

Being chicano in america



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The plight of the Hispanic citizen in the United States is difficult to characterize; a massive demographic that has made its home in an equally massive nation - every major US city today boasts an impressive and diverse Hispanic population. Nowhere is this more true than in Los Angeles and New York City, where Hispanic Americans number in the millions. But who are Hispanic Americans? To what degree have they assimilated to the broader "mainstream" American culture? How do they differ from one another? In major American cities, Hispanics have, by degrees, experienced a blend of alienation and acceptance.

First, it must be understood that the broadly defined "Hispanic" or "Latino" label is itself a vast oversimplification. The US Census Bureau is the first to acknowledge that Hispanic Americans can belong to any of 13 distinct races (Cohen 88). Many people think that all Hispanic people are the same, but in actuality the term Hispanic refers to many different types of people. The term Hispanic American is not necessarily a precise linguistic description of this demographic group based on its economic, social, political and cultural diversity. Most Hispanic-Americans speak Spanish and originated from the same part of the hemisphere.

Typically, most Hispanics came to America from Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Central America, and South America. . Most Mexicans come to the United States to earn higher wages and to support their families back in Mexico. Mexican-Americans were treated inferiorly by Caucasian Americans until the late 1990s despite the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which gave Mexican Americans the right to maintain their culture in the United States

(Schaefer, 2006). Mexican American children were forced to attend segregated schools that lacked adequate supplies and educated teachers.

This “de jure” school segregation lasted until 1975 when the U. S. Supreme Court declared the segregation unconstitutional (Schaefer, 2006). Even after the school systems were integrated, Spanish speaking children were treated unfairly by teachers. In the 1960s, integrated schools in New York and Florida refused to allow Hispanic children to speak Spanish during school hours (Schaefer, 2006). Eventually, a law was passed that required communities with a Hispanic population of at least 5% to provide bilingual education classes to students (Schaefer, 2006). Bilingual education caused controversy amongst many Hispanic groups.

Hispanic school children began to fall behind because they believed that the “English Immersion” classes because the purpose was to assimilate children while depriving them of their native language. Cuban-Americans tend to be concentrated in Miami and on the East Coast. Most of the Cuban population immigrated to the United States during the 1950s, after the takeover of Cuba by the radical communist leader Fidel Castro. The Cubans that fled their home country as refugees tended to be well-educated, wealthy, and politically conservative, and they retained these traits once in the United States.

Cuban immigrants that have been in America for a long period of time tend to be better-educated than other Hispanic populations, while Mexican-Americans, who may be more recent immigrants, come from an economic situation with poor economic opportunities, may tend to be less well-educated. One reason

for the political difference between Mexican and Cuban-Americans in terms of their voting affiliation may be that Mexican-Americans are often fleeing what they perceived to be an unfair right-wing government that is hostile to creating economic opportunities for the lower classes.

Unlike Cuban-Americans, Mexican-Americans tend to be more politically liberal on social issues, although they are more politically conservative on social issues if they strongly identify with their Catholic heritage than non-Hipic individuals of a similar liberal political affiliation. Of Central and South American Hipics, such as Nicaraguans or El Salvadorians, political affiliation is highly influential upon the nature of the regime the individuals were fleeing.

El Salvador was dominated by right-wing leaders who drove many individuals from the nation, versus the left-wing Nicaraguan government of the Sandinistas in the 1980s. Most Hipics, regardless of where they hail from strongly support the death penalty and family values, although, contrary to conservative stereotype 91% said they disagreed with the present President Bush on issues pertaining to immigration (Corral, 2004). Geographically, of Latino groups, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans are the most likely to live urban locations, but all Hipic Americans were more likely to be urban dwellers than their White counterparts.

Hipic-Americans are also more likely to be employed in service occupations, particularly Mexican-Americans and Mexicans have the lowest annual earnings, overall, of all Hipics. Hipics are less likely than non-Hipic Whites to have earnings of \$35, 000 or more each year. Thus, although Mexican-

Americans may be disproportionately afflicted by poverty, this may be a reflection of their greater numbers and more recent immigrant status, given that Mexican-Americans outnumber other Hispanic-Americans according to most recent census figures.

