant. It is the elite that provides the most coherent display of whiteness and it is their embodiment of whiteness that is the hegemonic form. This form of whiteness does the work of securing “the dominant position of Whites” (Lewis 2003b). Before discussing what we call “shades of whiteness” and the possible “whiteness” of members of the Mexican origin population, it is useful to describe in more detail hegemonic forms of whiteness in the United States today.

Worldwide, but from the perspective of the United States, the whitest collection of people is the English aristocracy of the United Kingdom, with the Royal Family at its head (Kelley 1997). In the United States, the most white are members of “old money” families (Aldrich 1989) in the Northeast with inherited wealth, children who go to schools such as the “St. Grottlesex” New England Episcopalian preparatory schools (Andover, Exeter, Choate, St. Paul, Groton, and Middlesex) (Amory 1947:299) and then to Ivy League colleges such as Harvard, Princeton, and Yale. As the children come of age, they inherit money through trust funds, move into family businesses, and become members of interlocking corporate directorships. The members of this class tend to be of English heritage and Protestant, and they would consider no group their superior except for the English aristocracy of the United Kingdom. For numerous reasons (geography, religion, race, culture, social class), the Mexican origin people in the United States have had and for the most part will have little or no contact with this American Northeastern old-money group.

A second elite group in the United States possesses large amounts of money, but rather than being old and inherited, their money is new and earned. Aldrich (1989) calls an individual in this social class “Market Man.” While these entrepreneurs may have more money than many members of the old-money elite, they do not have the prestige of members of old-money families. Some, but relatively few, of Mexican origin have made it into this group. A combination of light skin color and large amounts of money are necessary to be included in this group if one is of Mexican origin.

A third level of “whiteness” in the United States includes those of European ancestry in the middle and upper middle class. A considerable number, more than at the second level, of the Mexican origin group can become “white” at this level—for several reasons. First, some people of Mexican origin have a significant amount of European ancestry, which makes them light-skinned and therefore indistinguishable from the majority society. Second, there is upward mobility among the Mexican Americans. As they move into middle-class and upper-middle-class status, they, on at least the most light-skinned of them, will face some but not a great amount of prejudice and discrimination. In any case, they are not likely to receive much more prejudice than white ethnics (such as the Irish, Italians, and Poles) currently receive.

**Table 1** Key Variables that Influence Mexican Origin Identification.

| VARIABLE                   | MEXICAN<br>(MEXICAN INDIAN) | NOT MEXICAN<br>(AMERICAN WHITE) |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Name                       | Spanish                     | English                         |
| Command of English         | Nonproficient               | Proficient                      |
| Skin Color/Facial Features | Dark/Indian                 | Light/European                  |
| Height                     | Short                       | Tall                            |
| Religion                   | Catholic                    | Protestant                      |
| Social-Class Standing      | Lower Class                 | Middle Class                    |
| Ethnic Self-Identity       | Mexican                     | American                        |
| Racial Self-Identity       | Nonwhite                    | White                           |

#### WHITES' EVALUATION OF MEXICAN AMERICANS IN TERMS OF SOCIAL DISTANCE FROM THEMSELVES

Whites do not place Mexican Americans in the same location as blacks in terms of social distance from themselves. For instance, Warren and Twine (1997:212) cite a young white woman's response to their question concerning who was "allowed" to move into her community, "Blacks are not allowed to move into this area, but Mexicans and Asians are different—they can blend."

Generally speaking, having Mexican Indian characteristics as well as having lower-class characteristics places individuals at greater social distance from the U.S. majority society than having characteristics associated with European ancestry and characteristics associated with being in the middle or upper social classes. More specifically, eight factors seem to influence whites' evaluation of Mexican Americans. Two of the eight factors relate to language and are, first, the name of the individual, including given name(s) and surname, and second, the Mexican origin person's command of English. The remaining six variables are phenotype, height, religion, social-class standing, and ethnic and racial self-identity. Given that Anglo-conformity assimilation (Gordon 1964) has been the reality in the United States, to the extent that Mexican origin individuals desire upward social mobility, they may try to minimize social distance between themselves and majority whites by changing their characteristics relative to the above variables, at least the variables over which they have some control. Each variable is considered below in some detail.

