Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans

The history of Mexican Americans is closely tied to immigration, which has been encouraged (e.g., the bracero program) when Mexican labor is in demand and discouraged (repatriation and Operation Wetback) when Mexican workers are unwanted. The Puerto Rican people are divided between those who live in the island commonwealth and those who live on the mainland. Puerto Ricans who migrate to the mainland most often come in search of better jobs and housing. As groups, both Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans have lower incomes, less formal education, and greater health problems than White Americans. Both family and religion are sources of strength for the typical Puerto Rican or Mexican American.
citizenship is the basic requirement for receiving one’s legal rights and privileges in the United States. However, for both Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, citizenship has been an ambiguous concept at best. Mexican Americans (or Chicanos) have a long history in the United States, stretching back before the nation was even formed, to the early days of European exploration. Santa Fe, New Mexico, was founded more than a decade before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth. The Mexican American people trace their ancestry to the merging of Spanish settlers with the Native Americans of Central America and Mexico. This ancestry reaches back to the brilliant Mayan and Aztec civilizations, which attained their height about C.E. 700 and 1500, respectively. However, roots in the land do not guarantee a group dominance over it. Over several centuries, the Spaniards conquered the land and merged with the Native Americans to form the Mexican people. In 1821, Mexico obtained its independence, but this independence was short-lived, for domination from the north began less than a generation later.

Today, Mexican Americans are creating their own destiny in the United States while functioning in a society that is often concerned about immigration, both legal and illegal. In the eyes of some, including a few in positions of authority, to be Mexican American is to be suspected of being in the country illegally or, at least, of knowingly harboring illegal aliens. For no other minority group in the United States is citizenship so ambiguous as it is for Puerto Ricans. Even Native Americans, who are subject to some unique laws and are exempt from others because of past treaties, have a future firmly dominated by the United States. This description does not necessarily fit Puerto Ricans. Their island home is the last major U.S. colonial territory and, for that matter, one of the few colonial areas remaining in the world. Besides assessing the situation of Puerto Ricans on the mainland, we also need to consider the relationship of the United States to Puerto Rico.

**Mexican Americans**

Wars play a prominent part in any nation’s history. The United States was created as a result of the colonies’ war with England to win their independence. In the 1800s, the United States acquired significant neighboring territory in two different wars. The legacy of these wars and the annexation that resulted were to create the two largest Hispanic minorities in the United States: Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans.

A large number of Mexicans became aliens in the United States without ever crossing any border. These people first became Mexican Americans with the conclusion of the Mexican–American War. This two-year war culminated with a U.S. occupation of 11 months. Today, Mexicans visit the Museum of Interventions in Mexico City, which outlines the war and how Mexico permanently gave up half its country. The war is still spoken of today as “the Mutilation” (T. Weiner 2004).

In the war-ending Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed February 2, 1848, Mexico acknowledged the annexation of Texas by the United States and ceded California and most of Arizona and New Mexico to the United States for $15 million. In exchange, the United States granted citizenship to the 75,000 Mexican nationals who remained on the annexed land after one year. With citizenship, the United States was to guarantee religious freedom, property rights, and cultural integrity—that is, the right to continue Mexican and Spanish cultural traditions and to use the Spanish language.

The beginnings of the Mexican experience in the United States were as varied as the people themselves. Some Mexican Americans were affluent, with large land holdings. Others were poor peasants barely able to survive. Along such rivers as the Rio Grande, commercial towns grew up around the increasing river traffic. In New Mexico and Arizona, many Mexican American people welcomed
the protection that the U.S. government offered against several Native American tribes. In California, life was quickly dominated by the gold miners, and Anglos controlled the newly found wealth. One generalization can be made about the many segments of the Mexican American population in the nineteenth century; they were regarded as a conquered people. In fact, even before the war, many Whites who traveled into the West were already prejudiced against people of mixed blood (in this instance, against Mexicans). Whenever Mexican American and Anglo interests conflicted, Anglo interests won.

A pattern of second-class treatment for Mexican Americans emerged well before the twentieth century. Gradually, the Anglo system of property ownership replaced the Native American and Hispanic systems. Mexican Americans who inherited land proved no match for Anglo lawyers. Court battles provided no protection for poor Spanish-speaking landowners. Unscrupulous lawyers occasionally defended Mexican Americans successfully, only to demand half the land as their fee. Anglo cattle ranchers gradually pushed out Mexican American ranchers. By 1892, the federal government was granting grazing privileges on public grasslands and forests to anyone except Mexican Americans. Effectively, the people who were now Mexican Americans had become outsiders in their own homeland. The ground was laid for the social structure of the Southwest in the twentieth century, an area of growing productivity in which minority groups have increased in size but remain largely subordinate.

The Immigrant Experience

Nowhere else in the world do two countries with such different standards of living and wage scales share such an open border. Immigration from Mexico is unique in several respects. First, it has been a continuous large-scale movement for most of the last hundred years. The United States did not restrict immigration from Mexico through legislation until 1965. Second, the proximity of Mexico encourages past immigrants to maintain strong cultural and language ties with the homeland through friends and relatives. Return visits to the old country are only one- or two-day bus rides for Mexican Americans, not once-in-a-lifetime voyages, as they were for most European immigrants. The third point of uniqueness is the aura of illegality that has surrounded Mexican migrants. Throughout the twentieth century, the suspicion in which Anglos have held Mexican Americans has contributed to mutual distrust between the two groups.

The years before World War I brought large numbers of Mexicans into the expanding agricultural industry of the Southwest. The Mexican revolution of 1909–1922 thrust refugees into the United States, and World War I curtailed the flow of people from Europe, leaving the labor market open to the Mexican Americans. After the war, continued political turmoil in Mexico and more prosperity in the Southwest brought still more Mexicans across the border. Simultaneously, corporations in the United States, led by agribusiness, invested in Mexico in such a way as to maximize their profits but minimize the amount of money remaining in Mexico to provide needed employment. Conflict theorists view this investment as part of the continuing process in which American businesses, with the support and cooperation of affluent Mexicans, have used Mexican people when it has been in corporate leaders’ best interests. The Mexican workers are used either as cheap laborers in their own country by their fellow Mexicans and by Americans or as undocumented workers here who are dismissed when they are no longer judged to be useful (Guerin-Gonzales 1994).

