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Senior Capstone

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### **Assimilation/Identity for Latinos**

The term “Hispanic” is a made up word that was first introduced into the official U.S census in 1970. It was mostly directed toward states in the SouthWest that had a larger population of Spanish-speaking Latinos. “Hispanic” is an umbrella term that signifies the distinction that groups from Latin American countries receive. It disregards many groups of diverse ethnic, racial and lingual backgrounds. More importantly, the term has no consideration for the colonized populations of Puerto Ricans and Chicanos (Mexican-American). It classifies people that recently came to the states to people that were born here or have been here all their lives and are “American”. It supports the idea that all Latinos are the same, share the same backgrounds or eat the same foods even.

The term “Hispanic” lumps together people from three different continents. The 2010 census has a two part question for people with Latin American origin. It asks the person to identify their ethnic background alongside their race. There is no room in this term for “Latinos” that don’t speak the language.

“Nonetheless, the idea of Latin America, and thereafter, the idea behind the terms Hispanic/Latino was not produced and disseminated exclusively by the English-speaking Euro-American gaze. That is, it has also been promulgated from within, by U.S.-based Spanish-speaking intelligentsia who perpetuate and reify its cognitive meaning--ironically, the very same intellectual outlet that purports to empower Latin American immigrant communities (e.g., Padilla, 1985; Aparicio & Chávez- Silverman, 1997; Martinez-Echazabal, 1998; Anzaldúa, 1999; Gracia, 2000, 2015; Acuña, 2003; Suarez-Orozco & Paez, 2002; Mignolo, 2005; Vasquez & Torres, 2003; and Guitierrez & Almaguer, 2016, among others). In this case, they are also ostensibly guilty of appropriating Latin America as a Spanish-speaking realm associated with an imagined unified ancestral home while at the same time making claims about identity politics in the name of other Latin Americans who do not share the same language, heritage, ancestry or culture as theirs, or the same perceived common U.S.-based immigrant experience.”

(Marcus)

The quote by Alan Marcus gives us an interesting perspective into Latin America identity in the U.S. It teases at this idea that this identity solely exists for the sake of the United States. The United States is the main factor in identifying as Latino. Signifying that this group is just as or more diverse than any two other groups with no linguistic, racial or ethnic background. There have always been debates about the “better” Hispanics in the U.S., most of the time these debates hurt later generations of Latinos that are distanced from the culture and life in the “homeland”. This quote also provides us with a better understanding of other “Latinos” with non-Spanish

speaking backgrounds. Like when second and third generation kids of Puerto Rican descent get called “fake” for not adhering to their ethnic backgrounds.

The end of the Mexican-American war in the Southwest of the country in 1848 was a realization point for many Mexicans, they had to make the decision of staying in the states as U.S. citizens or returning back to Mexico. The treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo protected Mexican-Americans that stood in their now annexed land. It sought to protect their land and crops. As history shows, this treaty was not respected and U.S citizens of the “white” race made sure of this. The term “Hispanic” brushes off this history as if Mexican-Americans weren’t U.S citizens as per law. As if they weren’t here for hundreds of years. This judgement against the Mexicans led to modern views of this population in the U.S. Recent immigrants from other Latin American countries are often oblivious to this history, the one that is presented denotes the group as deceitful and untrustworthy.

“It had all seemed so direct and simple, California moving step by step toward its rightful American future. “The war between our government and Mexico, in a short time after, ceased to exist,” the California chronicler Benjamin Truman wrote. “California became a territory of the United States, and legally, Los Angeles was no longer a Mexican pueblo, but a ‘burg’ of the great Yankee nation.” But as early Los Angeles historian James Miller Guinn wrote in 1901, in a phrase succinct and on target, the “process of Americanizing the people was no easy undertaking.” Laid atop the Mexican War and its violent , racist exuberance were the postwar brutalities of the Gold Rush, the beatings, the

criminalization, and the lynchings of resident Mexicans, most of whom had, at least by treaty, become Americans.” (Deverell 3)

The quote by William Deverell demonstrates Mexico’s contribution to the U.S economy, yet they are viewed as illegals, gangsters that bring drugs and crime into America. They are constantly accused of taking American jobs but America took the jobs of most Mexican farmers after the war. It also points to the United States’ obsession with identifying and categorizing people to then “Americanize.” Tax laws imposed on “foreign” workers made it difficult for Mexicans to establish any power. Once again, for chicanos, identifying as Hispanic robs them of that rich history. It “others” them.

Similarly, at the end of the Spanish-American war in 1917, Puerto Ricans became U.S citizens. Integration into American society was deemed hard for this group as men were constantly viewed as weak and feminine by the U.S. The island essentially became the U.S. tropics state.