All Hispanic-Americans, although they may be profoundly culturally and politically different in their home nations have common political interests because of the current state of inequity that exists in America between Whites and Hispanics. Furthermore, because they are growing as a demographic and tend to be younger, Hispanics have a political interest in banding together as a powerful interest group to further their interests as a people, even if they might not perceive themselves as unified in such a way that transcends age-old cultural differences.

Hispanic-Americans can benefit from joining together as an interest group to improve social conditions for themselves and fight against discrimination (Inventing Hispanics, 2001). Even across cultures, between politically conservative Cubans and liberal Nicaraguans, similarities exist. This sentiment is reflected in the profile of all Hispanic immigrant groups, which tend to live in closer proximity to their extended family, and retain close ties to family that still resides their home country.

While the political regime in that nation may affect the type of contact that is possible or feasible for immigrants to America to retain, the determination to keep contact with that group and to facilitate immigration by extended family 'back' in the home country was common across all Hispanic-American groups. As with any demographic, Hispanics do not rise and fall as one people,

but rather experience gains and setbacks regionally and of course, individually. Thus, it is not surprising that Hipics in Los Angeles may experience very different things than their counterparts in New York City. For one thing, the Hipic population of Los Angeles is largely Mexican. In the state of California as a whole, 84% of all Hipics are of Mexican origin; in Los Angeles, this figure is just as high (Pew Hipic Center 1). By contrast, in New York City, there are a plethora of different peoples that comprise the Hipic population. A patchwork of Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, South and Central Americans, Cubans, and Mexicans is blanketed over metropolitan New York, and in some respects, Hipic neighborhoods reflect this.

For example, Castle Hill, Hunts Point and Grand Concourse in the Bronx are predominantly Puerto Rican areas; Roosevelt Avenue, Corona, and Jackson Heights in Queens are home to New York's up and coming South American population (Ramirez & de la Cruz 2-6). These many distinctions reflect not only in the physical appearance of the "average" Hipic in New York, but also in the customs and ideologies that are embraced within each of these communities. It is perhaps because of these many Hipic subsets that so many foreign-born Latinos in New York appear to have much closer ties to their country of origin than do Hipics in Los Angeles.

In a recent survey, over seven in ten foreign-born Latinos in New York said they consider their "real homeland to be in the country where they were born", as opposed to the 57% of California Hipics that said the same thing (Pew Hipic Center 2). As a corollary to this, nearly half of foreign-born New York Hipics plan to permanently return to their country of origin some day; only one third of California Hipics make the same claim (Pew Hipic Center 2).

Do these trends speak to the degrees by which Hipics in America feel alienated by mainstream society?

If so, it is a difficult conclusion to reconcile with other phenomena that affect Hipics directly. In both New York City and Los Angeles the Hipic community is thriving; as such, the majority of New York City's Hipics are classified as "highly/partially acculturated", and in Los Angeles, the Hipic Population has tripled since 1980 (Hutchinson 47). What this means is that in both New York City and Los Angeles, Hipics are enjoying a cultural connectedness that transcends their point of origin.

This is evidenced by an overwhelming proficiency with English and Spanish, and a unique ability to vacillate comfortably between the Hipic and "American" cultures. The average Hipic that arrives in New York City or Los Angeles will find not only that he or she is in good company, but that a rich, distinct cultural enclave awaits. In each of these colossal media markets, an immigrant Hipic will find himself in a culture that, though new to him, is nonetheless at pains to communicate and connect with him in a familiar way. Politicians will be clamoring for his vote, many of whom may bear a Hipic surname.

Stores, shops and markets run by Hipics and stocked with foods from his country of origin will be easy to find. Spanish language radio stations, television stations, and advertisements will all be aimed at attracting his specific attention—and his dollar. In Los Angeles, where 40% of the metro is Hipic, Spanish Language radio stations consistently bring in higher ratings than any other stations in the market (Ramirez & de la Cruz 3-7). The power

of the Hipic consumer has not gone unnoticed. This is not to say that Hipics in New York or Los Angeles do not experience discrimination.