Beginning in the 1930s, the United States embarked on a series of measures aimed specifically at Mexicans. The Great Depression brought pressure on local governments to care for the growing number of unemployed and impoverished. Government officials developed a quick way to reduce welfare rolls and eliminate people seeking jobs: ship Mexicans back to Mexico. This program of deporting Mexicans in the 1930s was called repatriation. As officially stated, the program was constitutional because only illegal aliens were to be repatriated. Mexicans and even people born in the United States of Mexican background were deported to relieve the economic pressure of the depression. The legal process of fighting a deportation order was overwhelming, however, especially for a poor Spanish-speaking family. The Anglo community largely ignored this outrage against the civil rights of those deported and did not show interest in helping repatriates to ease the transition (Balderrama and Rodriguez 2006).
When the depression ended, Mexican laborers again became attractive to industry. In 1942, when World War II was depleting the labor pool, the United States and Mexico agreed to a program allowing migration across the border by contracted laborers, or *braceros*. Within a year of the initiation of the bracero program, more than 80,000 Mexican nationals had been brought in; they made up one-eleventh of the farm workers on the Pacific Coast. The program continued with some interruptions until 1964. It was devised to recruit labor from poor Mexican areas for U.S. farms. In a program that was supposed to be supervised jointly by Mexico and the United States, minimum standards were to be maintained for the transportation, housing, wages, and health care of the braceros. Ironically, these safeguards placed the braceros in a better economic situation than Mexican Americans, who often worked alongside the protected Mexican nationals. The Mexicans were still regarded as a positive presence by Anglos only when useful, and the Mexican American people were merely tolerated.

Like many policies of the past relating to disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups, the bracero program lives on. After decades of protests, the Mexican government finally issued checks of $3,500 to former braceros and their descendants. The payments were to resolve disputes over what happened to the money the U.S. government gave to the Mexican government to assist in resettlement. To say this has been regarded as too little, much too late is an understatement.

Another crackdown on illegal aliens was to be the third step in dealing with the perceived Mexican problem. Alternately called Operation Wetback and Special Force Operation, it was fully inaugurated by 1954. The term wetbacks, or *mojados*—the derisive slang for Mexicans who enter illegally—refers to those who secretly swim across the Rio Grande. Like other roundups, this effort failed to stop the illegal flow of workers. For several years, some Mexicans were brought in under the bracero program while other Mexicans were being deported. With the end of the bracero program in 1964 and stricter immigration quotas for Mexicans, illegal border crossings increased because legal crossings became more difficult (J. Kim 2008).

More dramatic than the negative influence that continued immigration has had on employment conditions in the Southwest is the effect on the Mexican and Mexican American people themselves. Routinely, the rights of Mexicans, even the rights to which they are entitled as illegal aliens, are ignored. Of the illegal immigrants deported, few have been expelled through formal proceedings. The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) has repeatedly expressed concern over the government’s handling of illegal aliens.

Against this backdrop of legal maneuvers is the tie that the Mexican people have to the land both in today’s Mexico and in the parts of the United States that formerly belonged to Mexico. *Assimilation* may be the key word in the history of many immigrant groups, but for Mexican Americans the key term is *La Raza*, literally “the people” or “the race.” Among contemporary Mexican Americans, however, the term connotes pride in a pluralistic Spanish, Native American, and Mexican heritage. Mexican Americans cherish their legacy and, as we shall see, strive to regain some of the economic and social glory that once was theirs (Delgado 2008a).

Despite the passage of various measures designed to prevent illegal immigration, neither the immigration nor the apprehension of illegal aliens is likely to end. Mexican Americans will continue to be more closely scrutinized by law enforcement officials because their Mexican descent makes them more suspect as potential illegal aliens. The Mexican American community is another group subject to racial profiling that renders their presence in the United States suspect in the eyes of many Anglos.

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*braceros* contracted Mexican laborers brought to the United States during World War II

*mojados* “wetbacks”; derisive slang for Mexicans who enter illegally, supposedly by swimming the Rio Grande

*La Raza* literally meaning “the people,” the term refers to the rich heritage of Mexican Americans; it is therefore used to denote a sense of pride among Mexican Americans today
In the United States, Mexican Americans have mixed feelings toward the illegal Mexican immigrants. Many are their kin, and Mexican Americans realize that entry into the United States brings Mexicans better economic opportunities. However, numerous deportations only perpetuate the Anglo stereotype of Mexican and Mexican American alike as surplus labor. Mexican Americans, largely the product of past immigration, find that the continued controversy over illegal immigration places them in the ambivalent role of citizen and relative. Mexican American organizations opposing illegal immigration must confront people to whom they are closely linked by culture and kinship, and they must cooperate with government agencies they deeply distrust.

The Economic Picture

As shown in Table 10.1, both Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans have both higher rates of poverty and significantly lower incomes than White non-Hispanic Americans. Only seven percent of all managerial and professional positions are held by Latinos. When we consider Latinos’ economic situation, two topics deserve special attention: the debate over what has been called the culture of poverty and the effort to improve the status of migrant workers.

The Culture of Poverty

Like the African American families described in Chapter 8, Mexican American families are labeled as having traits that, in fact, describe poor families rather than specifically Mexican American families. Indeed, as long ago as 1980, a report of the Commission on Civil Rights (1980:8) stated that the two most prevalent stereotypical themes appearing in works on Hispanics showed them as exclusively poor and prone to commit violence.

Social scientists have also relied excessively on the traits of the poor to describe an entire subordinate group such as Mexican Americans. Anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1959, 1966), in several publications based on research conducted among Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, identified the culture of poverty. According to its theorists, the culture of poverty embraces a deviant way of life that involves no future planning, no enduring commitment to marriage, and absence of the work ethic. This culture supposedly follows the poor, even when they move out of the slums or the barrio.

The culture-of-poverty view is another way of blaming the victim: the affluent are not responsible for social inequality, nor are the policymakers; it is the poor who are to blame for their own problems. This stance allows government and society to attribute the failure of antipoverty and welfare programs to Mexican Americans and other poor people rather than to the programs themselves. These are programs designed and too often staffed by middle-class, English-speaking Anglo professionals. Conflict theorists, noting a similar misuse of the more recent term underclass, argue that it is unfair to blame the poor for their lack of money, low education, poor health, and low-paying jobs.

The poor often make extraordinary use of what they do have. Sociologist William Julius Wilson reminds us that culture is the way “individuals in a community develop an

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 10.1</th>
<th>Selected Social and Economic Characteristics of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, 2008</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total White Non-Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having citizenship</td>
<td>98.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing college, 25 years and older</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households of married couples</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living below poverty level</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income over $75,000</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: See Table 9.1.

understanding of how the world works and make decisions based on that understanding” (Cohen 2010b:A17; Ryan 1976).