“Thus, according to Adalberto Lopez, following the war, American capital quickly penetrated the island, “commercial relations between the United States and Puerto Rico grew rapidly, and the island quickly became one of the metropolis’ most important overseas markets.” By the mid-twentieth century, the effects of constant U.S. exploitation of the island’s human and material resources had led to the massive migration of unemployed Puerto Ricans, lured by the postwar demand for labor on the eastern

seaboard of the United States ... In addition, it is important to consider the effects on the post-1960s immigrants of political and geographic factors specific to the history of all the nations in the Western Hemisphere. These have also differentiated the experiences of more recent Latin American immigrants both from one another and from those of the European immigrants of the turn of the century.” (Oboler 6, 7)

This quote further supports the idea that the United States is the country it is today because of the sacrifices made by indigenous people that were displaced at the hand of U.S. expansionism. It also supports the idea that the U.S was built on immigrant labor. This quote speaks to the distinct experiences of Latin American groups. In the case of Puerto Rico, their entrance in the U.S was marked by conquest. Whereas, Dominicans entering during the mid 1960s were accepted into American society as economic immigrants. Or the unique experience of Cubans under the Castro regime. All of these experiences make us different but the census makes no effort at trying to diversify us. As of now the U.S. is telling us we're all the same.

The term “rayano” was given to famous LatinX writers from the Dominican Republic, who sought to rewrite history the “right” way. A lot of the time, writers and scholars in the island write about the Haitian Massacre of 1937 in a way that keeps Dominicans out of critical view. The sad history is brushed away. As Pulitzer-winner Junot Diaz and Julia Alvarez take to sincere appreciation of Haitian culture as Dominican culture, their “Dominicanness” is being stripped away. Elected officials are convinced they must not be Dominican because their values don't

coincide with the country's values. Junot Diaz and Julia Alvarez statuses as LatinX members allows them to see the hatred for Haitians in a new light.

“Although the term *rayano* is not an elective one, it is appropriately used to describe authors like Alvarez and Diaz in the sense their statuses as Dominicans in the United States allow them to have a different understanding of Haitians from Dominicans on the island. Members of the US diaspora, in fact, often internalize “new” ideas of race that interact with the island’s “prevalent understanding of race”(Simmons 65)” Furthermore, as Ramon Antonio Victoriano-Matinez asserts it is these hybrid Dominicans that validate the “*dominicanyork*” refrain in respect to life in the United States: “*nosotros somos los haitianos de aqui*(222)” (Myers)

These two quotes stuck out to me because as someone who is reporting on this hate, it feels like my community will remove my rights as a Dominican. It also highlights the idea that Dominican-Americans don't have a sense of identity. The last sentence of the last quote means “we are the Haitians in this country(the US). This sentence holds a lot of truth and power, because here in the states we are the marginalized group fighting for basic rights, the same way Haitians are excluded from Dominican communities.

New York City is home to many different ethnic groups. One of the biggest, recent groups is the growing population of Dominicans in Washington Heights. Dominican anti-Blackness practices are rooted in hundreds of years of hate at the hands of Trujillo. This hate

then transfers into American society and in turn the Latino community, with this creating a social hierarchy in the Latino community itself.

“Findings on ethnoracial identification in the US Census suggest that while Latina/os tend to prefer white identification, many reject the black-white US racial binary, instead opting to classify their *race* as “Latina/o” or “Hispanic” (Pew Research center 2015). In the 2010 Census (Rios et al 2014), of the nearly thirty-nine million Latina/os who reported one race, 47% identified as white, while 31.5% reported “Some other race (SOR).” Only 2% chose black or African American, and just over 1% identified American Indian or Alaska native. Two and half million Latina/os (5.5%) reported two or more races, but two-thirds of those reported SOR as one of their racial identifications. Notably, 13% reported no race at all. Such trends show the historical and transnational continuity of white dominance in Latin America’s own status hierarchies.” Negron 5, 6)

This quote proves how the census continues to be an inaccurate source for people’s national identity. It expands on the idea that many Black Latinos choose not to identify as black or simply don’t know the difference between race and ethnicity.

All in all, the umbrella term “hispanic” does not cater to every hispanic. It confuses people into thinking it’s a race. The term undermines a lot of groups that don’t share the Spanish language. As well as hinder certain races with ties to Latin American backgrounds. “Hispanic” leads people to believe we are all the same when in fact time of arrival in the United States or colonization play a huge role into the identity of many Latinos victim to U.S conquest.

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**Podcast audio file**



[https://soundcloud.com/user469157139/assimilationidentity-final-cut/s-XZ8Ka0V2prQ?si=2714377f8c724013b12c08e46e06dc61&utm\\_source=clipboard&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=social\\_sharing](https://soundcloud.com/user469157139/assimilationidentity-final-cut/s-XZ8Ka0V2prQ?si=2714377f8c724013b12c08e46e06dc61&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing)