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Race in the Americas

IN LATIN AMERICA and the United States, Europeans, Africans, Asians, and indigenous peoples mixed and produced "new people."¹ Few people, however, would deny that the population stew in the United States is quite different from that in Latin America. Indeed, a number of scholars have noted the difference between the processes of racial formation in the north and the south (Degler 1959; Denton and Massey 1989; Ginorio 1979; Harris et al. 1993; Petrullo 1947:16; Pitt-Rivers 1975; Rodríguez and Cordero-Guzmán 1992; Wade 1985; Wagley 1965). Snowden argues that the concept of "race" in Latin America is similar to that of the ancient peoples in the areas surrounding the Mediterranean (1983:97), and others contend that in Latin America, "race" is more like a "social race" or an ethnicity (Pitt-Rivers 1975; Wagley 1965).

However, the concept of race in Latin America has been quite different from the ancient view, in that it also implies a "pigmentocracy," a racist paradigm in which honor, status, and prestige are signaled by skin color and phenotype. The whiter one's skin and the more European looking one is, the greater is one's claim to honor and privilege. Conversely, the darker one's skin is, the more closely associated one is with African and Amerindian peoples—that is, the conquered and the laborers.² The recent literature has highlighted this difference and consequently stressed the similarities in this regard between racial formation in the United States and Latin America.

POLARITIES ALONG THE NORTH-SOUTH AXIS

Latin America is a very large and extremely heterogeneous area. For a variety of reasons, studies of race by North Americans have usually focused on just a few regions—for example, Brazil, the Spanish

Caribbean, and Mexico.³ Consequently, the following generalizations must be read with a number of provisos in mind. First, not all Latin American countries have been adequately researched. Second, much of what is reviewed here was written in English and thus does not cover the literature written in Spanish or Portuguese that is not well known in the United States. Third, even the Spanish and Portuguese studies may not accurately incorporate or even consider the views of the less educated or nonelite. Finally, at present, travel, communications, and the exchange of peoples and goods between Latin America and the United States are at all-time highs and are expected to increase in this era of global transformation. Because race is a social construct, it has been and will continue to be influenced by these changes.

Table 6.1 indicates the broad differences found in the literature. The first of these four major differences between the north and south is the tendency in Latin America to see "race" as a social-racial construction and in the United States to see it as a genealogical concept. In the Spanish Caribbean and Latin America, ancestral "blood" is only one variable determining one's race. Moreover, race is not necessarily passed down from generation to generation, as is implicit in a system based on hypodescent or genetic inheritance. In the Spanish Caribbean, the parents of a white child may be black or an intermediate shade. Accordingly, in the Caribbean and Latin America, phenotype is often viewed as an "individual marker," whereas in the United States it is a group marker determining one's reference group (Wright 1994). Of course, in almost all Latin American countries, certain phenotypes are associated with particular linguistic or social/cultural groups, with cultural types, and/or with stereotypes, for example, the tall Otavalo Andean Indians of Ecuador and the African-descended people of the Chocó in Colombia (see Arocha 1998 for an interesting analysis of the relationship of the latter to issues of inclusion in Colombia).

A second, related, dimension is that race is not always based on just color. Other physical and social characteristics, such as facial features, hair texture, social class, dress, personality, education, linguistic identity, cultural modes of behavior, relation of the referent to the speaker, and context are important to "racial classification" (Rodríguez and Cordero-Guzmán 1992; Sanjek 1971:1128). Hence, a person who would be considered white in the Spanish Caribbean might be considered black or nonwhite in the United States because of his or her color. Race in the Caribbean and Latin America is highly dependent on context

Table 6.1
General Differences in Racial Constructions

	United States	Latin America
Type of social construction	Genealogical-biological-hypodescent	Social-racial
Categories	Few, discrete, mutually exclusive	Multitude, overlapping
Role of color	Basic variable	One of many variables
Fluidity over time	Some fluidity	Substantial fluidity
Nomenclature	Unstable for mixtures or nonwhites	More stable

and situation (Harris et al. 1993; Johnson et al. 1997; Rodriguez and Cordero-Guzmán 1992).

Third, in many parts of Latin America, race is more openly reported as able to change over time and space.⁴ That is, in some countries, a person may be born "brown" but become "white" with upward mobility, whereas in the United States, race is more static and is often considered to be an ascribed characteristic. Reflecting this more fluid conception of race in the Spanish Caribbean and Latin America are a variety of racial terms, often overlapping and without clear demarcation. In Brazil, for example, an open-ended question about race in a survey can yield more than 140 categories of answers (Sanjek 1971). The various terms used to refer to racial types or categories indicate the different conceptions (and constructions) of race. Hence, the racial taxonomies differ, although in both the north and the south, white has generally been seen as preferable to or better than black because it was the color of those who conquered and colonized and were the "governing race," as they were labeled in the 1850 U.S. census (U.S. Secretary of the Interior 1852:20).

In each country of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, a greater number of terms are consistently and commonly used—for example, *moreno*, *indio*, *jabao*, and *trigueño*—for what in the United States might be called "black" or "intermediates," a term not often used here. Some of these terms (e.g., *trigueño* or *moreno*) also are ambiguous or have many meanings, referring at times to those regarded as white or black in the United States.⁵ In addition, a variety of terms are used to refer to those who are *blancos* (whites) or to their particular color, for example, *blancusina/o*

(very white), *cano/a* (white, as in gray or white hair), *rubia/o* (blond), *guera/o* (blond), *colorá/ado/a* (reddish), and *jinja/o* (pale). In some groups, the very term *blanco* or *blanquito* (white) is also increasingly used to refer to removed, powerful, or upper-class persons, regardless of their color, thereby underscoring the relationship between perceived color and power. Finally, descriptive terms are used to refer to skin color that is not white-white, for example, *piel canela* (cinnamon skin), *trigueño claro* (light *trigueño*), and *trigueño oscuro* (dark *trigueño*).

Alvar found eighty-two racial terms used throughout Latin America—and since the same term often has more than one meaning, he listed 240 definitions for them (1987:89–215). Many of these terms have been used for a long time and have different meanings in different countries. The following example from his work illustrates how complex these terms are. The term *puchuelo* was first cited by Father Morell in a work published in 1776, but he noted that it was coined much earlier. In Peru and Venezuela, *puchuelo* is defined as the result of a cross between a European and an *ochavona*. This cross is said to produce a person of *raza totalmente blanca* (of the totally white race). *Puchuelo* is also defined as the cross between a white person and a person who is *cuarterona de mestizo* (one-quarter mestizo). If the term is modified by *de negro*, "of blacks," in Mexico the term means the child of a white and an *ochavona negra* (or octoroon) (Alvar 1987:185). Some people may legitimately object to works like Alvar's that analyze and itemize minute differences in conceptions of race as trivializing the inherent brutality of slavery and racism. However, such works also demonstrate that both researchers and the lay public were aware of the magnitude of phenotypic diversity and the complexity and fluidity involved in creating such differences.

In contrast, in the United States, despite early and regional or local variations—for example, in New Orleans—race is generally determined by perceived or imputed biological inheritance. The "rule of hypodescent," according to which one drop of "black" blood makes a person "black," has been applied most recently and most rigidly to African Americans.⁶ Because race and color are often used synonymously, African Americans are considered to be "black" regardless of their appearance or other factors. Similarly, Asians are considered "yellow" and Native Americans "red." Although other social variables are often part of racial determination in the United States, for example, accent or speech or dress style, the basis is ancestry and color. Moreover, in the

United States, persons born black remain black no matter what they achieve socially. Until recently, intermarriage between whites and non-whites (other than blacks) has resulted in their children's race being defined as partialized, as in "half-breeds" or "part Asians," for a number of generations. Assimilation often has meant hyphenated American status for some groups, minoritization for other groups, and total Americanization for those who most resemble Europeans.

Although African Americans have also developed a variety of terms to refer to color tones (Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1992) and some terms such as *mulatto* and *half-breed* have been used by governmental bodies in the past, the emphasis has been on constructing race categories as if they were "pure" (Lee 1993). Even in the African American community, individuals never become fully white, as they do in some Latino communities. Indeed, when a person of African American descent becomes white, it is because the individual is "passing," that is, leaving the black community. Although some people in the African American community are seen as "white" by African Americans, whites, and others, to use this as a self-designation or category would be seen as denying their group, ancestry, or "true" identity. In contrast, in Latino communities, it is not uncommon to refer to individuals as Latino and white (in color), without any denial of ethnicity implied. At the same time, the terms *white* and *Latino* can be juxtaposed as two distinct cultural-racial groups, so to be one is not necessarily to be the other. In contrast, in the United States, individuals are rarely considered both black/African American and white (in color); they tend to be seen as mutually exclusive. It is only with the recent increase in intermarriage that the children of such unions have begun to use terms such as *biracial* and *multiracial* for themselves and that these terms have become common ways of describing individuals of "mixed" heritage. Those persons without immediate "mixed" ancestry have not generally been so described, although increasingly many are claiming all their ancestries.

In essence, as noted in chapter 4, the racial taxonomy of the United States has reflected a small number of intermediate racial categories that have fluctuated (in both official and everyday use) over time, whereas in the Spanish Caribbean and other parts of Latin America, many intermediate and stable categories have persisted over time. As noted earlier, the extent to which these different constructions of race influence one another because of immigration to the United States,

transnational migration movements, and increased communications between both hemispheres is not yet clear.

DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

Although the differences between north and south pertain to racial constructions, they may also obscure the similarities. First, both Americas have histories of indigenous conquest, slavery, and immigration. Second, in both Americas, race has been constructed to reflect and support class and power relations. Each country in Latin America has developed its own racial constructions, but in all cases, they have tended to benefit those in power. The ideological and practical racial distinctions of the colonial structure of Latin America as a whole has favored the conquerors and colonizers. As Spickard noted,

From the point of view of the dominant group, racial distinctions are a necessary tool of dominance. They serve to separate the subordinate people as Other. Putting simple, neat racial labels on dominated peoples—and creating negative myths about the moral qualities of those peoples—makes it easier for the dominators to ignore the individual humanity of their victims. (1992:19)

A racial hierarchy was and is still evident today in Spanish-speaking America, which has been reinforced in the Spanish-language media, particularly in the ever-popular television *novelas* or soap operas that air in both Latin America and the United States. In most *novelas*, the protagonists and major characters are usually played by northern European-looking actors, and the marginal and lower-status service roles, such as maids and chauffeurs, are given to darker-skinned, non-European actors (Subervi-Vélez et al. 1997:234–235).

Reasons for the Differences

The reasons offered for these differences are too numerous to be explained fully here, so I will only summarize a few of them. One is that Spain's contact with North Africa made the Spanish more tolerant of different color groups than the northern Europeans were. That is, Mediterranean peoples tended to see darker-skinned people as white or

more like them than northern Europeans did. According to Forbes, Spaniards were used to a great variety of colors but did not associate them with a concept of separate "races." Thus, the Spanish Mediterranean world used a variety of color terms and had an awareness of many gradations in human physical types and subscribed to the general view that "human types changed gradually and blended into one another." According to Forbes, this view was typical not just of Spain but also of most observers before 1900 (Forbes 1988:268).⁷

Both Sanjek (1994) and Forbes (1988), however, contend that the Spanish way of viewing race shifted over time toward a more racialized view. Sanjek argues that despite the initially different views of Spain and northern Europe regarding color and race, by the late seventeenth century, all European countries looked down on both Africans and Native Americans and were reluctant to sanction intermarriage or to admit persons of mixed background to the full entitlements enjoyed by those of solely European ancestry (1994:1-17). "As the centuries of dispossession and enslavement of these peoples wore on, the ordinariness and economic utility of such treatment were accepted more and more" (p. 5).

Spain adopted the Roman slave law codes, which were developed when a person of any race could be a slave. In this context, slavery was "an unfortunate accident that could befall any luckless one." This conception of slavery as accidental and not racial "automatically endowed [African/black slaves] with the immunities contained in the ancient prescription" (Degler 1959:28). Consequently, the Spanish conceived of slaves and Indians as vassals or royal subjects and thus as having certain rights. This differed from the North American conception of slaves as property. This does not mean that the Spanish treatment of slaves was more benevolent but, rather, that it was sanctioned and conceived of differently. Indeed, Hoetink found in his study of the Caribbean that "there is no clear connection between the type of slavery practices, that is, whether 'cruel' or 'mild,' and the positions attained by free blacks or colored in the society" (1985:8).

A third difference noted is the influence of the Spanish Catholic Church, which had a central role in the conquest of Latin America. In Latin America, it also promoted the conversion, baptism, and attendance of slaves at integrated religious services, whereas in the United States, the churches for blacks and whites were separate.⁸ For some, the role of the Catholic Church is seen to be analogous to that of the Span-

ish legal code. That is, in theory it promoted a positive cultural attitude toward persons of color but in practice failed to carry it out (Denton and Massey 1989; Rodríguez and Cordero-Guzmán 1992).

The economies of many Latin American countries were more mixed and less dependent on slavery. As a result, slavery was less important as an institution, and there were fewer slaves, both absolutely and proportionately. (Brazil and the Caribbean were the major exceptions.) This, together with the immigration of many Europeans and the substantial numbers in some countries of indigenous peoples, may have led to a conception of race that was fluid instead of dichotomous (Duany 1985; Hoetink 1985). Duany (1985) illustrated the significance of economic development in racial formation by comparing the history of race relations in nineteenth-century Cuba and Puerto Rico. He contends that race relations in Cuba, which had a plantation economy, distinguished more rigidly between the white planters and the nonwhite plantation workers or slaves. In Puerto Rico, however, the absence of an extensive plantation economy created a large intermediate group of free colored persons, which facilitated social-racial mobility (Hoetink 1985:14; Williams 1984).⁹

The gender ratio was also quite different in early Spanish America. As Rodríguez and Cordero-Guzmán found, "the greater migration of European women and families to North America as compared with Latin America—where men predominated and European women were scarce—may also have influenced the relations between races and the consequent conceptions of race that evolved" (1992:527). Indigenous and African women may more often have been mates of European men. The children of such unions were, in some cases, recognized and educated, and they contributed to the formation of the *criollo* class (Burkett 1978). In addition, the development of a large, free, African-descended class may also have produced greater differentiation. As appendix D explains, the number and proportion of "free people of color" in the United States was never very large, peaking at less than 15 percent of all African Americans.