Lewis’s hypothesis about the culture of poverty came to be used indiscriminately to explain continued poverty. Critics argue that Lewis sought out exotic, pathological behavior, ignoring the fact that even among the poor, most people live fairly conventionally and strive to achieve goals similar to those of the middle class. Social science research today, unlike Lewis’s research, does sample Mexican American families across a broad range of socioeconomic levels. This research shows that when Anglo and Mexican American families of the same social class are compared, they differ little in family organization and attitudes toward childrearing. In addition, comparisons of work ethics find no significant differences between Mexican Americans and Anglos. Poverty is present among Mexican Americans, there is no doubt about that. Indeed, Mexican immigrants tend to look on public assistance programs not as a means to avoid work but to minimize the effects of times they are out of work but actively seeking employment. However, to question the label culture of poverty does not deny the poor life chances facing many Mexican Americans (Massey and Sampson 2009; Valentine 1968; Van Hook and Bean 2009).

Chávez and the Farm Laborers  The best-known Hispanic labor leader for economic empowerment was César Chávez, the Mexican American who crusaded to organize migrant farm workers. Efforts to organize agricultural laborers date back to the turn of the twentieth century, but Chávez was the first to enjoy any success. These laborers had never won collective bargaining rights, partly because their mobility made it difficult for them to organize into a unified group.

In 1962, Chávez, then 35 years old, formed the National Farm Workers Association, later to become the United Farm Workers (UFW). Organizing migrant farm workers was not easy because they had no savings to pay for organizing or to live on while striking. Growers could rely on an almost limitless supply of Mexican laborers to replace the Mexican Americans and Filipinos who struck for higher wages and better working conditions. Despite initial success, Chávez and the UFW were plagued with continual opposition by agribusiness and many lawmakers. This was about the time the UFW was also trying to heighten public consciousness about the pesticides used in the fields. Chávez had difficulty fulfilling his objectives. By 2011, union membership had dwindled from a high of 80,000 in 1970 to a reported 5,000. Nevertheless, what he and the UFW accomplished was significant. First, they succeeded in making federal and state governments more aware of the exploitation of migrant laborers. Second, the migrant workers, or at least those organized in California, developed a sense of their own power and worth that will make it extremely difficult for growers to abuse them in the future as they had in the past. Third, working conditions improved. California agricultural workers were paid an average of less than $2 an hour in the mid-1960s. Still given the lack of regular harvesting, by 2011 a migrant farm worker’s wages for a year rarely top $12,000 doing labor few people would consider at three times that wage.

César Chávez died in 1993. Although his legacy is clear, many young people, when they hear mention of Chávez, are more likely to think of professional boxer Julio César Chávez. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the primary challenge came from efforts to permit more foreign workers, primarily from Mexico and Central America, to enter the United States temporarily at even lower wages. About three-quarters of all farm workers are Mexican or Mexican American. The problems of migrant farm workers are inextricably tied to the lives of both Latinos and Latin Americans (Ríos 2011; Sanchez 1998; Triplett 2004; Wozniacka 2011).

Political Organizations  The social protests that characterized much of the political activity in the United States of the mid-1960s touched the Mexican American community as well. In Southern California in 1966, young Chicanos in college were attracted
to the ideology of Chicanismo (or Chicanozaje) and joined what is popularly called the Chicano movement. Like Black Power, Chicanismo has taken on a variety of meanings, but all definitions stress a positive self-image and place little reliance on conventional forms of political activity. Followers of Chicanismo, unlike the more assimilation-oriented older generations, have been less likely to accept the standard claim that the United States is equally just to all.

Besides a positive self-image, Chicanismo and the movement of La Raza include renewed awareness of the plight of Chicanos at the hands of Anglos. Mexican Americans are a colonial minority, as sociologist Joan Moore (1970) wrote, because their relationship with Anglos was originally involuntary. Mexican culture in the United States has been either transformed or destroyed by Anglos, and the Mexican American people themselves have been victims of racism. The colonial model points out the ways in which societal institutions have failed Mexican Americans and perpetuated their problems. Militant Mexican Americans refer to assimilationists, who they say would sell out to the White people, as vendidos, or traitors. The ultimate insult is the term Malinche, the name of the Mexican American woman who became the mistress of Spanish conqueror Cortés. Many in the Chicano movement believe that if one does not work actively in the struggle, one is working against it (Delgado 2008b; Rosales 1996).

Perhaps as well as any recent Mexican American, Reies López Tijerina captures the spirit of Chicanismo. Born in a cotton field worked by migrant farmers, Tijerina became a Pentecostal preacher and in the late 1950s took an interest in old Spanish land grants. From research in Mexico, Spain, and the Southwest, he concluded that the Mexican Americans—and, more specifically, the Hispanos—had lost significant tracts of land through quasi-legal and other questionable practices. In 1963, he formed the Alianza Federal de Mercedes (Federal Alliance of Land Grants), whose purpose is to recover the lost land. To publicize his purpose when few Anglos would pay attention, he seized part of the Kit Carson National Forest in New Mexico. Tijerina spent the next few years either in jail or awaiting trial. Tijerina’s quest for restoration of land rights has been accompanied by violence, even though he advocates civil disobedience. However, the violence led him to be criticized by some Hispanics as well as Anglos (Nabokov 1970; Rosales 1996).

Organized in 1967, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) has emerged as a potent force to protect Mexican Americans’ constitutional rights. Although it does not endorse candidates, MALDEF has made itself felt in the political arena, much as the NAACP has for African Americans. On the education side, it has addressed segregation,
biased testing, inequities in school financing, and failure to promote bilingualism. MALDEF has been involved in litigation concerning employment practices, immigration reform, and voting rights. It has emerged as the primary civil rights group for Mexican Americans and other Latinos (Alvarez-Smith 2008).

Recently the Mexican community in the United States was faced with a new political challenge. Beginning in 1998, Mexicans in the United States could acquire rights as Mexican nationals under Mexico’s new dual nationality law. Their children, even if U.S. born, are also eligible for Mexican nationality. The United States does not prohibit dual nationality, and it is estimated that anywhere from 5 million to 10 million Mexican Americans are eligible for such dual nationality. Although many dual-nationality people will not be allowed to vote in Mexico’s elections, this measure is likely to further their interest in political life south of the border. As we will now see with Puerto Rico, Latinos in the United States find political issues of importance outside the 50 states (Migration News 1998).

Puerto Ricans

Puerto Ricans’ current association with the United States, like that of the Mexican people, began as the result of the outcome of a war. The island of Borinquén, subsequently called Puerto Rico, was claimed by Spain in 1493. The native inhabitants, the Taíno Indians, were significantly reduced in number by conquest, slavery, and genocide. Although for generations the legacy of the Taino was largely thought to be archaeological in nature, recent DNA tests revealed that more than 60 percent of Puerto Ricans today have a Taíno ancestor (Cockburn 2003:41).

After Puerto Rico had been ruled by Spain for four centuries, the island was seized by the United States in 1898 during the Spanish–American War. Spain relinquished control of it in the Treaty of Paris. The value of Puerto Rico for the United States, as it had been for Spain, was mainly its strategic location, which was advantageous for maritime trade (Figure 10.1).

The beginnings of rule by the United States quickly destroyed any hope that Puerto Ricans—or Boricua, as Puerto Ricans call themselves—had for self-rule. All power was
given to officials appointed by the president, and any act of the island’s legislature could be overruled by Congress. English, previously unknown on the island, became the only language permitted in the school systems. The people were colonized—first politically, then culturally, and finally economically (Aran et al. 1973; Christopulos 1974).

Citizenship was extended to Puerto Ricans by the Jones Act of 1917, but Puerto Rico remained a colony. This political dependence altered in 1948, when Puerto Rico elected its own governor and became a commonwealth. This status, officially Estado Libre Asociado, or Associated Free State, extends to Puerto Rico and its people privileges and rights different from those of people on the mainland. Although Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens and elect their own governor, they may not vote in presidential elections and have no voting representation in Congress. They are subject to military service, Selective Service registration, and all federal laws. Puerto Ricans have a homeland that is and at the same time is not a part of the United States.

The Bridge between the Island and the Mainland

Despite their citizenship, Puerto Ricans are occasionally challenged by immigration officials. Because other Latin Americans attempt to enter the country posing as Puerto Ricans, Puerto Ricans find their papers scrutinized more closely than do other U.S. citizens.

Puerto Ricans came to the mainland in small numbers in the first half of the century, often encouraged by farm labor contracts similar to those extended to Mexican braceros. During World War II, the government recruited hundreds of Puerto Ricans to work on the railroads, in food-manufacturing plants, and in copper mines on the mainland. But migration has been largely a post–World War II phenomenon. The 1940 census showed fewer than 70,000 Puerto Ricans on the mainland. By 2010, more than 4.6 million Puerto Ricans lived on the mainland and 3.9 million residents lived on the island.

Among the factors that have contributed to migration are the economic pull away from the underdeveloped and overpopulated island, the absence of legal restrictions against travel, and the growth of cheap air transportation. As the migration continues, the mainland offers the added attraction of a large Puerto Rican community in New York City, which makes adjustment easier for new arrivals.

New York City still has a formidable population of Puerto Ricans (786,000), but significant changes have taken place. First, Puerto Ricans no longer dominate the Latino scene in New York City, making up only a little more than a third of the city’s Hispanic population. Second, Puerto Ricans are now more dispersed throughout the mainland’s cities.

As the U.S. economy underwent recessions in the 1970s and 1980s, unemployment among mainland Puerto Ricans, always high, increased dramatically. This increase shows in migration. In the 1950s, half of the Latino arrivals were Puerto Rican. By the 1970s, they accounted for only 3 percent. Indeed, in some years of the 1980s, more Puerto Ricans went from mainland to the island than the other way around.

Puerto Ricans returning to the island have become a significant force. Indeed, they have come to be given the name Neorican, or Nuyorican, a term the islanders also use for Puerto Ricans in New York. Longtime islanders direct a modest amount of hostility toward these Neorican. They usually return from the mainland with more formal schooling, more money, and a better command of English than native Puerto Ricans have. Not too surprisingly, Neoricans compete very well with islanders for jobs and land.

The ethnic mix of the nation’s largest city has gotten even more complex over the last 10 years as Mexican and Mexican American arrivals in New York City have far outpaced any growth among Puerto Ricans. New York City is now following the pattern of other cities such as Miami, where the Latino identity is no longer defined by a single group.

The Island of Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico, located about a thousand miles from Miami, has never been the same since Columbus discovered it in 1493. The original inhabitants of the island were wiped out in a couple of generations by disease, tribal warfare, hard labor, unsuccessful rebellions against...
the Spanish, and fusion with their conquerors. These social processes are highlighted in the Spectrum of Intergroup Relations that summarizes the experience of Latinos in the United States described in this chapter.

Among the institutions imported to Puerto Rico by Spain was slavery. Although slavery in Puerto Rico was not as harsh as in the southern United States, the legacy of the transfer of Africans is present in the appearance of Puerto Ricans today, many of whom are seen by people on the mainland as Black.

The commonwealth period that began in 1948 has been a significant one for Puerto Rico. Change has been dramatic, although whether it has all been progress is debatable. On the positive side, Spanish has been reintroduced as the language of classroom instruction, but the study of English is also required. The popularity in the 1980s of music groups such as Menudo shows that Puerto Rican young people want to maintain ties with their ethnicity. Such success is a challenge because Puerto Rican music is almost never aired on non-Hispanic radio stations. The Puerto Rican people have had a vibrant and distinctive cultural tradition, as seen clearly in their folk heroes, holidays, sports, and contemporary literature and drama. Dominance by the culture of the United States makes it difficult to maintain their culture on the mainland and even on the island itself.

Puerto Rico and its people reflect a phenomenon called neocolonialism, which refers to continuing dependence of former colonies on foreign countries. Initially, this term was introduced to refer to African nations that, even after gaining their political independence from Great Britain, France, and other European nations, continued to find their destiny in the hands of the former colonial powers. Although most Puerto Ricans today are staunchly proud of their American citizenship, they also want to have their own national identity independent of the United States. This has not been and continues not to be easy.

From 1902, English was the official language of the island, but Spanish was the language of the people, reaffirming the island’s cultural identity independent of the United States. In 1992, however, Puerto Rico also established Spanish as an additional official language.

In reality, the language issue is related more to ideology than to substance. Although English is once again required in primary and secondary schools, textbooks may be written in English, although the classes are conducted in Spanish. Indeed, Spanish remains the language of the island; 8 percent of the islanders speak only English, and among Spanish-speaking adults about 15 percent speak English “very well” (Bureau of the Census 2007h).

**SPECTRUM OF INTERGROUP RELATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPULSION</th>
<th>SEGREGATION</th>
<th>ASSIMILATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INCREASINGLY UNACCEPTABLE</td>
<td>INCREASINGLY UNACCEPTABLE</td>
<td>MORE TOLERABLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXTERMINATION or genocide</td>
<td>SECESSION or partitioning</td>
<td>FUSION or amalgamation or melting pot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taino Indians of Puerto Rico</td>
<td>Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo</td>
<td>Bilingual education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social isolation in schools</td>
<td>Color gradient</td>
<td>Mexican Raza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracking</td>
<td>Vendidos Neoricanos</td>
<td>Dual nationality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neoricanos Chicanismo</td>
<td>Vendidos</td>
<td>Curanderismo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Issues of Statehood and Self-Rule  Puerto Ricans have consistently argued and fought for independence for most of the 500 years since Columbus landed. They continue to do so in even in the twenty-first century. The contemporary commonwealth arrangement is popular with many Puerto Ricans, but others prefer statehood, whereas some call for complete independence from the United States. In Table 10.2, we summarize the advantages and disadvantages of the current status as a territory or commonwealth and the alternatives of statehood and independence.

The arguments for continued commonwealth status include both the serious and the trivial. Among some island residents, the idea of statehood invokes the fear of higher taxes and an erosion of their cultural heritage. Some even fear the end of separate Puerto Rican participation in the Olympic Games and the Miss Universe pageant. On the other hand, although independence may be attractive, commonwealth supporters argue that it includes too many unknown costs, so they embrace the status quo. Others view statehood as a key to increased economic development and expansion for tourism.

Proponents of independence have a long, vocal history of insisting on the need for Puerto Rico to regain its cultural and political autonomy. Some of the supporters of independence

<table>
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<tr>
<th>TABLE 10.2</th>
<th>Puerto Rico's Future</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Continuing Territorial Status (Status Quo)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pros</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cons</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Island is under U.S. protection.</td>
<td>United States has ultimate authority over island matters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islanders enjoy U.S. citizenship with a distinct national identity.</td>
<td>Residents cannot vote for president.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents don't pay federal income taxes (they do pay into Social Security, Medicare, and 32% to island tax collectors).</td>
<td>Residents who work for any company or organization that is funded by the United States must pay federal income taxes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States provides federal funds in the sum of $22 billion annually and offers other tax advantages.</td>
<td>Although Puerto Rico has a higher standard of living compared to other Caribbean islands, it has half the per capita income of the poorest U.S. states.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Island retains representation in the Miss Universe pageant and Olympic Games.</td>
<td>Island cannot enter into free-trade agreements.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Statehood** | 
| **Pros** | **Cons** |
| Permanent and guaranteed U.S. citizenship and an end to U.S. colonial rule over the island. | Possibility of English-only requirements (loss of cultural or national identity). |
| The island would receive federal money to build the infrastructure. | An increased standard of living could result in greater economic deterioration because of the current muddled economic situation. |
| The island would be able to enjoy open-market trade with U.S. allies. | Businesses that take advantage of certain tax benefits could leave the island, and future businesses might not consider working there. |
| The island would acquire six seats in the House of Representatives and two seats in the Senate, enabling the island to have more political clout and the right to vote in presidential elections. | Island would lose representation in the Miss Universe pageant and Olympic Games. |

| **Independence** | 
| **Pros** | **Cons** |
| Island would retain language and culture. | Lose U.S. citizenship. |
| Island would be able to participate in the global economy. | Lose U.S. protection. |
| End of U.S. colonial rule over the island. | Lose federal funds. |

The Social Construction of Race  The most significant difference between the meaning of race in Puerto Rico and on the mainland is that Puerto Rico, like so many other Caribbean societies, has a color gradient, a term that describes distinctions based on skin color made on a continuum rather than by sharp categorical separations. The presence of a color gradient reflects past fusion between different groups (see the figure in Chapter 10 on page 246). Rather than seeing people as either black or white in skin color, Puerto Ricans perceive people as ranging from pale white to very black. Puerto Ricans are more sensitive to degrees of difference and make less effort to pigeonhole a person into one of two categories.

The presence of a color gradient rather than two or three racial categories does not necessarily mean that prejudice is less. Generally, however, societies with a color gradient permit more flexibility, and therefore, are less likely to impose specific sanctions against a group of people based on skin color alone. Puerto Rico has not suffered interracial conflict or violence; its people are conscious of different racial heritages. Studies disagree on the
amount of prejudice in Puerto Rico, but all concur that race is not as clear-cut an issue on
the island as it is on the mainland.

Racial identification in Puerto Rico depends a great deal on the attitude of the individual
making the judgment. If one thinks highly of a person, then he or she may be seen as a
member of a more acceptable racial group. A variety of terms is used in the color gradient
to describe people racially: _blanco_ (white), _trigueño_ (bronze- or wheat-colored), _moreno_ (dark-
skinned), and _negro_ (black) are a few of these. Factors such as social class and social position
determine race, but on the mainland race is more likely to determine social class. This situa-
tion may puzzle people from the mainland, but racial etiquette on the mainland may be
just as difficult for Puerto Ricans to comprehend and accept. Puerto Ricans arriving in the
United States may find a new identity thrust on them by the dominant society (Denton and
Villarrubia 2007; Landale and Oropesa 2002; Loveman and Muniz 2007; Sánchez 2007).

In Listen to Our Voices, Congressman Luis Gutierrez in his remarks to the House of
Representatives speaks out against what he regards as abuse of authority by the Puerto
Rican government against its residents. Interestingly, the US born representative of Puerto
Rican parents defends himself against charges that he is an island “outsider” and thus
should not be commenting on events in Puerto Rico.

### The Island Economy

The United States’ role in Puerto Rico has produced an overall economy that, though
strong by Caribbean standards, remains well below that of the poorest areas of the United
States. For many years, the federal government exempted U.S. industries locating in Puerto
Rico from taxes on profits for at least 10 years. In addition, the federal government’s pro-
gram of enterprise zones, which grants tax incentives to promote private investment in
inner cities, has been extended to Puerto Rico. Unquestionably, Puerto Rico has become
attractive to mainland-based corporations. Skeptics point out that as a result, the island’s
agriculture has been largely ignored. Furthermore, the economic benefits to the island are
limited. Businesses have spent the profits gained on Puerto Rico back on the mainland.
Regardless, the island economy has not kept pace with the rest of the United States since
the 1970s (President’s Task Force on Puerto Rico’s Status 2011).

