

1999

Social and Legal Repercussions of Latinos' Colonized Mentality

Laura M. Padilla

California Western School of Law, lpadilla@cwsl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.cwsl.edu/fs>



Part of the [Civil Rights and Discrimination Commons](#), and the [Law and Society Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Laura M. Padilla, *Social and Legal Repercussions of Latinos' Colonized Mentality*, 53 U. Miami L. Rev. 769 (1999).

Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.cwsl.edu/fs/301>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by CWSL Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of CWSL Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact alm@cwsl.edu.

Social and Legal Repercussions of Latinos' Colonized Mentality

LAURA M. PADILLA*

Internalized oppression is the turning upon ourselves, our families and our people the distressed patterns of behavior that result from the racism and oppression of the minority society. Internalized racism is directed more specifically at one's racial or ethnic group.¹

I. INTRODUCTION

Internalized oppression and racism are insidious forces that cause marginalized groups to unconsciously turn on themselves, thereby reinforcing self-fulfilling negative stereotypes and producing self-destructive behaviors. Many people have been socially conditioned to believe the stereotypes of Latinos as a drain on United States social services, as undeserving beneficiaries of preferences, and as lazy and ignorant people who barely speak English. The stereotypes can be even worse. I recently read that "many perceive Latinos as poor, criminals, drug users."² Latinos are also seen as people who "bring inferior cultural mores, including a propensity to go on welfare and commit crimes, poor health and hygiene, disregard for hard work and education, and a backward attachment to their language."³ Moreover, popular storytelling

* Professor of Law, California Western School of Law, J.D. Stanford Law School, 1987; B.A. Stanford University, 1983. I am grateful to my Kellogg Group XV advisor, Roberto Chené, for his inspiration to write this article. He articulated the concept of internalized oppression for me, a concept that I had been familiar with all my life but could not name. I am particularly thankful to participants of the Third Annual Latino Critical Race Theory Conference in Miami for their feedback when I presented parts of this paper at a panel on May 8, 1998. Finally, I note that this essay is part of a larger project which will detail how Latinos' internalized racism is manifested in the law. Because of space constraints, this essay is not able to elaborate on how internalized oppression and racism legally perpetuate the subordination of Latinos.

1. Roberto Chené, *CREATING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITIES, ENHANCING COMMUNITY IN THE WORKPLACE*, [Module II] at 2 (on file with the author) [hereinafter *INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITIES*].

2. Estevan Flores, *Changing the U.S. Consciousness About Latinos/as*, Latino/a Res. and Pol'y Center Newsl. U.of Colo. at Denver., Denver, Colo., Aug. 1998, at 2. Note that while this essay frequently uses the term "Latinos" more broadly, my point of reference is often the Mexican-American.

3. Richard Delgado, *Rodrigo's Bookbag: Brimelow, Bork, Herrnstein, Murray and D'Souza—Recent Conservative Thought and the End of Equality*, 50 *STAN. L. REV.* 1929, 1952 (1998) (reviewing PETER BRIMELOW, *ALIEN NATION: COMMON SENSE ABOUT AMERICA'S IMMIGRATION DISASTER* (1995); ROBERT H. BORK, *SLOUCHING TOWARD GOMORRAH: MODERN LIBERALISM AND AMERICAN DECLINE* (1996); RICHARD J. HERRNSTEIN AND CHARLES MURRAY,

paints Latinos as docile, willing to accept any working conditions without complaint.⁴ Other writers remind us that Mexicans in particular have been characterized “as traditional, sedate, lacking in mechanical resourcefulness and ambition.”⁵

Sadly, “Mexicans themselves internalize the ‘Anything But Mexican’ mindset. An internalized racism, popularly called a ‘colonized mentality’ by Chicano movement activists during the 1960s, splinters Latino and even Mexican unity.”⁶ To the extent that Latinos internalize negative stereotypes, they cause intra-communal harm. For example, a significant number of Latinos voted in favor of California’s Proposition 187, which ended many benefits for immigrants,⁷ and Proposition 209, which ended affirmative action in government contracting and public colleges and universities,⁸ precisely because they accepted negative stereotypes about Latinos. That is, they were seduced into believing that Latino immigrants take but do not give, and that they are subhuman, thus undeserving of education and medical attention.⁹ Furthermore, they

THE BELL CURVE: INTELLIGENCE AND CLASS STRUCTURE IN AMERICAN LIFE (1994); and DINESH D’SOUZA, *THE END OF RACISM: PRINCIPLES FOR A MULTIRACIAL SOCIETY* (1995)).