Roughly 30% of Hipics in both places claim to have been in contact with some form of discrimination because of their racial/ethnic background (Pew Hipic Center 3). A difference between East and West, however, lies in the perceived root cause of that discrimination. The majority of Hipics in New York believe that they are discriminated against mainly for the fact that they are Spanish-speaking; whereas Los Angeles Hipics are more likely to assert that it is their physical appearance that attracts discrimination (Pew Hipic Center 3).

Hipics are also discriminating against one another in the United States; not surprisingly, in New York the cause of this discrimination is the very diversity that exists within the demographic. In Los Angeles, where the Hipic population is overwhelmingly Mexican, discrimination within the demographic tends to reflect social conditions, with wealthier Hipics discriminating against their poorer counterparts. In each region, however, intra-racial discrimination among Hipics is cited as a “major problem” by at least half of all Hipics (Pew Hipic Center 4).

The intriguing history of the United States of America has certainly added an interesting chapter in recent years; it is a chapter that belongs to its fastest growing demographic: Hipics. It is now widely understood that in the next 50 years, Hipics will likely supplant the “white” race as the largest racial group in this country (Cohen 91). This has raised some notorious fears about a balkanized United States made up of ethnic enclaves. It has also caused

some to express grave concern about the preservation of the English language in the US, and the "American" way that was forged in the white Puritan crucible.

As probably a reaction both SB 1070, to deter undocumented immigrants, and the DREAM act- a piece of legislation that is on the other polar end of the spectrum were formed to both combat, and aid in the acceptance of Hispanic immigrants. Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act ("DREAM Act") was introduced in the United States Senate, and the United States House of Representatives . This proposition would give those inadmissible or deportable alien students who graduate from US high schools, who are of good moral character, arrived in the U. S. as minors, and have been in the country continuously for at least five years prior to the bill's enactment, the opportunity to earn conditional permanent residency and thus continue their studies and be a part of Americas work force. S. B. 1070 was formed as an effort to force people of Latino descent to have their documentation on them at all times. This has caused much controversy, as it has been the pillar for racial profiling and discrimination discussions.

Socioeconomic status drives the inequalities in the school system. The low and working class have less time and income to intervene with schooling.

This means they have less time to meet with teachers, hire tutors, and provide continuous transportation. Therefore the lower class can't possibly compete with the middle and upper classes. Many Latino students feel inferior in United States School systems. Another explanation to this is a theory of cultural deprivation. This is the idea that certain cognitive styles connect to different ethnic groups. It just so happens that what school

demands from students is a characteristic of the White and Asian races, which is abstraction, while other less successful groups like African Americans and Latinos possess more concrete thinking.

Current manifestations of this can be seen from Samuel Huntington's article "The Hispanic Challenge." Huntington believes that the Latino culture is deprived because Latinos have not assimilated into American culture, and thus, can't succeed within its boundaries. According to Huntington, unlike previous immigrants, Hispanics wish to retain a dual culture. This presents them with the culture clash of two varying views on culture as well as education. There are several factors that have made this culture of immigrants' so much different than the past immigrants that America has so fondly welcomed with open arms.

These include contiguity, scale, illegality, regional concentration, persistence, and historical presence. The fact that the US shares such a large border with Mexico is enhanced by the great economic differences on each side. "The income gap between the United States and Mexico is the largest between any two contiguous countries in the world" (Huntington). The incentive to immigrate is obvious, and allows Latinos to remain in contact with their family and friends while making a living in the US. Because the passage between these borders is so accessible, it has led to immigration on a grand scale.

The persistence of Hispanics in migrating has led to having Mexicans account for nearly half of all immigration to the US and has changed Mexican's standing from the minority to the majority in many areas. This regional

concentration has slowed assimilation because "dispersal is essential" for this to take place. An example of regional concentration slowing this process down to almost a halt is in Miami in which the Cuban population has dominated and Cuban culture is overwhelmingly evident. Much of this immigration has also been done illegally, supporting the fact that Cubans do not possess a strong desire to assimilate.

Many Hispanics feel like they should not have to assimilate into an area that is historically theirs. Many feel like this land was stolen from them and have the right to rebel against political, legal and cultural standings. There is also much support from fellow Hispanics in this cause because "blood is thicker than borders" (Huntington) that is, who you are should overcome where you live. In the US today, there is no need or incentive for Hispanics to assimilate into the "American" culture. There is actually more reason to retain Hispanic culture than to let it go.

Hispanics are not willing to buy into America, and thus continue to possess several cultural traits that hold them back. These include "lack of initiative, self reliance and ambition as well as little or no use for education, [and that] hard work is not the way to material prosperity" (Huntington). For these reasons, Hispanics are rejecting the ways of the US culture, but in that, they also reject the characteristics of success in school and life that come with the assimilation into this culture.

Huntington's article says "Mexican Americans will share in that dream and in that society only if they dream in English." The reasons that compel Latino individuals to migrate from their home countries to this one vary greatly.

Some immigrants are motivated in hopes of escaping political turmoil, while others are motivated by the prospect of attaining an “ education or economic opportunities with the hopes of improving their lives” (Santiago-Rivera et al. , p. 56). According to Gallardo-Cooper, one way to capture the complexity of the adaptation process is by examining its various manifestations.

This process is described in a framework using three dimensions: complete assimilation, acculturation/ integration, and rejection of the American culture. The incorporation of “ values of the majority culture” is more prevalent in those members of a community that have been living in the United States the longest (Ramirez and Castaneda). A first generation Mexican immigrant is less likely to accept the majority culture as his own than a second generation Mexican American. Understandably, a third generation Mexican American would be more susceptible than previous generations towards assimilation.

Many hipic children are Bilingual, but prefer to speak English, primarily. A movement away from traditional Latino family values and “ avoid[ance] of Latino leisure activities” are also signs of assimilation, and many children exhibit both of these attributes (Ramirez & Castaneda). Assimilation or acculturation perspectives would be expected to arise from the pressures to incorporate the values of mainstream America that are felt, in both, dualistic and atraditional communities.

Many kids have assimilated, however, despite growing up in a traditional community. A traditional community is a cohesive unit where there are close

ties between most families, which are related by blood, marriage or religious ceremony. The “ traditional community is ethnically homogeneous; most residents in these communities” are of Latino descent (Ramirez and Castaneda, pg. 89). Additionally, Spanish is the primary language spoken in these communities. These factors serve to instill a strong sense of identification with the ethnic group.

Ramirez and Castaneda, however, emphasize that within every community some variability will be observed from individual to individual, which would account for the contradictory assimilationist attitude observed in some Hipic children. As a child raised in a traditional community, one would be socialized to “ achieve cooperatively” and “ achieve for the family” (Ramirez and Castaneda). The interpersonal relationships typically found in a traditional community are such that relationships within the extended family take priority over those formed outside the family.

The strong interpersonal relationships typically found in a traditional community are apparently absent in many immigrant children’s lives. While growing up sometimes the only close relationships had are relationships with the family. The extended family becomes virtually non-existent in life as a result of the migration. Peer groups play a crucial role in the socialization of adolescents in a dualistic community. Relationships in peer groups are very close, long lasting, and demand commitment for mutual help; membership in these peer groups parallels family ties.

As an adolescent. Values related to Hipic ideology have a strong influence in a traditional community, but have little influence on child socialization in a

dualistic community. For example the parent may adhere to tradition religious practices, such as Catholicism- but children aren't forced to, who may find that these practices are rigid and outdated. That outlook on religion compares with the sentiments observed in Mexican American youths growing up in a dualistic community.

The traits of family centeredness and religiosity may reflect positively or negatively on group members, depending on the extent to which individuals' behavior is consistent with the traits. People who deviate from these prescriptive behaviors may be seen as traitors to their community. They may therefore be seen as "acting white," or being traitors if they reject the Catholicism of their communities. Consequently, it is not surprising that ethnic identity may itself be shaped by ethnic stereotypes. In conclusion the Latino population experiences a unique type of discrimination that is both de facto and de jure.

Aside from blatant anti-Latino, there exists mechanism and laws the inherently discriminate against Latinos. This research has given me a greater understanding of the Hispanic culture, how they differ amongst their own varying factions. This is important in my field because one may make assumptions based on a very broad categories. There are stands difference not only between the different Spanish speaking populations, but also the generations. This better explains one's ability or desire to assimilate, it gives insight to understanding how discrimination and oppression acutely affects them.