RACE IN EARLY SPANISH AMERICA

Undoubtedly all these explanations contributed to the distinctive constructions of race in Latin America, as compared with those in the

United States. When and how did these differences begin? Forbes suggests that the Latin American tendency to view individuals in a "progression of colors" reflected a more Mediterranean worldview in which numerous shades were associated with Europeans, Africans, and so forth (1988:268). This approach, he argues, was brought by the Spaniards to the Americas and predated the extensive mixing that took place there. Even though his assumption has not been extensively researched, if we examine the records of early Spanish America, we find a society with many, fluid, and overlapping race categories, determined by various physical, social, and economic variables.

Early Spanish colonial records use color terms to describe Europeans, a practice not followed in the British colonies. Evidently, race was determined by a variety of factors, such as reputation, legal process, choice, acculturation, and *calidad* (quality) and many different terms were used to describe people physically.¹⁰ In addition, and again somewhat in contrast to the British colonies, mixture (or *mestisaje*) was recognized in the writings and paintings of the time. Finally, the early Spanish American literature refers to lower-class Spaniards (or whites) as a caste, suggesting that castes were not based just on color.

An example of how substantial the color variations were even among those classified as "Spaniards" is a 1677 roster of colonists bound for New Mexico. It lists as Spaniards those individuals described as having "fair skin," others as having "dark complexions," and still others listed as being "mestizos" or "dark." Spaniards also were classified by national origin, and so there were European Spaniards, Mexican Spaniards, and Spanish Indians (Gutiérrez 1991:197). Color was apparently an adjective that could be applied to persons of different national-origin groups.

These references contrast with the later practices in the British colonies, whose European-descended population seldom referred to degrees or modifications of color. Greene and Harrington's 1966 compilation of population estimates in the British colonies before 1790 reflects this convention and indicates the common use of terms such as *people*, *souls*, *inhabitants*, or *whites*—with the last two terms sometimes modified, as in European or white inhabitants—to count populations.¹¹ Color terms were not used to describe Europeans, nor were those of "mixed race" generally reported as such. With some minor exceptions, the basic divisions were—as in the first decennial census—whites, slaves (or blacks), and Indians, by tribe.¹²

Settlers in early Spanish America also emphasized racial classification according to reputation or social acceptance (Gutiérrez 1991). For example, in his analysis of sixteenth- to eighteenth-century northern New Spain (now New Mexico), Gutiérrez discovered that a Juan Sandoval was listed "by appearance of white racial status." Another man was described as "mestizo, according to reputation," and still another was promoted to lieutenant because "he is known as a white man" (1991:198). Categories such as *español*, *mestizo*, and *mulato* were sometimes used interchangeably with descriptions of physical color—like *blanco* (white), *pardo* (roughly brown or gray), and *prieto* (black)—even though color had no real legal definition. Consequently, a person could be described as *español mestizo* (or a mestizo Spaniard).

Comments that a person "appeared to be," "was reputed to be," or "was known to be" of a certain race also indicated that classification depended somewhat on social perception and acceptance. This in turn suggests that racial mixing and "passing" may have been prevalent on this remote fringe of northern New Spain (Gutiérrez 1991:198). Except at the extreme ends of the color scale, however, there was no direct correspondence "between race and actual physical color" (Gutiérrez 1991:197).

Other scholars writing about early Spanish America have noted this malleability of "race" (Carroll 1991). MacLeod, for example, writing about Central America in the seventeenth century, notes that many Indians kept their "race" but became non-Indian through dress and the adoption of language and cultural customs—becoming culturally mestizos or Ladinos (1973:308, 383). Katzew reports that in Mexico during the eighteenth century, a number of newly wealthy families who were descendants of Indians and slaves purchased certificates of legal "whiteness" (called *gracias al sacar*, which is translated literally today as "thanks to be taken out" but which may have had a different meaning at the time) (1996:12). At the same time, others manipulated their racial identities for other purposes, as when mestizos identified themselves culturally with Indians and adopted Indian hairstyles, language, and the like in order to avoid paying tribute. Likewise, blacks adopted Indian and Spanish customs.

Furthermore, according to Gutiérrez, in this early period in Spanish America, a person's status was based not solely on race but also on *calidad* (1991:202 ff). *Calidad* and color were often closely related. Spaniards prized their honor, and many were persons of *calidad* because they lived

among (and were above) *genízaros* (detrribalized Indians), who had been dishonored by their enslavement, and among the Pueblo Indians, who had been conquered. Gutiérrez pointed out that much of what it meant to be "honorable" was a projection of what it meant to be a free, land-holding citizen of legitimate white ancestry. Conversely, those without honor were slaves, outcasts, or Indians. Nonetheless, the concept of honor was not necessarily rooted in racial-physical difference but was, rather, "a complex measure of social status based on one's religion, ethnicity, race, occupation, ancestry and authority over land" (Gutiérrez 1991:206). Consequently, the resulting social order tended to favor those most akin to the European conquerors yet still allowed non-Europeans to improve their position.

This order differed somewhat from the system that evolved in the United States, which based social and racial status strongly, if not solely, on biological descent or appearance. Thus, *calidad* was not a concept that had an exact equivalent in the United States' racial formation process. Moreover, even though concepts similar to *calidad* undoubtedly could be found in the United States, for example, "god-fearing" and "honest," these were not generally used in racial classifications. As a minimum, it required "whiteness" to be a citizen, so people were first members of a race and then were god-fearing, honest, or whatever.

Another difference is that in North America, mixtures were described only biologically, whereas in Latin and Central America, cultural descriptors were never completely abandoned (Forbes 1988). Latin Americans distinguished first between those of legitimate birth raised by the Spanish and those raised by Native Americans. This distinction recognized that cultural factors or socialization influenced the identity of the "hybrids." Early North American colonists followed this same path, but by the 1800s, and especially after the Civil War, "greater and greater emphasis was placed upon wholly biological or 'racial' categorization and differentiation in North America." (Forbes 1988:269; see also Davis 1992; Logan Alexander 1991; Williamson 1984)

A number of scholars have noted the early use of various and changing terms to physically describe "mixes" of people as well as the conquering Spaniards (Alvar 1987; Forbes 1988; O'Crouley 1972; Rodríguez, R. 1991:24). O'Crouley, for example, in his description of New Spain in 1774, lists and defines several common terms used to describe mixtures.¹³ Gutiérrez's 1991 analysis of marriage and baptismal records in sixteenth- to eighteenth-century northern Mexico uncovered various

terms used to describe brides, grooms, babies, and parishioners. This contrasts with the United States, where official documents or common parlance did not use many terms to refer to mixtures of people. Many of these terms are still commonly used in Latin America, for example, *mestizo*. Others, however, are no longer employed, for example, *castizo* or *genizaro*.¹⁴ MacLeod also noted the diverse categories in early Central America, for example, Spanish and Ladinos, *mestizos*, blacks, mulattoes, *Indios*, English (1973:228). Finally, the *casta* paintings commissioned during the 1700s by wealthy Spaniards and *criollos* illustrate the numerous terms used to describe the different "mixes" (Katzew 1996).¹⁵

Although in the United States, terms referring to "mixtures" were few, in some parts of the Spanish-speaking Americas, numerous terms were used to refer to different kinds of mixes, for example, children of indigenous and African parents (Forbes 1988:130). Gutiérrez (1991), examining colonial records in Mexico dating between 1690 and 1846, also found a variety of terms used for different mixes. For example, *coyote* and *lobo* (wolf) were widely used to refer to the "half-breed" children of Indian slave women born in captivity.¹⁶ *Color quebrado* was a broad term that did not specify the nature or extent of racial mixture but, rather, meant "broken color" or "half-breed." The precise degree of racial mixture was not indicated. Hence, in contrast to the United States, the blood quantum was not ranked, although like the United States, the sense that mixture diminished "purity" was present.

Gutiérrez (1991) noted the various classifications of Indians and Spaniards in northern New Spain. If an Indian spoke Spanish, he or she was known as an *indio ladino*. *Indios* were Pueblo Indians who lived in their own towns and were economically and politically independent. A *genizaro* was a detrribalized Indian who lived in a Spanish town. This term is no longer used, but at the time it appeared as a column heading in census counts. According to Gutiérrez, the status of *genízaros* was similar to that of domestics or slaves (1991:150).

With regard to early views of the influence of "non-Spanish blood" on future generations, the picture is quite complex. On the one hand, Spanish colonial records indicate that (black) race was not necessarily transmitted from one generation to another (Forbes 1988:121). Although the records might classify a mother as *negra* (black), they might also classify her daughter as *lora* (brown)¹⁷ or might not indicate color at all, which usually meant white. Gutiérrez's 1991 analysis of early records also indicates that race was not necessarily inherited. In the

early period, marriage statistics seldom gave race, and mixing appeared to be common. This contrasts with how the children of African slaves or free people of color were classified in the United States. Writers on the early Spanish American period also have not found evidence of a strict view of hypodescent, as was prominent in the north.

Sometimes, however, racist views were clearly articulated, and the biological and cultural supremacy of the Spanish and Europeans was often explicitly stated or assumed. Also, some commentators of the time distinguished between the influence of "black blood" and that of "Indian blood" on "Spanish blood." For example, in Pedro Alonso O'Crouley's description of eighteenth-century New Spain, he, as a Spanish merchant from Cadiz, accepts without question the superiority of Spaniards and refers without hesitation to the more indelible stigma of mixture with Negroes as opposed to Indians (1972:20 ff). Another Spanish merchant writing at about the same time affirms this view and stresses even more the supremacy of the white pole to the black (Katzew 1996:10-11). The question, of course, is whether such texts reflected the prevailing customs, the views of the elite class, or the observations and prejudices of these particular upper-class Spanish observers.

The *casta* paintings offer a similarly complicated view. What is unusual about these paintings is that they depict the complexity of intermixing. Indeed, this appears to be the paintings' purpose. Thus, we see a variety of mixtures, from children who appear to be white but whose parents are described as not white, to those who appear to be black but whose parents appear to be white. The paintings' depiction and explication of mixture are not found in the same degree in the north, where mixing also occurred. It also is curious that in these paintings, the Spanish who intermarry or interbreed are depicted as being of both genders. Similarly, the Indians or blacks are not always the female slaves or Indian princesses commonly found in U.S. literature or folklore. Finally, in the early eighteenth century, each of these mixed persons is portrayed as wealthy, whereas the later *casta* paintings show them in less affluent circumstances. Analysts today see the projections of wealth as reflecting the insecurities of the *criollos* and Spanish elite in the American colonies who were attempting to convince Europeans and themselves of the stability and prosperity in the New World. Although we do not know whether these paintings were more ideal than real or whether these terms were commonly used at that time, they nonetheless present

a striking visual contrast to how mixture was projected (or not) in the north.¹⁸

The *casta* paintings also show that the results of intermixture differed depending on whether a black or an Indian was mixing with a Spaniard. As O'Crouley pointed out, a white and an Indian could have a "white" child, and thus the Indian stigma would disappear "because it is held as systematic that a Spaniard and an Indian produce a *mestizo*; a *mestizo* and a Spaniard, a *castizo*; and a *castizo* and a Spaniard, a Spaniard." Thus, if intermarriage continued with the Spanish, the Spaniard would return. If, however, "Spanish stock is mixed with Indian several times over, there is also a return to Indian" (O'Crouley 1972:20). Some of the paintings depict this process.

Intermarriages with blacks also are described and depicted in the *casta* paintings as producing white-appearing children, for example, *albinos* and *moriscos*, but not as producing a "Spaniard." The paintings also depict a return to "black," that is, *torno atras* (a return backward). Thus, as the two Spanish merchants of the time maintained, white blood was not "redeemable" (i.e., recoverable) with blacks. Blacks and Indians could return to their original types, but Spaniards could return to Spaniards only if the mixture had been with Indians.

It is likely, however, that as the mixtures continued to mix with other mixtures, the utility or relevance of these classifications or theories diminished.¹⁹ After the third generation (when everyone has eight grandparents), it was difficult to categorize the racial mixture definitively. In fact, the difficulty of classifying these mixtures was already evident in at least two of the terms used in the *casta* paintings, *tente en el aire* (hold yourself in midair) and *no te entiendo* (I don't understand you). All of this impeded "the creation of a fixed system of classification and representation" (Katzew 1996:10). Consequently, even though Spanish commentators may have employed a version of hypodescent at the time, very likely only those concerned about maintaining the "purity" of their European ancestry and their "blood" claim to upper-class status or power would have worried about such distinctions (Gutiérrez 1991:292).

Indeed, the *casta* paintings' racial classifications may have been attempts to clarify and stabilize what was an increasingly fluid society whose social and racial boundaries were uncertain (Katzew 1996). Suggesting the uncertainty of such boundaries are references in the literature of that time to "castes," which included whites and Spaniards.

MacLeod noted, for example, the concerns in seventeenth-century Central America about the growing number of castes, which included free Negroes, mulattoes, mestizos, and déclassé white vagabonds (1973:141–42, 192, 211–213, 235, italics added).²⁰ Siguenza y Góngoro, writing in the seventeenth century about the deplorable drinking habits of the Indians and other groups of the Mexican population, described these groups as “composed of Indians, of Blacks both locally born and of different nations in Africa, chinos, mulattos, moriscos, mestizos, zam-baigos, lobos, and even Spaniards . . . who are the worst among such a vile mob (cited in Katzew 1996:12, italics in original).

Finally, MacLachlan and Rodríguez wrote that although the colonials of New Spain (Mexico today) assumed that there was an ethnic hierarchy (and historians accepted this assumption), the notarial records indicate otherwise (1980:223). The records state that by the seventeenth century, wealth and status were not confined just to whites and that the poor included all racial groups. In fact, some European immigrants remained quite poor, and mestizos of means occasionally had Spanish-born servants.

In essence, from early on, Latin America more freely acknowledged the influence of culture, class, and other social factors in determining race. As a consequence, many Latin American countries developed overlapping racial categories on a continuum from light to dark, from European to indigenous, or from white to black, rather than discrete, mutually exclusive racial categories. Scholars of early Spanish America explain that the racial system in place then had many of the same features found today. It was not bipolar (i.e., it had more than two categories), and it was—as the preceding examples illustrate—apparently fluid, dependent on social perception, and quite complex. We also see in place by 1744 the use of intermediate terms such as *pardo*, a polite description of individuals known to be mulattoes, and the use of the term *moreno* for those who were *negros* (O’Crouley 1972). As noted earlier, these terms are still common in many Latin American countries today.

At the same time, pigmentation was emphasized, and implicit and sometimes explicit racism dominated the determination of one’s social status. Biological descent was only one variable entering the racial calculus, but as in the United States, it may have been more stringently applied to those with African ancestors than to those with Indian ancestors. During the early Spanish colonial period, other characteristics such as class, physical type, social networks, or hairstyle and dress also

were important indicators of social status and ethnic identity (Gutiérrez 1991:205 ff). Yet despite what may have been great fluidity in early colonial Spanish America, the race order relied on the existence of oppressed “others” in order to define “the included.”

Racial Configurations

A comparison of differences and similarities between north and south may obscure the differences among the different countries in Latin America itself. As we saw in chapter 2, the various countries’ racial and ethnic categories differ, as do the concepts and their definitions (Rout 1976:185–312). Some countries do not ask about race and ethnicity, and sometimes these change over time (Almey, Pryor, and White 1992; Bates et al. 1995:433–435; Lee 1993; Martin, DeMaio, and Campanelli 1990; Miller 1991; Statistics Canada and U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993).²¹ That is, race has been conceived differently in each country in Latin America because each has had a different history (Scott 1995:56).

For the countries in Central and South America, this variability depends on their history of settlement as well as political considerations and policies concerning the collection (or noncollection) of race and ethnic data. Almey, Pryor, and White (1992) examined how, during a forty-year period in the twentieth century, the censuses of fifty-one countries classified their populations with regard to race and ethnicity. They found that the census forms of those countries whose settlers had a predominantly European cultural background (e.g., Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay) had no questions on race/ethnicity (Almey, Pryor, and White 1992:7). But the censuses of Central American and Andean countries usually did include questions on ethnicity and race.

Moreover, the censuses of countries in the Americas that had slave and plantation economies generally did ask about ethnicity and race but used different terms for racial categories. For example, Cuba and Brazil used color terms to distinguish groups such as black, *pardo* (similar to brown), white, and yellow.²² The British West Indies, where Chinese and East Indian indentured labor was an important part of the country’s history, listed separate categories for these groups. Similarly, those countries where Syrians, Lebanese, and other Arabs immigrated in substantial numbers had separate categories for these groups. Some countries included a category for “mixed,” and over time, others

replaced "black" with "African." In the 1980 censuses for Belize, Barbados, and the Dominican Republic, the Portuguese were put into a category different from that for whites (Almey, Pryor, and White 1992).

Countries such as Bolivia, Guatemala, and Panama collected data on their large indigenous and nonindigenous populations. But according to Almey, Pryor, and White (1992), the data on indigenous populations were not consistent. In general, such information was collected only sporadically, and the categories changed over time. Moreover, those nations with small and rapidly disappearing indigenous populations, for example, Brazil and Chile, did not attempt to use the national census to identify and count them (Almey, Pryor, and White 1992:8). Thornton noted that Belize counted Mayans and Caribs, those who are mixed Native American and black, and that some countries counted separately those who speak another language (1987:222).

Settlement history is not the only variable determining how questions of race and ethnicity are asked (Almey, Pryor, and White 1992) or how racial ideologies are expressed. Government policies, conditions of the nation-state, balance of power, and external views of race also influence how countries come to see or measure race. These factors—because they vary by country—also lead to a multiplicity of racial ideologies and policies (Graham 1990). For example, scholars have concluded that between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Cuba and Argentina developed racial ideologies that openly or explicitly emphasized and glorified whiteness and whitening (Andrews 1980; Helg 1990; Rout 1976:193 ff); Brazil celebrated its "Racial Paradise or Racial Myth";²³ Puerto Rico talked about a sense of cryptomelanism (Serreno 1945; for a more extensive review of the literature on race in Puerto Rico, see Rodríguez 1996); Mexico celebrated "*mestizaje* and *indigenismo*" (Gutiérrez 1991; Knight 1990); and Venezuela created a complacent *café con leche* society (Wright 1990).²⁴ These racial ideologies also influenced cultural self-definitions, preserved power relationships, shaped policies, and controlled the oppressed.²⁵

Although these characteristics apply to particular countries, regional exceptions within countries and overlaps between countries can be found as well. Moreover, a particular ideology may also be found in another country; for example, El Salvador may also have a *café con leche* society. In addition, racial formation is constantly evolving, so the characteristics of one period may change.²⁶ Moreover, these characteristics are drawn from analyses of writings on race, which often reflect the

class biases of upper-class intellectuals and political elites in these countries. Popular views of race may therefore be quite different from these descriptions, although one could argue that a country's racial ideology eventually affects everyone. The process is circular. "Race" is created by cultural practices; it is articulated in a particular way by writers; once constituted, it speaks to and about culture; and it influences the way people see themselves (Nobles 1995:128).

