

From Multiracial to Monoracial: The Formation of Mexican American Identities in the U.S. Southwest

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Mexico, that is, the U.S. Southwest, following the Anglo-Americanization during the second half of the nineteenth century, is an excellent case study of the historical formations of Anglo-American and Spanish American racial orders. Both racial orders were based on a hierarchy that privileged Whiteness and stigmatized Blackness. Yet Spanish America's high levels of miscegenation resulted in ternary orders allowing for gradation in and fluidity within racial categories, in addition to the formation of multiracial identities, including those of individuals with African ancestry. Anglo-America was characterized by restrictions on miscegenation and more precise definitions of and restrictions on racial categories. This prohibited the formation of multiracial identities while buttressing a binary racial order that broadly necessitated single-race (monoracial) identification as either White or nonWhite, and more specifically, as White or Black, given their polar extremes in racial hierarchy. Within this order, hypodescent applies most stringently to those with African ancestry through the one-drop rule, which designates as Black all such individuals. This article examines monoracialization through historical processes of Mexican– American identity formations. Over the twentieth century, this shifted from White to Brown, but without any acknowledgment of African ancestry.

Keywords: multiracial; mixed race; mestizaje; miscegenation; hypodescent; Mexican Americans; Chicanas/os

1. Introduction

Beginning in the late seventeenth century, Anglo-America implemented restrictions on miscegenation and stringent definitions of and constraints on racial categories. Multiracial identities have historically been prohibited due to hypodescent and the monoracial imperative. These social devices categorize multiracials, respectively, according to their most subaltern racial background and necessitate single-racial identification. This line of reasoning supported a binary racial order that has broadly required identification as either White or nonWhite, and more specifically, as White or Black, given their polar extremes in racial hierarchy. Within this order, hypodescent has applied most rigorously to those with African ancestry through the one-drop rule, which designates as Black all such individuals.

Spanish America's extensive miscegenation beginning in the sixteenth century resulted in a ternary order characterized by fluid racial categories, as well as multiracial identities, including those of individuals of African descent. This should not be interpreted to mean that the Spanish American ternary racial order was more egalitarian than the AngloAmerican binary one. Their different trajectories were grounded in a shared colonialism involving the conquest, settlement, exploitation of, as well as political-economic domination and control over, large areas of the world. Patriarchy was foundational to both racial orders. Men exercised control over power relations in the private and public spheres generating social structures and practices in which they were able to dominate, oppress, and exploit women. These social forces granted White men the power to control the productive (and to some extent reproductive) labor of not only men of color but also that of White women and women of color (Daniel 2006).

Racial formation was thus a central organizing principle of social relations. It was shaped by Eurocentrism, as well as its correlates, White racism and White supremacy, which privileged people of European descent and discriminated against people of color. The state participated in constructing and enforcing institutional racial categories and boundaries, and thus policies sustaining racial inequality (Goldberg 2002; Loveman 2014; Marx 1998; Telles 2014). All of the aforementioned social forces supported White elites in Anglo-America and Spanish America in nation making, building national unity, and forging nationalist ideologies.

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Abstract: The racialization of Mexican Americans in northern

Racist ideology was also used to justify African enslavement and retain individuals of African descent in a subaltern position long after the abolition of slavery. Still, some scholars have argued that the law and Catholicism in Spanish America respected slaves' humanity and, more important, eased the transition from slavery to freedom, compared to Protestant Anglo-America (Cottrol 2013; Davis 1966; Tannenbaum 1947). De jure laws in Spanish America may have been more egalitarian; however, de facto social realities did not correspond with jurisprudence.

Notwithstanding a few dissenting voices, religious authorities, Protestant and Catholic, juggled Christian dogma to justify enslavement, despite contradiction to fundamental Christian principles. All slave regimes were brutal and ruled by the cold logic of production costs as well as the zealous and insatiable accumulation of the medium of exchange (Davis 1966). The Catholic Church not only was subservient to slave holders but also maintained considerable slave holdings. Priests, nuns, and brotherhoods in Spanish America all held large numbers of slaves. Among Catholic nations, Spain dominated the slave trade and slavery in the Americas (Adiele 2017; Davis 1966).

Finally, G. Bender (1978) maintains that European colonial attitudes toward miscegenation, as well as the social differentiation of multiracials from Whites and other nonWhites, were not motivated by tolerance or egalitarian impulses, but rather, primarily by selfinterest. They were less influenced by the varying religious, cultural, and national origins of the colonizing Europeans and more by the interplay of two demographic factors that prevailed in the colonial territories: the ratios of European men to women and Whites to nonWhites. Whenever Indigenous people and/or Africans composed a majority of the population and most of the Europeans were single males, as was the case in Spanish America, interracial intimacy between White men and nonWhite women, involving rape or fleeting extramarital relations and extended concubinage, was prevalent, notwithstanding the social stigma and some legal barriers to interracial marriage (Daniel 2006; Knight 1974; Rout 1976).

Miscegenation gave rise to a sizeable multiracial population that was racially and socially distinguished from Whites and other nonWhites. Their shared European ancestry and culture were invariably factored into the White minority's calculations to maintain their domination. The shortage of Whites meant that multiracials were viewed as strategic in the state's security apparatus to help manage colonial settlements, secure territorial borders, or fill roles in the political economy as artisans and skilled labor. Whites implemented ternary racial orders granting multiracials an intermediate status and privileges somewhat higher than that of other nonWhites, particularly Blacks, although significantly subaltern to that of Whites. This contributed as much to multiracials' own circumscribed status as to Whites' superordinate position (Daniel 2006; Telles 2014; Wade 2017).

Wherever these demographics were not obtained, as in colonial Anglo-America, interracial intimacy between White men and women of color was highly stigmatized. There were also significant legal barriers to interracial marriage. Notwithstanding shared European ancestry and culture, the White majority did not consider multiracials natural allies. Daniel (2006) argues Whites, instead, endeavored to maintain domination by enforcing hypodescent and the monoracial imperative. Multiracials were categorized, respectively, according to their most subaltern background while necessitating monoracial identification, resulting in a binary racial order with no intermediate status. One was either White or nonWhite, and more specifically, White or Black, given their polar extremities in the binary framework. Within this binary racial order, individuals of African descent have experienced the most restrictive rule of hypodescent through the one-drop rule, which designates as Black all such individuals.

This article examines Anglo-Americanization of the U.S. Southwest beginning in the nineteenth century,¹ particularly California, an area characterized by a ternary order under Spanish and Mexican rule. The objective is to elucidate the impact of the Anglo-American binary racial order on the Mexican population, particularly with respect to multiracials of African descent. My analysis investigates monoracialization through historical processes of Mexican American identity formations from the nineteenth century through the 1960s, a transitional and foundational period wherein Mexican Americans were forced to strategize within the Anglo-American binary racial order and with the monoracial imperative. These social forces culminated in an embrace of those

devices, initially as Whites, and subsequently, as people of color, that is, Chicanas/os, without any recognition of African ancestry.

I use “Mexican American”, “Mexican-descent American”, “Chicana/o”, and “Hispanic” interchangeably. For historical reasons, I employ “Chicana/o” mainly for the 1960s onward for individuals of Mexican-American background. “Mexican American” or “Mexican-descent American” are often used to encompass the period before, as well as after, the 1960s. “Mexican” as a standalone generally refers to Mexican nationals, although for historical purposes, I sometimes use it to encompass the entirety of the period prior to, and just after, U.S. annexation and colonization of the Southwest.