Puerto Rico’s economy is in severe trouble compared with that of the mainland. Its
unemployment rate in 2011 was 16.9 percent, compared with 8.8 percent for the
mainland—about three times that of the mainland. In addition, the median house-
hold income is one-third of what it is in the United States. In 2009, 45 percent of the
population was below the poverty rate, compared with 14 percent in the nation as a
whole and 21.9 percent in Mississippi, the state with the highest level. Efforts to raise
the wages of Puerto Rican workers only make the island less attractive to labor-intensive busi-
nesses, that is, those that employ larger numbers of unskilled people. Capital-intensive compa-
nies, such as the petrochemical industries, have found Puerto Rico attractive, but they have not
created jobs for the semiskilled. A growing problem is that Puerto Rico is emerging as a major
gateway to the United States for illegal drugs from South America, which has led the island to
experience waves of violence and the social ills associated with the drug trade (Bureau of the

Puerto Rico is an example of the world systems theory initially presented in Chapter 1. World
systems theory is the view of the global economic system as divided between nations that control wealth and those that provide natural
resources and labor.

Puerto Ricans generally maintain dual identity proudly, celebrating Puerto
Rican Day each June by observing the island’s seeking autonomy from
Spain.
Puerto Rico may be well off compared with many other Caribbean nations, it clearly is at the mercy of economic forces in the United States and, to a much lesser extent, other industrial nations. Puerto Rico continues to struggle with the advantages of citizenship and the detriment of playing a peripheral role in the economy of the United States.

New challenges continue to face Puerto Rico. First, with congressional approval in 1994 of the North American Free Trade Agreement, Mexico, Canada, and the United States became integrated into a single economic market. The reduction of trade barriers with Mexico, coupled with that nation’s lower wages, combined to undercut Puerto Rico’s commonwealth advantage. Second, many more island nations now offer sun-seeking tourists from the mainland alternative destinations to Puerto Rico. In addition, cruise ships present another attractive option for tourists. Given the economic problems of the island, it is not surprising that many Puerto Ricans migrate to the mainland.

For years, circular migration between the mainland and island has served as a safety valve for Puerto Rico’s population, which has grown annually at a rate 50 percent faster than that of the rest of the United States. Typically, migrants from Puerto Rico represent a broad range of occupations. There are seasonal fluctuations as Puerto Rican farm workers leave the island in search of employment. Puerto Ricans, particularly agricultural workers, earn higher wages on the mainland, yet a significant proportion return despite the higher wages (Meléndez 1994; Torres 2008).

### The Contemporary Picture of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans

We now consider the major social institutions of education, the family, healthcare, and religion, noting the similarities in their organization between Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans.
Both Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, as groups, have experienced gains in formal schooling but still lag behind White Americans in many standards of educational attainment. As is apparent in Table 10.1, both groups are also well behind other Latinos. Although bilingual education is still endorsed in the United States, the implementation of effective, high-quality programs has been difficult, as Chapter 9 showed. In addition, attacks on the funding of bilingual education have continued into the present.

Latinos, including Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, while not as segregated as African Americans, are still isolated from non-Latinos. Three factors explain this increasing social isolation of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans from other students in school. First, Latinos are increasingly concentrated in the largest cities, where minorities dominate. Second, the numbers of Latinos have increased dramatically since the 1970s, when efforts to desegregate schools began to lose momentum. Third, schools once desegregated have become resegregated as the numbers of school-aged Mexican Americans in an area have increased and as the determination to maintain balances in schools has lessened (Orfield and Lee 2005).

Even where Anglos and Latinos live in the same school district, the problem of social isolation in the classroom is often furthered through tracking. Tracking is the practice of placing students in specific classes or curriculum groups on the basis of test scores and other criteria. Tracking begins very early in the classroom, often in reading groups during first grade. These tracks may reinforce the disadvantages of Hispanic children from less-affluent families and non–English-speaking households that have not been exposed to English reading materials in their homes during early childhood (Rodríguez 1989).

Students see few teachers and administrators like themselves because few Latino university students have been prepared to serve as teachers and administrators. In 2008, only
55 percent of Mexican Americans and 76 percent of Puerto Ricans aged 25 or older had completed high school, compared with 88 percent of White non-Hispanics (see Table 10.1). Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans who do choose to continue their education beyond high school are more likely to select a technical school or community college to acquire work-related skills (Ellison 2008).

Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans are underrepresented in higher education in all roles. Recent reports have documented the absence of Hispanics among college teachers and administrators: less than 5 percent of all college teachers were Latino in 2009. The situation is similar in this respect to that of Blacks; however, there are no Latino counterparts to historically Black colleges, such as the Tuskegee Institute, to provide a source of leaders (Bureau of the Census 2010a:Table 615).

Motivation does not appear to be the barrier to school achievement, at least among Mexican immigrants. A Harvard University study of the attitudes of Mexican immigrant adolescents showed that 84 percent felt that school was the most important thing, compared with 40 percent of White teenagers. Again, 68 percent of immigrant children felt that doing their homework was more important than helping a friend, compared with only 20 percent of White adolescents who held the same priorities. However, there is evidence that as these children assimilate, they begin to take on the prevailing White views. The same survey showed second-generation Mexican Americans still giving education a higher priority but not as high as their immigrant counterparts. We consider shortly how assimilation has a similar effect on health (Crosnoe 2005; Woo 1996).

With respect to higher education, Latinos face challenges similar to those that Black students meet on predominantly White campuses. Given the social isolation of Latino high schools, Mexican Americans are likely to have to adjust for the first time to an educational environment almost totally populated by Anglos. They may experience racism for the first time, just as they are trying to adjust to a heavier academic load.

**Family Life**

The most important organization or social institution among Latinos, or for that matter any group, is the family. The structure of the Mexican American family differs little from that of all families in the United States, a statement remarkable in itself, given the impoverishment of a significant number of Mexican Americans.

Latino households are described as laudably more familistic than others in the United States. **Familism** means pride and closeness in the family, which results in family obligation and loyalty coming before individual needs. The family is the primary source of both social interaction and caregiving. In Research Focus, we look at familism more closely.

Familism has been viewed as both a positive and a negative influence on individual Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans. It has been argued to have the negative effect of discouraging youths with a bright future from taking advantage of opportunities that would separate them from their family. Familism is generally regarded as good, however, because an extended family provides emotional strength in times of crisis. Close family ties maintain the mental and social well-being of the elderly. Most Latinos, therefore, see the intact, extended family as a norm and as a nurturing unit that provides support throughout a person’s lifetime. The many significant aspects of familism include the importance of campadrazgo (the godparent–godchild relationship), the benefits of the financial dependency of kin, the availability of relatives as a source of advice, and the active involvement of the elderly in the family.

Familism pride and closeness in the family that result in placing family obligation and loyalty before individual needs

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Chapter 10 Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans

Healthcare

Earlier, in Chapter 5, we introduced the concept of life chances, which are people’s opportunities to provide themselves with material goods, positive living conditions, and favorable life experiences. We have consistently seen Latino groups as having more limited life chances. Perhaps in no other area does this apply so much as in the healthcare system.

Hispanics as a group are locked out of the healthcare system more often than any other racial or ethnic group. Although federal law requires that emergency medical treatment be available to all people, even illegal immigrants, many Hispanics—even those with legal residency but who have relatives here illegally—are wary of seeking medical help. Healthcare

The Latino Family Circle: Familism

Familism within the Latino community is associated with a sense of obligation to fellow family members, the placement of family interests over individual desires, and exclusiveness of the family even over friends and work. Familism has been likened to a thick social network where everyday social interaction is defined by one’s family.

Familism for the U.S.-born Latino is also associated with familiarity with Spanish so that one can truly relate to the older relatives for whom English may remain very much a foreign language. Being nominally if not practicing Roman Catholic is another means of maintaining strong family ties.

U.S. Hispanic families are undergoing transition with the simultaneous growth of more multigenerational families born in the United States as well as the continuing arrival of new immigrants. This is all complicated by the mixed status present in so many Latino extended families (with the obvious exception of Puerto Ricans, for whom citizenship is automatic). As explained in Chapter 4, mixed status refers to families in which one or more is a citizen and one or more is a noncitizen. This especially becomes problematic when the noncitizens are illegal or undocumented immigrants. All the usual pressures within a family become magnified when there is mixed status.

Although immigration makes generalizing about Latinos as a group very difficult at any one point in time, analysis of available data indicates that Hispanic households are taking on more of the characteristics of larger society. For example, cohabiting couples with or without children were relatively uncommon among Hispanic groups but now are coming to resemble the pattern of non-Hispanics. Similarly, Mexican-born women in the United States are more likely to enter marriage earlier, but now later generations are more likely to start marriage later. The same was true for Puerto Rican women born on the island, compared with those born on the mainland.

In the future, the greatest factor that may lead to a decline in familism is marriage across ethnic lines. Continuing immigration from Mexico has tended to slow outgroup marriage, but during periods of lessened migration, immigrants have been more likely to form unions with different Latino groups or with non-Hispanics.

Today, we still see a more collective orientation or familism rather than an individualistic orientation that is more likely to encourage family members to move away from their relatives or, more dramatically, lead to desertion or divorce. Studies with other established, longer-term immigrant groups suggest that family members become more individualistic in their values and behavior. People both within and outside the Latino community are very interested to see if Hispanics will follow this pattern and whether the familism that is so characteristic of much of the Latino community will fade.


Research Focus

The Latino Family Circle: Familism

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treatment. About a third (32.4 percent) had no health insurance (or other coverage such as Medicaid) for all of 2009, compared with 12 percent of White non-Hispanics and 21 percent of Blacks. Predictably, the uninsured are less likely to have a regular source of medical care. This means that they wait for a crisis before seeking care. Fewer are immunized, and rates of preventable diseases such as lead poisoning are higher. Those without coverage are increasing in number, a circumstance that may reflect a further breakdown in healthcare delivery or may be a result of continuing immigration (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2010:23).

The healthcare problem facing Mexican Americans and other Hispanic groups is complicated by the lack of Hispanic health professionals. Hispanics accounted for 6 percent or less of dentists and physicians, yet as a group Hispanics are about 15 percent of the population. Obviously, one does not need to be administered healthcare by someone in one’s own ethnic group, but the paucity of Hispanic professionals increases the likelihood that the group will be underserved (Bureau of the Census 2010a:Table 615).

Some Mexican Americans and many other Latinos have cultural beliefs that make them less likely to use the medical system. They may interpret their illnesses according to folk practices or *curanderismo*: Latino folk medicine, a form of holistic healthcare and healing. This orientation influences how one approaches healthcare and even how one defines illness. Most Hispanics probably use folk healers, or *curanderos*, infrequently, but perhaps 20 percent rely on home remedies. Although these are not necessarily without value, especially if a dual system of folk and establishment medicine is followed, reliance on natural beliefs may be counterproductive. Another aspect of folk beliefs is the identification of folk-defined illnesses such as *susto* (or fright sickness) and *atague* (or fighting attack). Although these complaints, alien by these names to Anglos, often have biological bases, they must be dealt with carefully by sensitive medical professionals who can diagnose and treat illnesses accurately (Belliard and Ramirez-Johnson 2005; Dansie 2004; Lara et al. 2005).

**Religion**

The most important formal organization in the Hispanic community is the Church. Most Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans express a religious preference for the Catholic Church. In 2007, about 58 percent of Hispanics were Catholic. In Figure 10.2, we examine a more detailed background of specific religious affiliations indicated by Latinos.

The Roman Catholic Church took an assimilationist role in the past, whether with Hispanic Catholics or with other minority Catholics. The Church has only sporadically involved itself in the Chicano movement or La Raza, and rarely in the past did the upper levels of the Church hierarchy support Chicanismo. For example, only with some prodding did the Roman Catholic Church support the United Farm Workers, a group whose membership was predominantly Catholic.
Recently, the Roman Catholic Church has become more community oriented, seeking to identify Latino, or at least Spanish-speaking, clergy and staff to serve Latino parishes. The lack of Spanish-speaking priests has been complicated by a smaller proportion of a declining number of men who are training for the priesthood and who speak Spanish (Ramirez 2000; Rosales 1996).

Not only is the Catholic Church important to Hispanics, but also Hispanics play a significant role for the Church. The population growth of Mexican Americans and other Hispanics has been responsible for the Catholic Church’s continued growth in recent years, whereas mainstream Protestant faiths have declined in size. Hispanics account for more than a third of Catholics in the United States. The Church is trying to adjust to Hispanics’ more expressive manifestation of religious faith, with frequent reliance on their own patron saints and the presence of special altars in their homes. Catholic churches in some parts of the United States are even starting to accommodate observances of the Mexican Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead. Such practices are a tradition from rural Mexico, where religion was followed without trained clergy. Yet even today in the United States, Hispanics continue to be underrepresented among priests, with only 4.4 percent nationwide being Hispanic (O’Connor 1998).

Although Latinos are predominantly Catholic, their membership in Protestant and other Christian faiths is growing. According to a national survey by the University of Notre Dame, first-generation Latinos are 74 percent Catholic, but by the third generation only 62 percent are Catholic (Watanabe and Enriquez 2005).

**Pentecostalism**, a type of evangelical Christianity, is growing in Latin America and is clearly making a significant impact on Latinos in the United States. Adherents to Pentecostal faiths hold beliefs similar to those of the evangelicals but also believe in the infusion of the Holy Spirit into services and in religious experiences such as faith healing. Pentecostalism and similar faiths are attractive to many because they offer followers the opportunity to express their religious fervor openly. Furthermore, many of the churches are small and, therefore, offer a sense of community, often with Spanish-speaking leadership. Gradually, the more established faiths are recognizing the desirability of offering Latino parishioners a greater sense of belonging (Hunt 1999).

**Conclusion**

David Gomez (1971) described Mexican Americans as “strangers in their own land.” Puerto Ricans, on the other hand, are still debating what should be the political destiny of their island nation. All of this makes nationality a very real part of the destiny of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans. Can they also preserve their cultures along with a sense of national fervor, or will these be a casualty of assimilation?

As we have seen, even when we concentrate on just Mexican Americans or Puerto Ricans out of the larger collective group of Hispanics or Latinos, diversity remains. Mexican Americans are divided among the Hispanos and the descendants of earlier Mexican immigrants and the more recent arrivals from Mexico. Puerto Ricans can be divided by virtue of residency and the extent to which they identify with the island culture. For many Puerto Ricans, the identity dilemma is never truly resolved: “No soy de aquí ni de allá” (“I am not from here nor from there”) (Comas-Díaz et al. 1998).

Economic change is also apparent. Poverty and unemployment rates are high, and new arrivals from Mexico and Puerto Rico are particularly likely to enter the lower class, or working class at best, upon arrival. However, there is a growing middle class within the Hispanic community.

Mexican culture is alive and well in the Mexican American community. Some cultural practices that have become more popular here than in Mexico are being imported back to Mexico, with their distinctive Mexican American flavor. All this is occurring in the midst of a reluctance to expand bilingual education and a popular move to make English the official language. In 1998, Puerto Rico observed its 500th anniversary as a colony: four centuries under Spain and another century under the United States. Its dual status as a colony and as a developing nation has been the defining issue for Puerto Ricans, even those who have migrated to the mainland.
Summary

1. As a result of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican–American War, the United States acquired a significant amount of Mexican territory, starting the long history of Latinos in the United States.

2. Federal policies such as repatriation, the bracero program, Operation Wetback, and Special Force Operation reflect that the United States regards Mexico and its people as a low-wage labor supply to be encouraged or shut off as dictated by U.S. economic needs.

3. The lowly status of migrant farm workers was dramatically changed by the collective efforts led by César Chávez.

4. Grassroots community organizations have marked the efforts of Mexican Americans seeking equity in the United States.

5. Puerto Ricans have enjoyed citizenship by birth since 1917 but have commonwealth status on the island. The future status of Puerto Rico remains the key political issue within the Puerto Rican community.

6. Like much of the rest of the Caribbean and Latin America, Puerto Rico has more of a color gradient in terms of race than the sharp Black–White dichotomy of the mainland.

7. Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans have experienced some improvement in education and healthcare but remain well behind non-Hispanics.

8. Religion plays an important role in the lives of Latinos who, although most remain Roman Catholic, are increasingly becoming members of Pentecostal faiths.

Key Terms

braceros / 240
contacted Mexican laborers brought to the United States during World War II

Chicanismo / 243
an ideology emphasizing pride and positive identity among Mexican Americans

color gradient / 248
the placement of people on a continuum from light to dark skin color rather than in distinct racial groupings by skin color

culture of poverty / 241
a way of life that involves no future planning, no enduring commitment to marriage, and no work ethic; this culture follows the poor even when they move out of the slums or the barrio

curanderismo / 254
Hispanic folk medicine

familism / 252
pride and closeness in the family that result in placing family obligation and loyalty before individual needs

La Raza / 240
literally meaning “the people,” the term refers to the rich heritage of Mexican Americans; it is therefore used to denote a sense of pride among Mexican Americans today

life chances / 253
people’s opportunities to provide themselves with material goods, positive living conditions, and favorable life experiences

mixed status / 253
families in which one or more members are citizens and one or more are noncitizens

mojados / 240
“wetbacks”; derisive slang for Mexicans who enter illegally, supposedly by swimming the Rio Grande

neocolonialism / 246
continuing dependence of former colonies on foreign countries

Neoricans / 245
Puerto Ricans who return to the island to settle after living on the mainland of the United States (also Nuyoricans)

Pentecostalism / 255
a religion similar in many respects to evangelical faiths that believes in the infusion of the Holy Spirit into services and in religious experiences such as faith healing

repatriation / 239
the 1930s program of deporting Mexicans

tracking / 251
the practice of placing students in specific curriculum groups on the basis of test scores and other criteria

world systems theory / 249
a view of the global economic system as divided between nations that control wealth and those that provide natural resources and labor
Review Questions

1. In what respects has Mexico been viewed as both a source of workers and as a place to leave unwanted laborers?
2. In what respects are Hispanic families similar to and different from Anglo households?
3. How does Chicanismo relate to the issue of Hispanic identity?
4. How does the case of Puerto Rico support the notion of race as a social concept?
5. What role does religion play in the Latino community?

Critical Thinking

1. Consider what it means to be patriotic and loyal in terms of being a citizen of the United States. How do the concerns that Puerto Ricans have for the island’s future and the Mexican concept of dual nationality affect those notions of patriotism and loyalty?
2. The phrase territorial minorities has been used to apply to subordinate groups that have special ties to their land, such as Native American tribes. How would you apply this to Mexican Americans?
3. The family is often regarded by observers as a real strength in the Latino community. How can this strength be harnessed to address some of the challenges that Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans face in the United States?
4. Are Mexican Americans assimilated, and are recent Mexican immigrants likely to assimilate over time?

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- **Explore on mysoclab.com** Social Explorer is an interactive application that allows you to explore Census data through interactivemaps. Explore the Social Explorer Report:
  - Social Explorer Activity: Family Structure Among Hispanic Populations

- **Read on mysoclab.com** MySocLibrary includes primary source readings from various noted sociologists from around the world. Read:
  - Mexican Americans and Immigrant Incorporation