Concerning given names, most ethnic would be a first name that is not English and that does not have an English referent, a name such as "Guadalupe" (Guadalupe is a name that can be given to either a male or a female in Mexico). More acceptable to the majority society would be a Spanish name that has an English referent, such as Jose, which is Joseph in English. Still more acceptable would be a Spanish name with an English referent that is spelled the same (or

very similarly) in English and Spanish, such as David (In Spanish, there is an accent mark on the “i” in David). An even more “white” first name would be an English name such as “Henry,” where the name exists in English but not in Spanish. The Spanish equivalent of Henry is “Enrique” a different word from “Henry.” Finally, the most English given name would be a name that has no Spanish equivalent, such as “Geoffrey.”

Name changing of first names can be generational, that is, parents who have Spanish given names give English first and second names to their children. It can also be that individuals themselves change their own names, most often through nicknames (Roberto becomes Bob or Bobby, for example), or by giving themselves, in their speech and correspondence, the English equivalent to their Spanish first and second names or, if there is no English equivalent, the closest English equivalent to their Spanish first and second names.

The second variable refers to the last names (surnames) of Mexican Americans. Compared to given names, there is greater reticence in changing a last name from Spanish to English, from Martinez to Spencer, for example, because this places social distance between individuals and their own family members with the same last name as themselves. Some last names are common in Spanish, such as Gonzalez or Martinez, and will be recognized as such, placing social distance between individuals with such names and the majority. Some less common Spanish surnames may not be recognized as such, and individuals with such names may not experience a great amount of social distance between themselves and the majority. Some Mexican origin individuals have non-Spanish surnames either because of a previous intermarriage with an Anglo male or because someone decided to give himself/herself an English last name (despite creating social distance between himself/herself and his/her family), and this is the situation in which the least amount of social distance is placed between persons with such last names and majority whites.

In terms of accent, most prestigious is the ability to speak English fluently and without an accent. Second is the ability to speak English, but with a Spanish accent. Third would be Spanish-only speaking. To the extent that an individual is unable to speak English or speaks only heavily accented English, social distance is placed between the individual and majority whites.

Phenotype is defined as the external physical appearance of a person. While some researchers have argued the social construction of race almost to the exclusion of any consideration of actual difference in phenotype, we would argue that there is an element of measurable difference in phenotype that contributes to social distance from the majority society. In other words, majority whites react to visible differences in phenotype and treat others accordingly. Of course, the meaning given to phenotype itself is socially constructed. The external physical appearance most European is light skin color and facial features similar to people in Northern and Western Europe, that is, a narrow nose, round eyes, thin lips, and so on.

The next variable we consider is height. A major element determining the height of Mexican origin individuals has to do with nutrition. With improved nutrition in the United States has come increased height by generation of those of Mexican origin in the United States (Of course, improved nutrition is also occurring in Mexico as well as in the United States at this time). To the extent that individuals are very short or short, they are seen as less “white,” in large part because shortness has been associated with being from an underdeveloped country. Note that this is one of the differences between the Mexican origin group and the African origin group. Among those from Africa, height varies greatly, and a substantial number of both Africans and African Americans are taller than majority whites.

Relative to religion, the most ethnic situation for those of Mexican origin would be being Catholic and belonging to a Mexican Catholic church in a *barrio* (a working-class Mexican origin neighborhood). The circumstance with the least social distance from majority-white society would be belonging to an established upper-middle-class or upper-class Protestant church. Established and prestigious Protestant denominations include, for example, the Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists. Belonging to an affluent Episcopalian church in an elite white neighborhood would be the situation with the least social distance from majority whites.

It should be noted that there is a difference in religious status and upward mobility between Catholics and Protestants. Catholics, when they rise socioeconomically, tend to stay within Catholicism. The change when Mexican American Catholics become upwardly mobile is that of moving from an ethnic lower- or working-class-neighborhood Catholic church to a Catholic church that is nonethnic and is in a nonethnic neighborhood. In contrast, individuals who are Protestant tend to change denominations as they move upward in social class. Denominations with less social prestige tend to be the “storefront” Protestant churches, churches of relatively recent origin. Protestant churches with a greater amount of prestige are those that have been in what is now the United States since colonial times.

We next consider the variable of social class. When we think of majority whites, we think of individuals in the middle or upper classes. In contrast, when we think of Mexicans in the United States, we think of individuals in the lower or working classes. To the extent, then, that a person of Mexican origin moves into the middle class, he or she becomes more “white.”

Concerning ethnic self-identity, those who identify exclusively with being “American” would place no social distance between themselves and the majority society. By identifying as “Mexicano” or as “Mexican American,” individuals place greater social distance between themselves and the majority. With reference to race, individuals can see themselves as “white” or “nonwhite.” In the U.S. Census, respondents have the choice of declaring themselves racially white or of other races.

In sum, we can see how different two individuals would be if they were at opposite ends of continuums on all eight variables. In the case where the individual was at the most “white” end of the continuum along each of the eight variables, the individual would be named, for example, Geoffrey Spencer, would speak perfect English, would be light-skinned, tall, at least in the upper middle class if not in a higher social class, would belong to an affluent Protestant church, and would think of himself as American and as white. Non-Hispanic whites would place little or no social distance between themselves and such an individual.

On the other hand, if an individual were at the other end of each of the eight variable continuums, the individual would be named Guadalupe Martinez, would speak only Spanish, would be short, dark, lower-class, would attend the Mexican Catholic church in the *barrio* and would consider himself a Mexican and a nonwhite. The social distance that non-Hispanic whites would place between themselves and this individual would be very great. Notice that six of the eight variables are changeable—the individual’s name, command of English (but not totally, because if a language is learned after a certain age, there is the likelihood of always speaking the language with an accent), religion, social-class standing, ethnic self-identity, and racial self-identity. Only one’s height and skin color are relatively immutable. Hence, as part of a process of upward mobility in the United States, some people of Mexican origin engage in a process of changing their location on the continuum of the above variables, minimizing social distance between themselves and majority whites. Others, though, regardless of upward mobility, arrive at a political consciousness where, although participating in the larger American society, they maintain a cultural pluralistic point of view and choose bilingualism and biculturalism rather than assimilation.

#### MEXICAN ORIGIN TERMS OF SELF-REFERENCE AND SOCIAL DISTANCE FROM MAJORITY WHITES

We have discussed individual characteristics of Mexican origin and the meaning whites give to varying characteristics of members of the group, resulting in social distance imposed on Mexican origin individuals by majority whites. We now look at six terms of Mexican origin self-reference to determine the amount of social distance which people of Mexican origin place between themselves and majority whites through their use of these terms. Four of the terms refer to ancestry from a single country of national origin, Mexico itself. The two remaining terms are “pannational” in that they can refer to individuals from numerous countries where Spanish is spoken as well as to people from Mexico. The national-origin terms are “Mexicano,” “Mexican,” “Chicano,” and “Mexican American,” and the panethnic terms are “Latino” and “Hispanic.” The four national-origin terms are in order of social distance from whites, with “Mexicano” exhibiting the greatest social distance from Whites and “Mexican American” designating the least amount of distance. The two panethnic terms

are also in order of social distance, with “Latino” indicating greater social distance from whites than “Hispanic.”

The first term, “Mexicano,” exhibits a considerable amount of social distance between individuals who use this term as their preferred term of self-designation and the majority, in part because this term is in Spanish. Unlike the term “Mexican American,” there is no reference to the United States in the term “Mexicano.” The second term, “Mexican,” has less social distance from majority whites than “Mexicano” because the term “Mexican” is in English. Again, “Mexican” implies a considerable amount of social distance from majority whites. As with the term, “Mexicano,” if one says, “I am Mexican,” there is no mention of the word “American” in it and this makes it a term more distant from the majority society than the term “Mexican American.”

The third term, “Chicano,” which is probably derived from a diminution of the word “Mexicano,” came into popular usage during the late 1960s and early 1970s to designate people who trace their ancestry to Mexico. This word connotes more than ancestry in Mexico, however; it also connotes militance and dissatisfaction with conditions of Mexican origin people in the United States. It has a connotation of pride in one’s Mexican heritage and culture. Associated with the word “Chicano” are the civil unrest and the social movements that were occurring when the term came into prominence, including Cesar Chavez’s United Farmworkers Union struggle, Reies Lopez Tijerina’s Alianza movement in New Mexico, and the creation of La Raza Unida Party, a political party that gained considerable support for a time in Texas. The fourth term, “Mexican American” refers both to possessing a Mexican heritage and to being American, and so it has both ancestry in Mexico and a current nationality and residence in the United States associated with it. Since the noun in the term is the word “American” and the adjective is “Mexican,” it more strongly associates one with the United States than with Mexico.

The two panethnic terms, “Latino” and “Hispanic,” refer to people of more than one national origin but are being used by those of Mexican origin to refer to themselves. “Latino” technically refers to people from those numerous countries whose language is derived from Latin, although its usage in the context of the United States is limited to those from countries where Spanish or Portuguese is spoken. “Latino” is parallel to the term “Hispanic,” in that it is panethnic, encompassing numerous nationalities (Also, unlike “Hispanic,” it seems to include those from Portugal and Brazil). However, “Latino” implies a greater social distance between the people to whom it refers and majority whites than does “Hispanic.” A group using the term “Latino” in self-reference cannot and does not want to become white. Use of “Hispanic,” on the other hand, expresses a desire to achieve white status. The term “Latino” has within it a critical awareness that things are not all well with the minority group. It includes a sense of historical oppression and a struggle for equality among members of the group. In this way, the term “Latino” parallels the term “Chicano,” except that “Latino”

is a panethnic term, whereas “Chicano” refers to ancestry in the country of Mexico alone. These two terms, “Chicano” and “Latino,” one a national term and the second a pannational term, are in opposition to the more conservative terms, “Mexican American” and “Hispanic,” “Mexican American” being the national term and “Hispanic” being pannational. With the term “Hispanic,” the connotation is not one of questioning the system but rather of obtaining a larger piece of the pie within the system as it is. The term “Latino,” on the other hand, connotes a questioning of the system and a sense that the political, economic, and social systems of the United States are unfair and should be changed.

Use of the term “Hispanic” raises additional issues. A large number of those of Mexican origin, particularly in Texas and Arizona, are calling themselves “Hispanic.” “Hispanic” refers to all people in the United States who trace their origin back to Spain. Therefore the term “Hispanic” includes not only those of Mexican origin but also those in the United States from Cuba, Puerto Rico, from Central and South America, and from Spain itself (whether or not “Hispanic” includes those from Portugal or Brazil is a major problematic—according to the U.S. Census, it does not). The advantage of this term as a panethnic term is that it significantly increases the number of people being designated, and numbers are, of course, important from a political point of view. Currently, the number of Hispanics is slightly larger than the number of African Americans in the United States. Census 2000 counted 35,306,000 Hispanics and 34,658,000 blacks.

Also, while those of Mexican origin have been thought of in the past as a regional group concentrated in the American Southwest (the states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Texas), Hispanics are to be found throughout the United States. Because “Hispanic” emphasizes the European origin of the group, it minimizes the social distance between the group and majority whites. To the extent that those of Mexican origin want to “become white,” this is the term that moves them in this direction. The fact that it is the term used by the U.S. Census is critically important because this legitimizes the term, and census counts and analyses are made based on this term. Its use by the U.S. Census makes it the term of choice for many. It remains to be seen to what extent the fact that it downplays origin from Mexico and non-European ancestry will keep it from being totally accepted by those of Mexican origin, or, on the other hand, to what extent the advantages of larger size and a national rather than a regional presence override the importance of emphasizing Mexican heritage.

#### INTERGROUP RELATIONS BETWEEN THOSE OF MEXICAN ORIGIN AND BLACKS

Based strictly on social class, it might be assumed that the possibility of a political and social coalition for the improvement of social conditions would be relatively straightforward between Mexican Americans and blacks. Such an assumption, however, ignores important aspects of social reality. The reality is that because European whites conquered the indigenous people of Mexico and have

remained the elite in that country ever since, because blacks occupy a low status in the United States and people in the United States tend to want to place social distance between themselves and those lower than themselves in the racial hierarchy, and because a significant percentage of the Mexican origin population in the United States is an immigrant population, the social distance between Mexican Americans and African Americans remains very large. For example, a study conducted in the state of Texas found that Mexican Americans preferred greater social distance from blacks than from whites (Dyer, Vedlitz, and Worchel 1989). Similar results were found in a study of Mexican Americans in Pontiac, Michigan (Lambert and Taylor 1990), where Mexican Americans reported preferring intermarriage with whites and Puerto Ricans to blacks. This pattern held for their preferences of close friends, neighbors, and coworkers (for similar findings, see Grebler, Moore, and Guzman 1970; Robin Williams 1964). In addition, significant numbers of Mexican Americans report viewing blacks as violent, aggressive, lazy, untrustworthy, and unlawful. In fact, a recent study of Mexican American college students showed that they held several negative stereotypes of blacks (Niemann 1994). These results are consistent with previous work that suggests that “Mexican Americans have historically viewed Blacks as ‘black Anglo-Saxons’ in the negative sense of their being an inferior imitation” (Henry 1980:224). These patterns of intergroup attitudes are also consistent with other research showing that the majority of Mexican Americans do not favor coalitions with blacks (Grebler, Moore, and Guzman 1970; Henry 1980; Henry and Munoz 1991; Jennings and Lusane 1994).

#### AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF MEXICAN ORIGIN VIEWS OF BLACKS AND WHITES

In the 1990 Latino Political Survey (de la Garza, et al. 1998), Mexican American racial affect toward blacks and whites was measured using a feeling thermometer scale. Specifically, each Mexican American respondent was asked to indicate on a feeling thermometer scale ranging from 0 to 100 how “warm” or “cold” they felt toward blacks and whites. A score of 0 reflects a very cold feeling, a score of 50 degrees reflects a neutral feeling, and a score of 100 reflects a very warm feeling. The following analysis draws upon data from this survey.

Table 2 reports the distributions of Mexican American racial affect toward blacks and whites. Generally, Mexican Americans felt most warm toward whites and least warm toward blacks. For instance, 60 percent felt very warmly (i.e., 75 degrees or higher on the thermometer scale) toward whites while only 36 percent felt very warmly toward blacks. This pattern is not surprising in light of previous work that has documented strained relations between Mexican Americans and blacks (see Dyer, Vedlitz, and Worchel 1989; Grebler, Moore, and Guzman 1970; Lambert and Taylor 1990; Robin Williams 1964). Others have argued that Mexican American antiblack prejudice is related to the fact that “Spanish culture has traditionally denigrated ‘dark skin’ and ‘inferiorized’

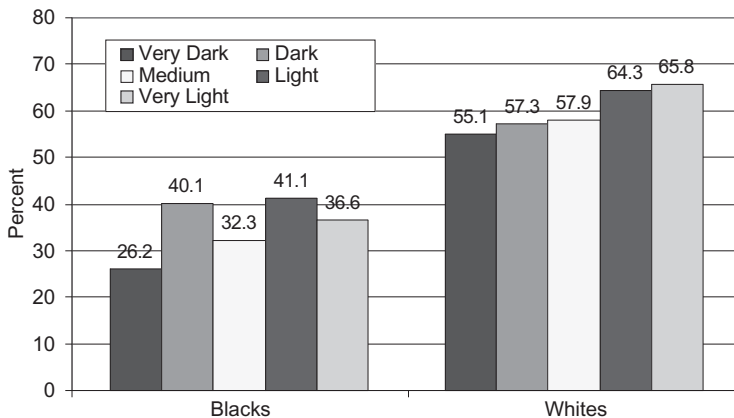
**Table 2** Mexican Americans' Warmth toward Blacks and Whites.

| DEGREES ON FEELING THERMOMETER | RACE   |        |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------|
|                                | BLACKS | WHITES |
| <b>Mexicans</b>                |        |        |
| 0°–24°                         | 7.2%   | 2.7%   |
| 25°–49°                        | 10.5   | 4.7    |
| 50°                            | 33.7   | 24.0   |
| 51°–74°                        | 12.5   | 8.4    |
| 75°–100°                       | 36.1   | 60.2   |
| (N)                            | (1544) |        |
| Mean                           | 3.61   | 4.18   |
| Black-White Difference         | –0.57* |        |

\*  $p \leq .001$  (two-tailed paired sample  $t$ -tests)

its possessors.” As a result, a key “legacy of that culture persists and translates into . . . negative attitudes toward contact with Blacks” (Oliver and Johnson 1984:66).

Rodriguez and colleagues (1991:47) point out that “a Latino’s racial identity is not (just) genetically determined but . . . depends on many variables, including phenotype.” Given the above results as well as Oliver’s and Johnson’s observation, it is necessary to consider other factors such as phenotype in large part because there is considerable heterogeneity in the Mexican American population in terms of skin color (Allen, Telles, and Hunter 2000; Arce, Murguia, and Frisbie 1987; Murguia and Telles 1996; Telles and Murguia 1990). For example,

**Figure 1** Mexican Americans' warmth toward blacks and whites by skin color.

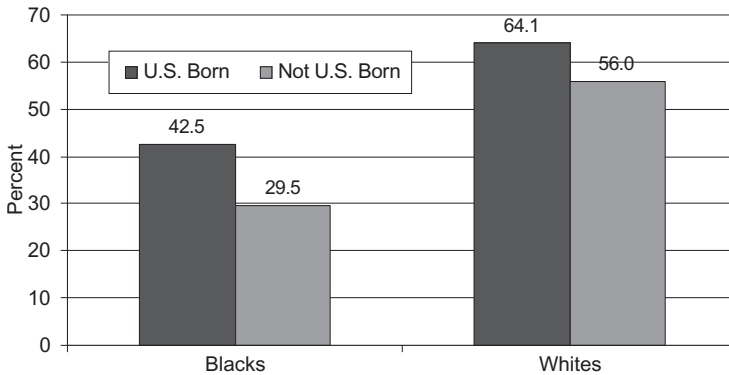
according to the 1990 National Latino Political Survey (de la Garza et al. 1998), 20 percent of Mexican Americans were considered to have a “dark” skin color, another 44 percent had “medium” skin color, and 36 percent were considered to have “light” skin color. This item was based on the interviewers’ assessment of the respondents’ skin color.

Figure 1 reveals two important facts. The first is that, on average, Mexican Americans of all colors feel warmer toward whites as compared to blacks. Second, although there does not seem to be a significant pattern relating skin color and Mexican American affect toward blacks, light-skinned Mexican Americans seem to have a significantly warmer affect toward Anglo-Americans than do Mexican Americans of darker skin colors.

#### THE IMMIGRANT HYPOTHESIS

Part of the social distance found between those of Mexican origin and blacks may be due to the immigrant status of a substantial part of the Mexican origin population in the United States. In one of the few studies of minorities’ intergroup attitudes, Lucie Cheng and Yen Le Espiritu (1989) developed what they call the “immigrant hypothesis” to help explain the differing patterns of intergroup attitudes and relations of Asians with Latinos and blacks. As they outline it, the immigrant hypothesis suggests that because of the large proportion of foreign-born people among both the Asian and Latino populations, these two groups share a “frame of reference different from that held by native born Americans” (Cheng and Espiritu 1989:531), in the case of our discussion, blacks. Because, as Cheng and Espiritu (1989:528) note, “immigrants often leave their home countries as a result of economic or political turmoil,” they share a belief in an immigrant ideology in which the United States is understood to be a land of opportunity. These shared beliefs result in better intergroup attitudes and relations between Latinos and Asians. As Uhlaner (1991:341) notes, “learning a new language, dealing with new customs, and negotiating the intricacies of the immigration and naturalization process itself present a set of experiences that may generate common interests that bring immigrants together.” Although Cheng and Espiritu’s immigrant hypothesis was developed to explain the differing intergroup attitudes and relations between Asians and Latinos as compared to Asians and blacks, it also has relevance for understanding Mexican Americans’ attitudes toward blacks and whites.

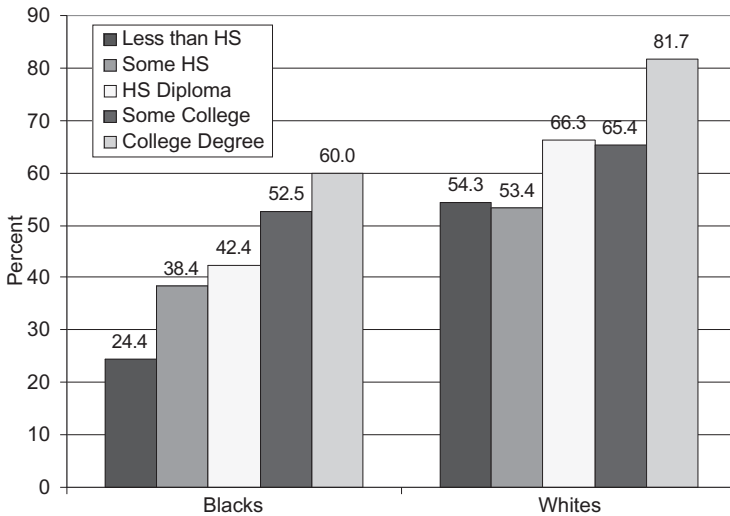
Although Cheng and Espiritu highlight the importance of nativity in distinguishing Asians and Latinos from blacks, we argue that it is more than just the sense of “sameness” derived from being foreign-born that may orient Latinos and Asians to have more positive views toward one another than toward blacks. We argue that the shared immigrant ideology of Latinos and Asians may also translate into distaste for blacks, whom they perceive as not embracing the achievement ideology. Okazawa-Rey and Wong (1997:33) make a similar point, noting that “immigrants judge the lack of success of U.S.-born peoples



**Figure 2** Mexican Americans' warmth toward blacks and whites by nativity.

of color to be the result of intellectual, character, and moral deficiencies rather than the effect of institutionalized discrimination and other real barriers to opportunities for success." A recent study of Latinos (most of Mexican origin) in Houston, Texas, that compared native-born Latinos to foreign-born Latinos found that approximately six in ten foreign-born Latinos believed there was a great deal of conflict between blacks and Latinos, in contrast to the results for native-born Latinos, in which four in ten reported a great deal of tension between blacks and Latinos (Mindiola, Rodriguez, and Niemann 1996). Jones-Correa (1998:120) notes that: "it makes just as much sense to act instrumentally and distance [oneself] from 'being Black' in their home countries as it does in the United States . . . [immigrants] are predisposed, then, even before coming to the United States, to see race as a scale on which one shifts 'upward' to become whiter, if one can." Moreover, Warren and Twine (1997:208) describe this process as "a tactical matter for nonblacks of conforming to white standards, of distancing themselves from Blackness, and of reproducing anti-Black ideas and sentiments." As a result, rather than having empathy with similarly situated minority groups that some might expect, Asian and Latino immigrants may instead express racial antipathy toward African Americans, whom they see as encompassing all that they hope not to become.

Empirically, using data from the 1990 National Latino Political Survey, we demonstrate in Figure 2 that nativity plays a role in Mexican Americans' feelings toward whites and blacks. Mexican origin individuals born in the United States feel significantly more warmth toward blacks and whites as compared to those born outside it. These results are consistent with the immigrant hypothesis. We want to emphasize, though, that concerning Mexican origin black relations, the immigrant hypothesis, while important, provides only part of the answer.



**Figure 3** Mexican Americans' warmth toward blacks and whites by educational attainment.

According to the 1990 Census, only 33 percent of the Mexican origin population, admittedly a large proportion of the group but certainly not the majority, are foreign-born. (This differs considerably from other Latino populations; for instance, 72 percent of Cubans, 71 percent of Dominicans, and 81 percent of Salvadorans are foreign-born.) One possible source of Mexican origin-Black social distance is Mexicans' high value for white skin—a holdover from the colonial experience. Another possible source is Mexicans' devaluing of blackness resulting either from current anti-black images and stereotypes that cross over from the U.S. to Mexico in media and popular culture or related to the fact that "Spanish culture has traditionally denigrated 'dark skin' and 'inferiorized' its possessors (Oliver and Johnson 1984: 66)."

Based on data from the 1990 National Latino Political Survey (see Figure 3), the impact of education on Mexican American attitudes toward blacks is striking. There is a linear increase by level of educational attainment in warmth toward blacks, from a score of 24.4 for Mexican Americans with less than high school to 60.0 for those with a college degree. There is a similar, although not perfectly linear, increase in warmth toward whites from a score of 54.3 for Mexican Americans with less than high school to a score of 81.7 for Mexican American college graduates.

This may indicate that with an increase in education, Mexican Americans may have greater social contact with Anglos and blacks, which may lead to a decreased amount of stereotyping of both of them.

## CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this chapter, we noted that demographic projections forecast that by 2050 whites will be a statistical minority in the United States (Farley 1996; McDaniel 1995). A major reason for this demographic shift is the rather large number of immigrants arriving in the United States from Asia and Latin America. In response to these demographic patterns, writers on race and ethnic relations have developed two distinct perspectives on their likely significance. One view suggests that it is doomsday in “America” and that the white values and culture that it largely represents will soon cease to exist. The other view indicates that the numerical shrinkage in the white population virtually assures the possibility for a more just and equitable U.S. society as it pertains to the opportunity structure facing racial and ethnic minorities. In contrast to these perspectives, we have argued instead that the changes in the racial/ethnic composition of our nation over the next five decades are not likely to lead to either of these portraits, in part because both views mistakenly treat racial and ethnic categories as if they are fixed and stable.

According to the 1990 Census, approximately 51 percent of the Mexican-origin population self-identified as “white” and 47 percent identified as “Other.” Consequently a third alternative for the future racial schema—that we believe reflects the complexity and fluidity of racial and ethnic categories—is the emergence of a three-way split of whites/browns/blacks, with some Mexican origin peoples, along with other groups from Latin America, seeing themselves in the middle of the United States racial hierarchy as “brown” and others strongly identifying with the white majority (see Bonilla-Silva et al. 2003). One possible indicator for how the Mexican origin population and others from Latin America will identify is their chosen panethnic label as either “Hispanic” or “Latino.” For instance, claiming the panethnic label “Hispanic” can be seen as an attempt to become another European-origin white group much like the Italians and Irish. In this scenario, there is a real danger that a significant part of the Mexican origin population will identify with and support policies advantageous to the largely white middle and upper classes but disadvantageous to the lower and working classes of people of color. In contrast, the claiming of the panethnic identity “Latino” can be seen as an attempt to identify as nonwhite. In this scenario, there is the possibility of coalescing with other people of color and supporting public policies that would address common struggles that each group faces, such as the need for better public school funding and inner-city job creation.

In this chapter, we have examined the Mexican origin population in the United States and the issue of whiteness as our lens onto what is likely to occur over the next five decades. Specifically, we have shown that discussing the Mexican origin population as a monolithic entity, especially as it pertains to their relation to blacks and whites, is problematic. For instance, how Mexican origin individuals see themselves (and are viewed) in relation to each of these

groups depends on an array of factors such as their name, English-language proficiency, skin color, height, religious orientation, social class, ethnic identity, and racial identity. In short, to speculate that all Mexican origin individuals will align themselves with people of color is no more accurate than to suggest that all will embrace whiteness as a strategy of upward mobility in the United States. It appears that there are a number of possible alternatives for the future of relations among whites, those of Mexican origin, and blacks. Unfortunately, only time will tell which is the most viable.