“Black” and “African American” are used interchangeably to refer to individuals of African descent unless specified otherwise, for example, when it is meaningful to distinguish between Blacks and multiracials of African descent (i.e., mulattoes).² “Individuals of African descent” or “African-descent individuals” can include Blacks and all other individuals of African descent, including multiracials. Multiracial, mixed race, hybridity, and similar terms are used interchangeably. “Afro-Mexicans”, most of them multiracials, generally refer to Mexicans of African descent who migrated to or were born in the United States. Finally, “White”, “European American”, and “Anglo-American” are used interchangeably in terms of the U.S. “White”, “European-descent”, or “individual of European descent” are sometimes more encompassing of the U.S. and elsewhere.

2. Methods and Materials

Borrowing from racial formation theory by Michael Omi and Howard Winant, I analyze the sociohistorical processes whereby racial categories, identities, and membership have been assigned and inhabited in the racial order and the agency individuals of Mexican descent have exercised in responding to those social forces (Omi and Winant 2015). Data are drawn primarily from published literature in the humanities and social sciences. This article also includes archival material, including court cases, legislative proceedings, census data, and travel literature relevant to the topic of race and multiraciality in Spanish America and Anglo-America, particularly in terms of Mexican Americans in California and elsewhere in the Southwest.

3. Results

3.1. Spanish America: The Ternary Racial Order

3.1.1. Slavery, Miscegenation, and the Foundation of the Racial Order

Throughout Spanish America, Europeans initially sought to enslave Indigenous people as a labor force. They were less successful with the sparser semisedentary Caribbean societies based on farming, fishing, and some hunting and had greater success with more sedentary and densely populated agricultural societies, especially in Peru and Mexico (Lockhart and Schwartz 1983). Still, epidemics,³ warfare, and labor-related hardships annihilated Indigenous people in the Caribbean and nearly did so on the mainland. Consequently, the Spanish Crown legally banned their enslavement in 1542.⁴ In the sixteenth century, increased labor needs produced a dramatic rise in the importation of enslaved Africans to supplement or replace Indigenous labor. By 1570, the 20,000–40,000 individuals of African descent in Mexico outnumbered Spaniards. After 1650, the Indigenous population had recovered sufficiently, and the African slave trade and population declined. While some 100,000–200,000 Africans entered Mexico over 150 years, Afro-Mexicans never constituted more than 2 percent of the colonial population, which always had an Indigenous majority (Bennett 2005; Palmer 1976; Proctor 2010; Silva 2018; Taylor 1998; Valdés 2018).

In Spanish America, Indigenous people and Blacks composed a majority of the population. Europeans were few and mostly single males, who formed liaisons with Indigenous and African-descent women. Most of these unions were consummated outside of matrimony through some level of coercion and violence involving rape, fleeting extramarital relations, and concubinage (Cline 2015; Mörner 1967). In general, relationships between social unequals were restricted to concubinage or consensual unions, to which the Church turned a blind eye (Furtado 2008; Katzew 2004; Seed 1992).

The Crown equivocated about intermarriages between Whites and individuals of Indigenous descent but ultimately sanctioned them if for no other reason than to expand the colonial

population and establish settlements (Menchaca 2001; Rout 1976). Attitudes toward marriages of Whites with individuals of African descent were vacillating and contradictory but clearly less favorable (Carrera 2003; Rout 1976; Saether 2003). Numerous colonial statutes sought to restrict, if not prohibit, these unions through various negative sanctions, including jeopardizing social advancement (Menchaca 2001; Rout 1976).

The Royal Pragmatic on Marriage (1776–1778) allowed parents or civil officials to prevent marriages if they were between social unequals in terms of class or race, as this was a prime determinant in an individual's status (Shumway 2005). Steinar A. Saether (2003) argues that one could conjecture that the law worked in practice as a prohibition against interracial marriages with individuals of African descent. Still, common-law unions and more informal relations and concubinage involving Spanish males and women of color were prevalent and more or less accepted, if not encouraged. The interracial family was also informally legitimized throughout Latin America (Menchaca 2001; Mörner 1967).

3.1.2. The Racial Order and the System of Castes

Extensive miscegenation in Spanish America gave rise to ternary racial orders with relatively fluid racial boundaries and sizeable multiracial populations legally and socially distinguished from and intermediate to Whites, Blacks, and Indigenous people. During the first decades of the colonial period, most multiracials were of European and Indigenous descent (*mestizos*). Later there was a significant increase in those of African and European descent (*mulatos*), or African, European, and Indigenous descent (*pardos*),⁵ as well as dual minority individuals of African and Indigenous descent (*zambos*) (Mörner 1967).

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Spanish America developed the *Sistema de Castas* (System of Castes) or *Sociedad de Castas* (Society of Castes), a hierarchical racial classification system representing the parent racial groups and their permutations. *Españoles* (Spaniards—later, Whites) were at the top of this racial hierarchy, with *mestizos* below Spaniards but above other multiracials in terms of prestige, privilege, and the potential for vertical social mobility. *Mestizos* were differentiated from other castas in law and public esteem, while those with property or social connections to elite Spaniards were less likely to be labeled as *mestizo* (Althouse 2005; Mörner 1967; Schwaller 2016). As progeny of *mestizos* and Whites, *castizos* were considered near-White, while the offspring of *castizos* and Whites resulted in the restoration of Spanish “racial purity” (Cline 2015; Katzew 2004; Martínez 2008). Mulattoes and other multiracials with African ancestry ranked lower than *mestizos* in the racial hierarchy. Consequently, no reduction in the degree of African ancestry made possible a return to Spanish racial purity. Blacks and Indigenous people were at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, although the latter ranked somewhat higher than the former (Chance 1978; Cline 2015; Katzew 2004; Martínez 2008; Schwaller 2016).⁶

However, *casta* identities were enforced arbitrarily and inconsistently. They frequently involved assumed ancestry based on perceived phenotype (Vinson 2018). Culture and socioeconomic standing were also taken into consideration (Lewis 2003). Moreover, the caste schema never completely closed off the possibility of vertical mobility (Lewis 2003). Cline (2015) also maintains that the myriad terms found in the famous eighteenth-century *casta* paintings had no legal standing. *Casta* paintings may have been the White colonial elites' attempt to put into place racial divisions based on hybrid fixity in a social reality characterized by increased race and class fluidity.

The caste system existed alongside the social distinction between “*gente de razón*” (literally “people of reason”) and “*gente sin razón*” (“people without reason”). Spaniards designated themselves “*gente de razón*”, uniquely capable of making rational decisions. They automatically qualified based on the belief that they were culturally already marked by their Christian faith. On the other hand, Spaniards relegated Indigenous people to the status of “*gente sin razón*” (“people without reason”). Yet *gente de razón* standing was granted to Christianized Indigenous people, multiracials, and Blacks (Guerrero 2010; Miranda 1988).

Indeed, racialized religion (and employing it as a means to maintain class privilege and domination) through laws of purity of blood (*limpieza de sangre*) informed the caste system and its views on miscegenation and intermarriage in the Spanish colonies. Originating in fifteenth-

century Spain, the concept of purity of blood reflected an obsession with the belief that the religious “unfaithfulness” of Jewish people not only endured in those who converted to Catholicism but also was transmitted by blood to their descendants, regardless of how sincerely they professed the Christian faith. Consequently, Old Christians “of pure blood” viewed these New Christians as impure and, therefore, morally unacceptable as members of their communities. This judgment primarily targeted the influential group of Iberian *conversos* (Catholics of Jewish origins), who wielded considerable political and economic influence but was also extended to *moriscos* (Catholics of Muslim lineage). Subsequently, various civil and ecclesiastical institutions and communities issued discriminatory and segregation laws against Indigenous people and individuals of African descent in the colonial territories (Lewis 2003; Martínez et al. 2012; Rodríguez-García 2022).