But these countries also have much in common. All have a legacy of slavery and the oppression of non-European peoples, although some countries were more dependent on slaves than others were. They all also responded to the development of racialist theories in the nineteenth century and to the shift in the balance of power during this period, with its attendant competition for political and economic dominance. Some countries responded similarly, for example, Cuba and Argentina (Helg 1990), others differently, for example, Mexico (Knight 1990). But the racialist theories and the popular thinking of the time touched them all. This thinking, in turn, influenced each country's policies, especially with regard to immigration and national conceptions of race and identity. In effect, all the countries emphasized the desirability of whiteness and European immigration policies (Graham 1990). In the same way that all Latin American countries were affected in the past by Eurocentrism and racism, they continue to be affected in the present by new movements, for example, Afrocentrism, Latinismo, and worldwide indigenous rights movements.

Racial Legacies

Despite its different historical constructions, "race" in the various Latin American countries has been more fluid and has led to the creation of more categories than the binary division adopted in the United States. Moreover, race in these countries has not been solely determined by genetic inheritance but has been much affected by other variables such as class, phenotype, language, and degree of assimilation. When viewed through the U.S. racial lens, this view of race is more akin to ethnicity, culture, or national origin, but from the Latin American perspective, it is simply *raza*, "race."

Recently, this view was manifested in the responses of many Hispanics to the U.S. census's questions about race. As noted earlier, at least 40 percent of all Hispanics in the United States responded that they

were "other race," and many of them wrote in a Latino referent, for example, their national origin or a cultural or ethnic label. Moreover, some of the findings of studies conducted by the census echo many of the differences between the U.S. and Latin American views of race just described.²⁷ For example, and as will be discussed in the next chapter, several ethnographers found that Hispanics, especially recent immigrants, generally do not view race as a dichotomous variable but, rather, as a continuum (Bracken and de Bango 1992; Rodríguez and Hagan 1991; Romero 1992). Respondents also conceptualize race "as a constellation of national origin, skin color and culture" (Bates et al. 1994:109). Finally, it was not only particular Hispanic groups that had difficulty with the race and Hispanic-origin questions, but all Hispanics, regardless of national origin (de la Puente 1993:37-38).

A study by Kissam, Herrera, and Nakamoto (1993) found that many Hispanics understand "race" to be national origin, nationality, ethnicity, or culture and that for many Hispanics, "race" and "ethnic group" are closely related.²⁸ According to this study, while the meanings of each of the three terms *race*, *Hispanic origin*, and *ethnic group* varied extensively from respondent to respondent, in contrast, the concept of national origin was, for most, well understood. The study's focus groups confirmed the researchers' in-depth interview findings (p. xi) and concluded that for the Hispanics they interviewed, race was closely tied to national origin and cultural identity and only weakly to phenotype or genotype (p. 32).

The study also provides some intriguing discoveries about education and race. It found that education influenced the respondents' answers, with those with more education responding in the way the census anticipated, especially to the race question. The study stated that in the cognitive interview, race "provided one of the most frustrating barriers for low-literate Hispanic respondents" (Kissam, Herrera, and Nakamoto 1993:22). Many of the less well educated respondents scanned the first three racial-group terms, *blanco* (white), *negro* (black), and *indio* (Indian). They then eliminated each and in some cases wrote in a Hispanic term. Because of the overlap for many Hispanics among race, ethnicity, and national origin, even well-educated Hispanics "expressed annoyance when they realized that their preferred racial group term was part of the amorphous group of 'otro grupo racial' (other race)" (p. 23). The authors decided that for the respondents, choosing the "other race" category conveyed a "disturbing and sometimes in-

sulting connotation to Hispanic immigrants about their role in ethnic interactions in the United States" (p. 23). According to the authors, the respondents felt that they had no "label" of their own and only a generic "other race" at the end of the list. The researchers concluded that the message to the Hispanic respondents was that they were less important than other races and that from the perspective of most of the study participants, the "census's implicit conceptual framework . . . [was] considered inadequate" (p. x).²⁹

These findings prompt several questions. How does the way that a group is seen in the United States compare with the way it sees itself? How long does it take for groups to understand their placement or classification on government forms? How might they resist, such as when people who have always seen themselves as "Cuban" or "Peruvian" are told that they are "Hispanic" and that this is the same as "Argentinean"? This is a repetition of the earlier immigrant experience in which Sicilians became "Italians" and Cherokees became "Indians."

But today, these findings involve for Latinos, at least, an apparent change in definitions of race. Many Latinos may come to the United States believing that race, ethnicity, and *hispanidad* (Hispanicism) all are related (because this is how "race" is socially constructed in Latin America), but they soon learn that for U.S. census purposes, these are supposedly distinct concepts; that contrary to what the ancients and other cultures believed, a race group is not the same as an ethnic group. Moreover, race is primarily biological or color based.

The following anecdote from one of the census studies illustrates another dimension of the racialization process. It suggests that racial perceptions change over time in the United States. A focus group predominantly made up of immigrant Hispanic women was confused about the racial question. A more acculturated Hispanic woman in the group told the others, "What they want you to put down is 'white'" (conversation with de la Puente, January 6, 1993). This conflict between the U.S. census's articulation of "race" and the respondents' views will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.