Still, the preferential liberation of enslaved mistresses and multiracial children of African descent made it possible for *mulatos* and *pardos* early on to enter the free classes in large numbers, notwithstanding the social stigma attached to Blackness; because of the smaller number of Whites, these free people of color were integral to the economy. They held interstitial roles as overseers, seamstresses, washerwomen, street vendors, cooks, artisans, and skilled labor due to a shortage of Europeans and the impracticalities of using slaves. Free Colored militia, disproportionately composed of multiracials, also helped expand the frontier, secure colonial borders against foreigners, and provide a military brake on independence-minded Creoles (Criollos) or “Spanish” settlers and colonizers born in the New World (Vinson 2018). As they shared ancestry and culture, Creoles also viewed Free Coloreds as allies against enslaved Blacks and/or the Indigenous majority. They often helped suppress slave uprisings and caught and returned fugitive slaves (Klein 1986). The Crown and colonists won the loyalty of Free Coloreds while maintaining White domination and control. Indeed, the inclusion of Free Coloreds in the state’s security apparatus contributed to their own circumscribed status and the superior position of Whites, as a revolt against Whites would bring them into opposition with the Crown and colonial government, resulting in serious reprisals in the event of defeat (Vinson 2018).

3.2. Anglo-America: The Binary Racial Order

3.2.1. Slavery, Miscegenation, and the Foundation of the Racial Order

Since Great Britain was less effective than Spain in coercing Native Americans into slave labor to meet its agricultural labor needs in its North American colonies, it developed the system of White indentured servitude (Williamson 1980).⁷ The early Anglo-American colonies were, therefore, overwhelmingly composed of White yeomanry, indentures and former indentures, and wage earners. Initially, there were few African slaves (Ringer 1983). African slavery was gradually established in the 1650s and 1660s. The Native American slave trade ended by 1750, although large numbers of them continued to be forced into slavery and other forms of unfree servitude (Reséndez 2016). African slaves eventually replaced Native American slaves and European indentures.

The legal distinction between individuals held in servitude and those who were free was more precise than the distinction between voluntary European indenture labor and involuntary African slave labor. Until slave laws were enacted, African slaves maintained a legal status similar to that of White indentured servants. European indentures and African slaves worked under similarly harsh conditions and shared the same living quarters (Spickard 1989). In the late seventeenth century, the expansion of African slavery led to servitude in perpetuity for enslaved Blacks and their descendants and relegated their legal status to that of property.

The mid-eighteenth century saw a significant increase in the number of enslaved Blacks and an equally dramatic reduction in the number of White indentures. Yet unlike Spanish America, the large number of White immigrants, including indentures or former indentures, reduced the need for Free Colored labor in interstitial roles. Free Coloreds, who were disproportionately multiracial, performed an important role in the artisanal and skilled trades. But there were always a sufficient number of Whites. Consequently, there was little incentive to socially differentiate mulattoes from Blacks within the racial order (Williamson 1980).

The gender ratio in Anglo-America was more balanced than in Spanish America as many Europeans arrived as families and reproduced European patterns of conjugal life, with the

European American population becoming a majority early in the colonial period. These demographics were not conducive to the pervasive miscegenation that characterized Spanish America. Still during the early seventeenth century, there were no laws prohibiting interracial intimacy despite strong social prejudice against it. Small numbers of Blacks and Whites, particularly African slaves and White indentures, intermarried or formed common-law unions and had offspring, alongside more prevalent clandestine contacts that involved births outside of marriage. These were largely the offspring of coercive liaisons, as in rape or concubinage, involving White masters and slave women of African descent. Yet the preservation of clear racial boundaries in a society now based on African slavery required maintaining and strengthening barriers between Blacks and Whites.

3.2.2. The Racial Order and the Rule of Hypodescent

Anglo-Americans began enforcing hypodescent during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as part of antimiscegenation legislation regulating interracial marriages. Black-White relations suffered the most severe restrictions. By defining as nonWhite children born of interracial relationships, hypodescent enforced a monoracialism necessitating identification as either White or nonWhite and mandated that one was either Black or White given their polar positions in the White-nonWhite binary (Daniel 2006; Davis 2001). In the 1660s, Virginia passed legislation to deter Black/White miscegenation and punish Black-White children (mulattoes) with prolonged servitude. Maryland and other colonies followed in the 1690s. Notably, while the earliest laws did not forbid interracial marriages, they sought to deter relations between White women and enslaved men of African descent through fines, banishment, whippings, and additional terms of servitude for White women indentures. They also stipulated those children born of these marriages would be indentured (Davis 2001).

By the mid-eighteenth century, marriages between Blacks and Whites in the southern and some northern colonies were stigmatized where they were not legally prohibited. Unions between Black males and White females, whether casual, common-law, or legalized in marriage, were strictly forbidden as threats to the sanctity of White womanhood and the integrity of the White family. Both were pivotal to the preservation of White racial “purity” and numerical self-perpetuation and the intergenerational transmission of White wealth, power, privilege, and prestige (Davis 2001; Pascoe 2009).

Public attitudes, however, continued to tolerate sexual assault and extended concubinage involving White men and women of African descent (Nash 2014). These unions had no legal standing, posed little threat to the slave-based racial order, and became the source of most subsequent miscegenation (Spickard 1989). White men in such relationships typically disavowed their multiracial offspring. Hypodescent legally exempted them from passing on inheritance and other benefits. Although hypodescent and African slavery were inextricably intertwined and mutually reinforcing, such offspring were enslaved according to the slave status of the mother, not on hypodescent. Hypodescent increased the numbers of Blacks, whether slave or free, not the number of slaves. It was the Anglo-American patriarchy’s ideal means of maintaining its economic and political power, extramarital sexual behavior, and obsession with White racial purity (Nash 2014).

F. James Davis (2001) argued that hypodescent was applied most stringently to first-generation offspring. Those with White and Latinx, Asian American (Spickard 1989), and Native American ancestry⁸ have been allowed more flexibility in self-identification than are individuals of African/European descent of any generation (Jordan and Spickard 2014). They have experienced the most restrictive rule of hypodescent—the one-drop rule—wherein anyone with “one drop of African blood” is designated as Black. Only applied to individuals of African descent and unique to the United States, the rule has historically precluded self-identification. It also has ensured that all future descendants with African ancestry have been designated and have self-identified as solely Black. The rule became the commonsense definition of Blackness between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. However, it did not become a customary part of the legal apparatus until the early twentieth century following the institutionalization of Jim Crow segregation in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling (Davis 2001).

U.S. attitudes toward the “dual minority” offspring of African Americans and other groups of color have varied (Forbes 1988; Loewen 1988). All have generally been subject to hypodescent and monoracial formations, but greater ambivalence is displayed toward non-Black dual minority offspring (Guevarra 2012; Leonard 1992). Their position in the U.S. racial hierarchy has been ambiguous and their membership less clearly defined in law. But hypodescent has still pushed them toward the less privileged racial background although which one is considered the most subaltern can vary situationally. Still, monoracial norms have historically prohibited recognition of their multiracial identities and experiences.

3.3. Northern Mexico: The Racial Order under Spanish and Mexican Rule

Few Europeans were available to populate the regions of northern Mexico in California and the rest of the Southwest when Spain began its most expansive colonization effort in the region during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Consequently, Hispanicized Indigenous people,⁹ multiracials of all kinds, and Blacks came as soldiers with the first expeditions. Miscegenation between Spanish settlers and Indigenous women was allowed and even encouraged due to the shortage of European women and as a means of establishing settlements in the new frontier. Spanish men also married multiracial and Black women despite legal restrictions and the social stigma. Some interracial marriages were mutually beneficial and stable (Pérez 2018); others were volatile and short-lived. Still many other relationships involved some degree of coercion, rather than mutual consent and peaceful means, whether rape or fleeting extramarital relations and extended concubinage (Casas 2007; Chávez-García 2004; Forbes 1971; Haney-López 2003; MacDonald 1998; Pérez 2018; Salomon 2010; Taylor 1998).

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, individuals of African ancestry lived in Texas and New Mexico as colonists or soldiers and were frequently used as *majordomos* (chief stewards) in Spanish missions (Alonzo 1998; Forbes 1971; MacDonald 1998). By 1800, Blacks and mulattoes composed approximately 20 percent of California’s total population (Forbes 1971; Goode 1974; Mason 1998; Taylor 1998). In keeping with Spanish American racial formations, in California and the Southwest, African or Indigenous ancestry was not necessarily a rigid obstacle to social mobility. Yet society was divided by class and race.

Elites (landowners, officers, and missionaries) were lighter-skinned and race-conscious. But many multiracials of African descent were able to rise in the social hierarchy, call themselves *Españoles*, and potentially own property. Some dark-skinned men also married light-skinned women and had children who eventually married into the White upper class (Forbes 1971; Haney-López 2003; Hurtado 1999; Lightfoot 2005; Taylor 1998; Vinson 2018).

By the time Spain settled California in the late eighteenth century, *gente de razón* was also commonly utilized throughout Spanish America as a designation for all the crown’s Christianized subjects regardless of racial background (Miranda 1988; Pérez 2018) although in some circles, *gente de razón* became synonymous with Whiteness (Vinson 2018). In the early nineteenth century, the Crown abolished the caste system and gave nonWhites many of the legal rights of Whites. With Mexican independence in 1821, the state removed the remaining laws preventing the exercising the citizenship rights enjoyed by Whites. Additional legislation laid the foundation for the removal of all forms of legal racial discrimination (Menchaca 2001).

Following the change from Spanish to Mexican rule, Mexico also removed immigration restrictions on foreigners in 1824. European and European American immigrants, particularly males, were granted large tracts of land to settle in California with the Mexican government’s backing (Almaguer 1994; Goode 1974). California’s Spanish-speaking community, that is, Californios, were increasingly influenced by and influenced the growing numbers of European and European American immigrants who integrated into their society, becoming Mexican citizens (Pérez 2018). Many of the more prominent and well-to-do men married women from elite lighter-skinned Californio families who owned massive, highly desirable tracts of land, as well as large herds of cattle, sheep, and horses (Camarillo 2005; Casas 2007; Hurtado 1999). Anglo-American men who married Californio women gained extensive landholdings while tapping into existing power networks. Rancho ownership was possible for them because, under Spanish/Mexican law, married women could independently hold title to property (Dysart 1976). With marriage, these assets were transferred from Mexican to European American hands (Orenstein 2005). Californio

families also arranged such marriages to forestall a loss of influence or enhance their social standing (Almaguer 1994; Goode 1974; Haney-López 2003; Pérez 2018).

Elite children from some of these marriages, born in the 1830s and 1840s, sought to navigate the Californio and Anglo-American worlds (Pérez 2018). After U.S. conquest in 1848, they were incentivized to assimilate into the Anglo-American one. Notwithstanding their struggles in navigating the bicultural divide, many remained firmly rooted in their Mexican culture. Still, they also largely considered themselves White (Pérez 2018). African ancestry had become a distant memory, if not repressed or denied, among the Californio elite as well as the masses (Haney-López 2003; Hernández 2004; Pérez 2018). In fact, in 1829, African slavery had been abolished in Mexico, including in California and other areas of the Southwest. Consequently, in Mexican California, there were no longer any African slaves, whose numbers in the region had always been minuscule.

Enslavement of Indigenous peoples persisted outside the law in the Southwest. To some extent, the disavowal or suppression of Indigenous ancestry paralleled that of African ancestry. Yet Indigenous people were visible as the largest subaltern, subjugated, and exploited population, even after Mexican independence, whether in the military forts, farming communities, or missions (Reséndez 2016). Indeed, the missions resembled penal institutions or even plantations, given the forced labor, as well as total domination and control, maintained by the Church fathers. These oppressive social forces included their evangelizing initiatives, however, well-intentioned they might have been from their vantage point. The Indigenous converts or neophytes could not leave the missions without permission and were granted only limited freedom in choosing their occupation. Yet their condition was neither truly that of enslavement. The padres could not legally sell or own them. They did, however, control Indigenous labor for extracting surplus from the mission estates. They also leased out the Christianized neophytes to the nearby military forts and farming communities as laborers, requiring compensation to the missions (not the individual neophytes) (Almaguer 1994; Lightfoot 2005).

3.4. From Ternary to Binary: The Demise of the Spanish American Racial Order

3.4.1. White Supremacy, Race Suicide, and Racial Extinction

After the Mexican American War in 1848, Mexicans were legally guaranteed U.S. citizenship and suffrage, which were protected by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the U.S. Constitution. Yet the social location of Mexicans in California, most of whom were darker-skinned mestizos, was largely unscripted (Almaguer 1994). Moreover, links to African slavery, as well as varying degrees of ancestry inherited from African forbearers, was passed on to all of California's social classes, including the elite (Forbes 1971). Some Anglo-American observers were aware or suspected that many Mexicans had African ancestry. Anglo-Americans disparaged Mexicans as multiracial and therefore inferior, voicing race suicide fears about miscegenation in the U.S. According to nineteenth-century scientific racism and biological determinism, the resulting "mongrelization" (Davis 2001, p. 13) would lead to the decline of Anglo-American civilization.

Anglo-Americans also believed that nonWhites would disappear as new European Americans arrived and saw themselves as Americans, not as future Mexicans. Indeed, as Anglo-Americans spread westward in the nineteenth century, many intending to take more territory from Mexico, "racial extinction" theories and the "manifest destiny" (Horseman 1981) of Anglo-Americans came to explain the eventual demise of all people of color. Thomas Jefferson Farnham, an advocate of Anglo-American expansion into California, encapsulated these ideas:

No one acquainted with the indolent, mixed race of California, will ever believe that they will populate, much less, for any length of time, govern the country. The law of Nature which curses the mulatto here with a constitution less robust than that of either race from which he sprang, lays a similar penalty upon the mingling of the Indian and white races in California and Mexico. They must fade away. (Farnham 1849, p. 413)

The Monterey Constitutional Convention of 1849 saw a considerable debate on these topics (Browne 1850). While it did not question Mexican citizenship because of suspicions of African ancestry, whether California would be admitted as a slave or free state did become a concern. The constitution prohibited slavery, but slaveholders were granted legal possession of African

American slaves brought into California from 1848 until 1856.¹⁰ Mexican American and European American convention delegates adopted the motion that “Africans, and the descendants of Africans” (Browne 1850) were to be denied citizenship, the ability to serve on a jury, homestead public land, or attend public school. Any African ancestry among Mexicans was disregarded. Still, the final approved version of the new article of the constitution did formally disenfranchise Native Americans (Almaguer 1994; Salomon 2010).

3.4.2. White by Absence of Definition

After Anglo-American annexation, occupation, and colonization of California and the Southwest, Mexicans came to be viewed officially more in terms of their national ethnocultural origins as Mexicans than their ethnoracial origins as mestizos or even mulattoes. Elite Californio families, including multiracials with African ancestry, even insisted they were “untainted” by racial mixture and often claimed to be descended from Spanish nobility. They considered themselves and were already considered White under Mexican rule. European Americans accepted this narrative even if they harbored doubts about its accuracy (Hurtado 1999; Pérez 2018). Ultimately, European Americans extended all Mexicans an official White racial identity, despite not being strictly “White” compared to their own Northern European norm image as the standard or litmus test for Whiteness.

Similarly, during the years of the Texas Republic (1836–1846), some Mexicans purchased and retained their land by claiming Whiteness through claims of “Spanish blood.” Anglo-Texans who married Mexican women called the spouses Spanish. Much as in California, Mexican women’s agency in and perceived benefits of these interracial marriages should be taken into consideration despite the patriarchal dynamics involved (Casas 2007; Chávez-García 2004). In such instances, racial distinctions to some extent coincided with class and landholding (Gross 2003). Indeed, the primary beneficiaries of White racial privilege in Texas, New Mexico (present-day New Mexico and Arizona), and California were the lighter-skinned *Tejano*, *Hispano*, and *Californio* elite, particularly the landowning classes. Social tolerance was, therefore, rigidly circumscribed along class lines (Almaguer 1994; Haney-López 2003; Montejano 1987).

Furthermore, Mexicans were only White by default because the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended the war between the U.S. and Mexico made them eligible for U.S. citizenship as early as 1848, at a time when only “White persons” could naturalize. No state or federal court ever attempted to clarify this statute or designate Mexicans as affirmatively “White.” Rather, courts consistently invoked the treaty as precedent in cases involving Mexicans, circumventing questions of their racial lineage. Unlike for “Negroes” or “Mongolians”, who were specifically prohibited from intermarrying with Whites, antimiscegenation statutes were not applied to Mexican Americans, who were legally defined by the absence of definition (Orenstein 2005). Still, while Mexican Americans were granted full citizenship and legally defined as “White”, restrictionists sought their prohibition on racial grounds. In practice, Anglo-Americans generally thought of them as nonWhite (Gómez 2018; Gross 2003).

The earlier conciliatory attitudes changed as power relations between Mexicans and European Americans were significantly reconfigured during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Initially, Californios greatly outnumbered European Americans by about ten to one. But by 1849, there were 100,000 Anglo-Americans and only 13,000 Mexicans. Dominant in the state legislature, European Americans enacted laws and political and economic restrictions that increasingly viewed and treated Mexicans as a racialized minority. The earlier accommodation in California, followed by the dispossession of Mexican lands, as well as exclusionary racial attitudes and practices, was replicated across the Southwest (Camarillo 2005; Takaki 2008).

Mexicans found it increasingly more difficult to claim their rights not only as citizens but also as landowners, both guaranteed by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Almaguer 1994; Takaki 2008). The original version of the treaty contained a provision, Article X, which guaranteed protection of “all prior and pending titles to property of every description.” The ratified treaty omitted this article. Instead, European American representatives offered the Mexican government a “Statement of Protocol” to reassure Mexicans that “the American government did not in any way intend to annul the grants of lands made by Mexico in the ceded territories” (Takaki 2008, p. 154). Grantees would be allowed to have their legitimate titles acknowledged in U.S. courts

(Gómez 2018). Yet through a variety of complicated and often underhanded, legalistic maneuverings, the courts across the Southwest, which European American legal officials dominated, became ever more successful in contesting Mexican land titles.

Unfamiliar with U.S. law and generally lacking English-language skills, many Mexican landholders became prey to European American lawyers. If they were able to prove their claim, they would often be required to pay their attorneys one-quarter of their land (Almaguer 1994; Salomon 2010; Takaki 2008). Others borrowed money at exorbitant interest rates to pay legal fees; after they won their cases, many *rancheros* were forced to sell their property to pay off legal debts. This dispossession was accelerated by borrowing money to pay off tax debts, only to be forced to sell their land to pay off debts incurred by the interest. In the end, whether or not they won their claims, large numbers of the great *rancheros* lost their lands (Almaguer 1994; Salomon 2010; Takaki 2008).

Between 1848 and 1880, privately-held Mexican land in California was thus transferred on a massive scale to European Americans (Almaguer 1994). Along with more generalized economic setbacks and loss of Mexican political influence came increased racism (Takaki 2008). As the ternary racial order was replaced with a binary one, elite Spanish-speaking Californians accepted Anglo-American binary and monoracial logics but rejected hypodescent. Instead, they embraced hyperdescent wherein they privileged European culture over indigenous “Mexicanness”. This served as a powerful motivation to identify as “Spanish” and thus lay claim to Whiteness (Foley 2014; Gómez 2018). More important, by now, African forebears were a long-lost, if not concealed, memory among light-skinned Spanish-identified descendants of California’s first families. This served as the basis for the racial mythology of a Spanish California devoid of Indigenous and African ancestry.

3.5. *The Monoracial Imperative: Forging a Mexican American Identity*

3.5.1. White by Law, Not Equal in Fact

By the 1900s, segregation of African Americans was being vigorously enforced in the South and variously in the Southwest. Attempts were also made to segregate Mexican Americans. However, enforcement was inconsistent and the results ambiguous. Indeed, the African American press reported that Mexican Americans were permitted to ride in Whites-only streetcars and trains and attend first-class theaters in the White sections even when highly educated African Americans could not. By the 1920s, segregation of Mexican American children in public schools in California and the Southwest was well-established. Children were segregated through school district assignments rather than by state law; however, segregation was not uniformly applied. In California, some districts chose not to separate Mexican children (Fuchs 1990). In Texas, the majority of Mexican-descent children attended segregated schools. Between 1890 and 1910, patterns of Mexican–White segregation coincided with divisions between “ranch counties” and “farm counties” (Montejano 1987). In the former, Mexicans continued to be landholders and commercial farmers. In the latter, they were sharecroppers for White landholders.

Where Mexicans held land, they were less likely to be excluded from schools and other public accommodations. “Mexican” was less likely to be a racialized nonWhite identity (Gross 2003; Montejano 1987). This was not a matter of law, as was true for Blacks. Yet Mexican Americans were turned away from White-only swimming pools, sometimes denied service at restaurants, and discouraged from moving into White neighborhoods (Foley 1997; Fuchs 1990; Orozco 2009; Steptoe 2016). The sign “No Dogs or Mexicans Allowed” was commonly posted outside restaurants (S.W. Bender 2003). Although Mexicans were legally designated as White, they were “White but not equal” (García 2008).

3.5.2. League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)

In 1929, the mostly urban and middle-class Tejanos founded the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) to overcome overt forms of segregation (Telles and Sue 2019).¹¹ During the 1930s repatriation drives, when Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals were routinely deported, Mexican people’s consciousness also began to change. Those who identified with the U.S. began to call themselves Mexican American and were determined to gain full inclusion within its racial order. They stressed an ideology of duality: “Mexican in culture and social

activity, but American in philosophy and politics” (Sánchez 1993). LULAC restricted its membership to U.S. citizens and emphasized English-language skills and loyalty to the U.S.

Concerned about the social stigma of being Mexicans, including the taint of multiraciality, LULAC members became vocal about and insistent on their status as Whites (Foley 2005b; Gómez 2018). Yet this was not necessarily intended to encompass everyone: upwardly mobile Mexicans emphasized their Whiteness, in part to distinguish themselves from working-class Mexicans, who tended to be darker-skinned with limited English language proficiency. They believed their class position made them quintessentially American and thus ostensibly White (Foley 2005a; Macias 2006). To claim Whiteness, the organization’s members constructed identities as “Latin American” and strenuously objected to being labeled as “colored” or required to share segregated facilities with Blacks (Foley 1997, 1998; Haney-López 2003). This was part of their strategy to psychologically and socially differentiate and distance themselves from African Americans (Foley 1998; Sheridan 2003).

Some scholars have characterized LULAC members and similar Mexican American activists as unwavering promoters of assimilation and White identity. Others argue that Whiteness was not necessarily based on shame in or dismissal of their multiraciality. Rather, LULAC’s chief architects viewed it as a pragmatic strategy to gain legal advantage against extant proscriptions and material benefits within the racial order’s limitations (Acuña 2015; Gratton and Merchant 2016; Orozco 2009; Sheridan 2003). Consequently, some Mexican Americans voiced opposition to this path and its opportunistic implications (Foley 2005a; Gratton and Merchant 2016; Gross 2003).¹²

3.5.3. “Another White Race”

Until 1930, Mexican Americans were counted as White on the census. Following increased immigration after the Mexican Revolution in 1910, the 1930 census established a separate racial category for Mexicans, which LULAC members strenuously opposed. The new “Mexican” category included any person of Mexican descent “who is definitely not White” (Foley 1997, p. 210). Enumerators were not, however, given any instructions to determine which ones were. LULAC, in concert with the Mexican government and the U.S. Department of State, successfully eliminated the category in the 1940 census. Mexican Americans were reclassified as Whites (Gratton and Merchant 2016; Ortiz and Telles 2012).

Part of the rationale for this change was that patterns of racial discrimination in Texas conflicted with demands for cheap labor in the Bracero Program initiated in 1942. The Mexican government initially refused to allow braceros to work in Texas until the state guaranteed their fair treatment and ended all informal segregation and formal discrimination. Governor Coke Stevenson tried to assure the Mexican government that Texas no longer regarded Mexicans as targets of racial discrimination (Foley 1997). He persuaded the state legislature to pass the Caucasian Race Resolution in 1943, designating Mexican Americans officially as Whites and giving all Whites equal rights in public places, business, and amusement (Foley 1997; Fuchs 1990).

This resolution sought to reassure Mexican officials that Texas, if not its citizens, recognized Mexicans as Whites. With such official recognition, the Mexican government permitted bracero workers to enter Texas in 1947. However, the blatant hypocrisy of this legislation was that no Texan regarded Mexicans and, least of all, braceros, as White. This legal construction of Mexican Whiteness stood at odds with the prevailing racial commonsense in the Southwest. Mexican Americans faced discrimination there similar to that of African Americans in the South, including lynchings (albeit significantly fewer in number) and poll taxes (Carrigan and Webb 2003; Foley 1997; Telles and Ortiz 2008).

There were regional differences in the treatment of Mexican Americans, ranging from these harsher proscriptions in Texas to the more tolerant attitudes in California and New Mexico. Indeed, northern New Mexico contained perhaps the largest concentration of individuals who were the most successful in arguing they were of Spanish rather than Mexican, that is, multiracial, origins (Gratton and Merchant 2016). Nevertheless, European American opinions and attitudes throughout the region and in the national imaginary constructed Mexican Americans as Other and nonWhite (Aragon 2014; Fox and Guglielmo 2012). Mexican American identity in the Southwest, like Whiteness itself, was refracted through class, nationality,

language, and culture (Barrera 1979; Jewell 2015). Primarily the lighter-skinned elite worked to construct American identities premised on Whiteness. Among the working class, the majority did not necessarily seek to define themselves as

White or achieve racial adjacency with European Americans. They saw themselves as *Mexicanos* (Foley 1997).

3.5.4. Litigating Whiteness

Mexican American leadership took advantage of legal Whiteness in early desegregation cases (Gómez 2018; Sheridan 2003). LULAC provided financial assistance in one of the most significant cases regarding school desegregation: *Mendez v. Westminster* (1946).¹³ The first successful challenge to school segregation, this case was filed on behalf of more than 5000 Mexican American students in Orange County, California, where segregation was not legal but was normative (Gómez 2018; Valencia 2005). The defendant districts in the *Mendez* case justified separate Mexican schools based on language needs, not race.

The plaintiffs alleged that language segregation was a pretense for blanket racial discrimination, and thus illegal because Mexican Americans were legally White, and Whites could not segregate “other Whites” (Foley 2005b). Consequently, it violated the Fourteenth Amendment’s equal protection clause. *Mendez v. Westminster* was never appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court and did not bring about a reversal of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Yet it was instrumental in helping establish a judicial precedent on the road to the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954, which, spearheaded by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), ended legal segregation of public schools.

During the same year as *Brown*, LULAC attorneys argued the *Hernandez v. Texas* (1954) case.¹⁴ This case litigated against the exclusion of Mexican Americans from serving on juries, specifically in Jackson County, Texas, where Pete Hernandez was on trial for a shooting. In the first Mexican American civil rights case argued before the U.S. Supreme Court, *Hernandez* presented a conundrum similar to *Mendez*: Mexican Americans were White by law. Attorneys for the state of Texas and judges in the state courts contended that the Fourteenth Amendment referred only to race, not to “nationality”. Mexican Americans were tried by juries composed of their racial peers: Whites. There was no violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. But the arguments in *Hernandez v. Texas* held that “nationality” groups could, in fact, be protected under the Fourteenth Amendment (Foley 2005b; Sheridan 2003). Consequently, the Supreme Court held that Hernandez’s constitutional rights under the equal protection clause were violated because of the de facto, systematic exclusion of Mexican Americans from the pool of potential jurors.

Both Mexican Americans and African Americans struggled against legalized segregation but the *Mendez* and *Hernandez* decisions rested on assertions of a White identity. The *Brown* decision rested on claims of a Black identity. African Americans located themselves on the Black side of the binary racial divide, while Mexican Americans placed themselves on the White side. Still, in their different yet historically linked antiracist struggles, Mexican Americans and African Americans reinforced, rather than challenged, the monoracial imperative and hypodescent, which require racial identification as either Black or White.

3.6. From White to Brown: Forging a Chicana/o Identity

In the 1940s and 1950s, Mexican Americans attempted to assimilate to Whiteness. During the 1960s civil rights era, continuing discrimination in employment, education, housing, political representation, public services, and other areas, as well as intolerance and erasure in White society, impelled a younger generation to construct new identities as nonWhite (Chávez 2002; Haney-López 2003; Macias 2006). They selected the designation “Chicano”, which was generally understood as a derogatory Spanish name for Mexican Americans of lower socioeconomic standing, most likely darker-skinned mestizos and/or Indigenous (Simmen and Bauerle 1969). Therefore, Chicano was brandished as a form of reclamation, self-ascription, and self-determination, affirming a heritage as a proud Brown race.

In 1970, the East L.A. Thirteen and Biltmore Six criminal cases were among the catalysts for the formation of the Chicano movement as Mexican Americans began to reject Whiteness and deny assimilation (Haney-López 2003; Macias 2006). These cases provided evidence of Mexican Americans' racial discrimination. They also presented a challenge because Mexican Americans had some success in litigating their Whiteness.

In the East L.A. Thirteen case *Castro v. Superior Court* (1970),¹⁵ the grand jury indicted thirteen community leaders for, among other misdemeanors, conspiring to encourage school protesters. The Biltmore Six case *Montez v. Superior Court* (1970)¹⁶ followed a 1969 California state conference on the needs of Mexican American students that resulted in a hotel fire. The defendants focused on race, arguing that the exclusion of Mexican Americans from grand juries was discriminatory and thus an infringement on the equal protection clause (Haney-López 2003).

During the movement's early phase, the concept of *mestizaje* was evoked through "La Raza". This was a reminder that Chicanas/os as mestizos are the product of colonization and the European/Indigenous encounter, and have a historical claim as the rightful heirs of the Southwest (Gonzales 2001). Yet this new identity politics and resistance would ultimately emphasize Indigeneity, which involved embracing Anglo-American binary and monoracial logics, as well as hypodescent. Moreover, neither "Chicano" nor "La Raza" contained an awareness or recognition of African ancestry. La Raza was derived from the early twentieth-century Mexican intellectual José Vasconcelos (1925) as "*La Raza Cósmica*" (the cosmic race) to reflect the mixture (*mestizaje*) inherent in Latin American populations (García 1997). In Mexico, national unity and integration through *mestizaje* would be achieved by "Whitening" and the eventual erasure of Indigenous, Asian, and, most important to Vasconcelos and similar Latin American thinkers, African elements. La Raza or *mestizaje* meant something different to Chicanas/os: it asserted browning rather than seeking to eliminate it.

3.6.1. Chicanismo, Afro-Mexicans, and the "Third Root"

However, African ancestry was never considered a component of Chicano "Brown" identity. Some Chicano activists initially thought of themselves as Black because they admired African Americans and maintained a close political affiliation and sense of solidarity with them in the struggle for equality. Yet the Chicano movement continued to deny or at least lacked awareness of Mexicans' own African ancestry (Haney-López 2003). In addition, the movement's nationalistic, antiracist, and anticolonial strategy around Indigeneity was meant to unify all Mexican Americans as a community. Yet it tended to demand uniformity, conformity, and sameness. Consequently, Afro-Mexicans and Afro-Mexican Americans may have repressed their Blackness in the 1960s to seek refuge in the larger Mexican American community (Hernández 2004). Still, given the centrality of racial discrimination in informing Chicana/o self-identity as nonWhite, Mexicans of African ancestry would have been drawn to Chicana/o nonWhiteness and Chicano movement demands for social justice (Haney-López 2003).

The experience of Afro-Mexicans in the United States in the 1960s was similar to those currently in California. They have a different migrant experience and often express a sense of alienation from other Mexican Americans. For instance, many have reported that other Mexicans do not view them as authentically Mexican, even in Mexico. Not only are many

White and mestizo Mexican migrants unaware of Afro-Mexican history and ancestry, but also many Afro-Mexicans themselves—especially middle-aged ones—have no knowledge of African ancestry or deny it (Hernández 2004; Lewis 2020). In California, the site of early Afro-Mexican immigration (Lewis 2020), U.S. racial politics may have influenced AfroMexican adoption of Chicana/o "Brown" identity and de-emphasis of African ancestry. Frequently taken for African American, they must come to terms with what it means to be Black in the United States, even if they do not identify as Black (Hernández 2004).

Hernández maintains that anti-Black sentiments or ambivalence toward African ancestry among Mexican Americans should not, however, be attributed solely to U.S. influence (Hernández 2004). Mexico's own history created and perpetuated anti-Blackness. In Mexico, there continues to be a pattern of favoring lighter-skinned marriage partners to have lighter-skinned children, who will "improve the race". Many light-skinned mestizos identify with European and Indigenous ancestry, purposefully omitting any mention of African ancestry.

Mexican national ideology continues to be predicated on the idea of *mestizaje* as Indigenous–Spanish mixing embodied by the “*mestizo*”. Therefore, Mexico’s silence about Afro-Mexicans has been a major contributing factor to the lack of recognition of Blackness among Chicanas/os (Hernández 2004).

Beginning in 1992, the concept of the “Third Root” (*La Tercera Raíz*) gained momentum when the Mexican government, as part of its commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the encounter between Spain and Mexico, acknowledged the African presence. For the first time, individuals were allowed to self-identify as Afro-Mexicans (or Afro-descendants) on the 2020 national census after a protracted struggle by activists (Argen 2020; Lewis 2020). Aside from historical erasure, collecting this data is complicated in terms of racial composition and identification since the majority of Mexico’s Afro-descendants are *afromestizos* of African, Indigenous, and Spanish ancestry in a nation that is overwhelmingly of Spanish and Indigenous origins. Yet according to census data, there are 2.5 million individuals who self-identify as being of African descent, which represents 2 percent of the national population (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía 2020). The constitution has also officially recognized Afro-Mexicans as a minority.

3.6.2. Chicana Feminists and Mestiza Consciousness

The Chicano movement projected a reductionist group identity that tended to focus on one axis of experience, identity, and ultimately, oppression. Consequently, it crystallized around race, hypodescent, and the monoracial imperative while ignoring other types of difference, notably gender. The movement’s men articulated Chicano identity through a patriarchal lens, excluding Chicana voices and ideas. As defined by some of the dominant male voices, a Chicana’s main function was to support Chicanos and maintain the race through bearing and raising Chicana/o children (Blackwell 2003). In response, some Chicana feminists articulated an identity that included aspects of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Pérez 1999). The goal was to project a complex identity to address multiple axes of experience and oppression, as well as their interlocking and ambiguous nature.

Gloria Anzaldúa called for a new *mestiza* consciousness that rejects static notions of the self and essentialist ideas of what it means to be Chicana/o, including notions of skin color and Spanish proficiency. She sought to escape the confines of colonial discourse by emphasizing a critical *mestizaje* that integrates European, Indigenous, African, and other backgrounds to create a postcolonial consciousness (Anzaldúa 1999; Pérez 1999). This critiques anticolonial consciousness that shaped Chicana/o identity in the 1960s, which often spawned a superficial racial and cultural essentialism and fundamentalism. While anticolonialism operated under stringent binaries, racial and otherwise, the postcolonial consciousness of the new *mestiza* embraces a hybrid or intermediate space that “contest(s) the terms and territories of both” colonialism and anticolonialism (Bhabha 1994). This new *mestiza* consciousness helped inform what Chela Sandoval defines as “radical *mestizaje*” (Sandoval 2000), which maintains that identities, more generally, involve a complex and hybrid negotiation across myriad lines of difference, including epistemological and spatiotemporal ones.

Gregory Rodriguez points out that amid the heated debates during the apex of the Chicano movement in the 1970s, some male Mexican American intellectuals, such as Ernesto Galarza, voiced reservations about anticolonial initiatives that narrowly defined Chicanismo by emphasizing Indigeneity, leading to the exclusion of not only the Spanish contribution but, by implication, also African and Asian ones.¹⁷ Anthropologist James Diego Vigil also sought to counter reductionism through the concept of *Chicanozaje* (Vigil 1998, p. 263). This melded notions of Chicanismo with the longstanding and broader understanding of *mestizaje* in Mexico to expand the boundaries of *mestizaje* and bring a deeper meaning to the term “Chicano” (Rodriguez 2007).¹⁸

4. Conclusions

Embracing Monoraciality, Rearticulating Hypodescent

Anglo-Americanization of California and the Southwest beginning during the latter half of the nineteenth century imposed monoracializing dictates on Mexicans. (Re)negotiating racial categories, identities, and claims about racial status followed. Paradoxically, monoracialism has

served as the primary racializing and subordinating process and as a tool for antiracist and anti-White supremacist counter-organizing. For many Mexican Americans, this initially meant an attachment to Whiteness and its privileges. Subsequently, Mexican Americans rejected the allure of Whiteness, made mostly available to those who were sufficiently light-skinned. Instead, they affirmed an identity based on Brownness.

One could argue that, notwithstanding the absence of African and Asian elements, Chicana/o identity initially deployed *mestizaje* as an interrogation of hypodescent, the monoracial imperative, and binary racial logics, although it eventually crystallized around Indigeneity premised on each of these tenets. Hybridity has been present in some Chicana articulations of *mestizaje* while addressing the historical role of patriarchy, ethnocide, genocide, and rape in the emergence of *mestizaje* and being attentive to the unequal power relations the implied conviviality of *mestizaje* can easily obscure (Anonymous 2003; Pérez-Torres 2006).

Indeed, the ideology of *mestizaje* in the Spanish American imaginary has been officially articulated as hybrid, egalitarian, and integrationist. Yet it has been premised on “hypocritical hybridity” (Daniel et al. 2014, p. 22). This has perpetuated inegalitarian integration, that is, the assimilationist erasure of racial (and cultural) distinctions operating under the guise of supposedly transcending difference through more egalitarian transracial (and transcultural) forms of integration. It also conveniently diverts attention away from patterns of inequality and exclusion based on differences in the manner of inegalitarian pluralism.

Still, critical engagement with the discourses on *mestizaje* has neither permeated Chicana/o consciousness nor resulted in an essential challenge to monoracial norms (Daniel et al. 2014; Pérez 2018; Pérez 1999; Pérez-Torres 2006; Turner 2014). Chicanas/os can *acknowledge* different racial *backgrounds* and not necessarily *identify* as multiracial. Broader patterns of identification among individuals of Mexican American descent are subject to change under the impact of increasing Mexican American intermarriage and growth in the number of multiracial offspring of partial Mexican American descent in the twenty-first century (Alba 2020). Still, Mexican American and Chicana/o identities have been and continue to be constructed as monoracial. These identities are neither fundamentally posited or constructed on hybridity nor located in the U.S. racial order as multiracial. Chicanas/os or Mexican Americans, like most Latinas/os, continue to articulate their racial position as singular in line with the U.S. monoracial paradigm.¹⁹

African American identity has gone through a parallel process of monoracialization. For several hundred years, Black identity has been refracted through the monoracial imperative and hypodescent of the Anglo-American binary racial order. Mexican American identity was informed by the Spanish American ternary racial order and did not intersect with monoraciality and hypodescent until the Anglo-Americanization of the Southwest in the nineteenth century. During the first half of the twentieth century, Mexican American organizations, such as LULAC, mobilized around a White identity as they launched challenges to Jim Crow segregation. During the same period, African American organizations, such as the NAACP, mobilized around Black identity, seeking to resist these same restrictions. In their different tactics, both had a primary goal of pursuing civil rights to integrate as equals in the racial order.

In the 1960s, Mexican American and African American radicals were critical of the inegalitarian, that is, assimilationist, outcomes of integration given the unequal power dynamics in the racial order. Instead, they shifted from the primary goal of integration to advocate egalitarian pluralism in the form of Chicano nationalism and Black nationalism based, respectively, on Brown Pride/Brown Power and Black Pride/Black Power. They envisioned African Americans and Mexican Americans as self-determining plural societies and cultures distinct and separate from, but also on equal footing with, European Americans (Daniel 2021).

Notwithstanding a few exceptions, neither African Americans nor Mexican Americans have conceptualized a multiracial identity within the U.S. binary racial context that can contest its mutually exclusive racial boundaries while challenging the hierarchical valuation of racialized difference. Yet their embrace of monoraciality and hypodescent requires consideration of the historical and contemporary racial orders: put succinctly, by drawing boundaries that excluded them, hypodescent legitimated and forged monoracial Mexican American and African American

identities as part of normative U.S. binary racial commonsense. Many individuals simply display an unquestioning acceptance of these identities, thus naturalizing, if only unwittingly, mutually exclusive racial designations and singular categories of experience. Others take a more political stance. Support for hypodescent, monoracialism, and binary racial logics is based on the belief that they are necessary for maintaining solidarity and community in the struggle against White racism, oppression, and privilege. Chicana/o and Black identities involve a rearticulation or repetition, rather than reproduction, of hypodescent. They support racial difference based on equality rather than hierarchy.

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Notes

- ¹ The “Southwest” refers to the territories where Spanish settlements were founded in New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, and California, rather than to the entire North American region claimed by Spain, which included Nevada, Utah, parts of Colorado, and small sections of Oklahoma, Kansas, and Wyoming.
- ² While the term “mulatto” is most often seen as derogatory in terms of contemporary thinking, I use it in this article for clarity purposes, as it was the racial classification used during the historical period discussed here to refer to mixed-race people of African and European descent.
- ³ Indigenous peoples had no previous contact with the Old World. Consequently, they were immunologically defenseless against diseases that spread to the New World and to which Europeans and Africans had comparatively greater resistance. The major pathogens included smallpox, measles, whooping cough, chickenpox, bubonic plague, typhus, and malaria. Influenza could also prove deadly ([Nunn and Qian 2010](#), p. 165).
- ⁴ Slavery continued de facto in a thinly disguised form in the Spanish colonies via the *encomienda* system. The Crown provided a grant to a colonist (*encomenderos*), conferring the right to demand tribute and forced labor from the Indigenous inhabitants. Indigenous peoples were subjected to torture, extreme abuse, and, in some cases, death if they resisted. *Encomenderos* were also mandated through these grants to convert Indigenous people to Christianity and endorse Spanish as their primary language ([Reséndez 2016](#)).
- ⁵ Mulattoes were multiracials of Spanish and African descent, or with Indigenous and African ancestry, at least in Mexico. *Pardo* (literally “brown”) could encompass individuals of Spanish, African, and Indigenous descent but sometimes included mulattoes, particularly in official contexts ([Forbes 1971](#)).
- ⁶ *Moriscos*, the progeny of mulattoes and Whites, are a perfect case study of this difference. *Moriscos* were the equivalent in terms of White and African ancestry to *castizos* in terms of White and Indigenous ancestry. They were both three-quarters White and, respectively, one-quarter African and one-quarter Indigenous. The progeny of *castizos* and Whites were considered a return to Spanish purity, whereas the offspring of *moriscos* and Whites resulted in albinos. In fact, attitudes toward albinos were not unlike the U.S. one-drop rule. Still, the social liabilities of African ancestry in some cases could potentially be mitigated in Spanish America through the purchase of certificates of Whiteness. No such policy existed in Anglo-America.
- ⁷ Indenture involved a contractual arrangement of temporary duration between two parties, in which the price of passage from Europe was advanced in exchange for usually five to eight years of voluntary labor.
- ⁸ Exceptions would be Native Americans connected to reservations ([Forbes 1988](#)).
- ⁹ This included individuals, often referred to as neophytes, who typically had been converted to Christianity, were baptized, and had some understanding of the faith. They frequently had varying degrees of familiarity with and proficiency in the Spanish language. This culturally adaptive behavior came about largely through violence, coercion, and forced assimilation ([Guerrero 2010](#); [Lightfoot 2005](#)).
- ¹⁰ With the discovery of gold in 1848, southern slave owners saw a new opportunity to profit by working their slaves in the goldfields. Consequently, the number of African American slaves entering California soared: by 1852 approximately 2200 African Americans in California, the majority slaves ([Goode 1974](#)).
- ¹¹ LULAC is the largest and oldest Latina/o civil rights organization.
- ¹² George I. Sánchez, a prominent activist and professor of education at the University of Texas between the 1930s and 1950s, provided a more nuanced framing. He regarded Mexican Americans as White but also a minority group that experienced systematic and racialized oppression ([Blanton 2006](#), p. 574).
- ¹³ *Mendez v. Westminster* (1946) *Mendez v. Westminster*. 1946. *Mendez v. Westminster [sic] School District of Orange County; et al.*, 64 F.Supp. 544, (S.D. 1946) *aff'd*, 161 F.2d 774 (9th Cir. 1947).
- ¹⁴ *Hernandez v. Texas* (1954) *Hernandez v. Texas*. 1954. 347 U.S. 475.
- ¹⁵ *Castro v. Superior Court* (1970) *Castro v. Superior Court*. 1970. 9 Cal. App. 3d 675.

- ¹⁶ *Montez v. Superior Court* (1970) *Montez v. Superior Court*. 1970. 10 Cal. App. 3d.
- ¹⁷ Asians were considerably smaller in numbers but also formed part of the racial makeup of the slave population in colonial Mexico. Their numbers are difficult to estimate with accuracy. However, at least 600 Asians per year entered Mexico during the seventeenth century (Seijas 2014).
- ¹⁸ In 1978, historian Manuel A. Machado Jr. pointed out that Chicanismo advocates failed to acknowledge that mestizaje, which occurred in Mexico and bequeathed to Mexican Americans in the Southwest, not only included the Spanish but also the AngloAmerican in terms of cultural contributions and interracial intimacy. Essentially, this was a “fifth root” of Mexican American mestizaje, so to speak, if one thinks of the African dimension as the third root and the Asian one as a fourth root (Machado 1978). One might also include the contribution of cultural exchange and miscegenation between Russian colonizers and Indigenous people during the first half of the nineteenth century in Colony Ross, the colonial maritime fur trading settlement in the greater San Francisco Bay area (Lightfoot 2005).
- ¹⁹ This is indicated by the 2020 census data where only 32.7 percent of Latinas/os checked two or more races on the census race question. The majority (67.3 percent) still identified with one race alone (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2021).

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