4. See Michael A. Olivas, *The Chronicles, My Grandfather’s Stories, and Immigration Law: The Slave Traders Chronicle as Racial History*, 34 ST. LOUIS U. L.J. 425, 436-437 (1990) (summarizing stereotypes of Latinos while condemning the hypocrisy of US immigration policy). This particular stereotype one-dimensionally projects the dominant view of Latinos’ work habits, neglecting the experience of the Latino who acts from values of respect, hard work and honor. In other words, from the Latino perspective, rather than considering ourselves docile and subservient, we see ourselves acting respectfully toward employers, putting in an honest day’s work and conducting ourselves with honor.

5. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Images of the Outsider in American Law and Culture: Can Free Expression Remedy Systemic Social Ills?*, 77 CORNELL L. REV. 1258, 1274 (1992). Delgado also writes that Mexicans are popularly portrayed as “happy-go-lucky cartoon characters or shady actors who sneak across the border, earn some money, and then send it to their families back home.” Richard Delgado, *Rodrigo’s Fifteenth Chronicle: Racial Mixture, Latino-Critical Scholarship, and the Black-White Binary*, 75 TEX. L. REV. 1181, 1198 (1997) (reviewing LOUISE ANN FISCH, *ALL RISE: REYNALDO G. GEORGE, THE FIRST MEXICAN AMERICAN FEDERAL JUDGE* (1996)).

6. RODOLFO F. ACUÑA, *ANYTHING BUT MEXICAN: CHICANOS IN CONTEMPORARY LOS ANGELES* 8 (1996).

7. California voters approved Proposition 187 by a vote of 59-41%. See Bill Jones, CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE, STATEMENT OF VOTE, NOV. 8, 1994 (General Election). While a majority of Latino voters did not support Proposition 187 at the polls, earlier surveys indicated that they favored it. “In 1994, pre-election surveys showed a majority of Latinos supported Proposition 187, the anti-illegal immigration initiative. But exit polls later indicated that an overwhelming majority opposed it.” Leonel Sanchez, *Latino Views Differ Sharply on Question of Bilingual Education*, SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIB., Mar. 15, 1998, at B1; see also Kevin R. Johnson, *An Essay on Immigration Politics, Popular Democracy, and California’s Proposition 187: The Political Relevance and Legal Irrelevance of Race*, 70 WASH. L. REV. 629, 659 (1995).

8. California voters approved Proposition 209 by a vote of 55-45%. See Bill Jones, CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE, STATEMENT OF VOTE, NOV. 5, 1996 (General Election).

9. I initially believed that because of the long term costs to society of having an uneducated and unhealthy immigrant population, it was shortsighted to withhold educational and medical

must have been convinced that our society is now color-blind and hence race-based preferences to ameliorate past discrimination are no longer necessary. More recently, until just before election time, a high percentage of Latinos supported Proposition 227, which proposed to end bilingual education in California.¹⁰ Additionally, a mostly Latino school board in New Mexico fired two teachers for teaching Chicano history to a group of predominantly Latino high school students.¹¹ These examples illustrate the manner in which Latinos' efforts harmed other Latinos, often to the delight of conservatives who masterminded the underlying activity.¹² This behavior results from a belief in Latino inferiority and Anglo superiority, both manifestations of internalized oppression and racism.

This essay begins by defining internalized oppression and racism and exposing the harms they cause. It dissects the reasons we engage in internalized racism and explains how once exposed, it will be easier to engage in a conscious effort to eradicate internalized racism. It will then describe how the intersectionality of internalized oppression and racism is expressed in the Latino community. The essay will then re-imagine Latino identity without internalized oppression and racism. It will include ideas on how to overcome internalized oppression and racism generally, both at the corporate and individual levels. The essay concludes that exposing internalized oppression and racism is the first step to alleviating the harm that results from a negative self-perception, which must be followed by the active construction of positive self-images. This, in turn, will lead not only to less support for racist and discriminatory legislation but to a more active and united denouncement of racist lawmaking. The final step is to engage in pro-active agenda-setting and campaigns to capitalize on a newly-forged, positive identity.

benefits to immigrants. On further reflection, I wonder whether this is part of a larger scheme to perpetuate an underclass and prevent many Latinos from breaking out of a cycle of poverty. For a discussion of the intentionality of campaigns such as those underlying Propositions 187 and 209, see JEAN STEFANCIC AND RICHARD DELGADO, *NO MERCY: HOW CONSERVATIVE THINK TANKS AND FOUNDATIONS CHANGED AMERICA'S SOCIAL AGENDA* (1996) [hereinafter *NO MERCY*].

10. California voters approved Proposition 227 by a vote of 61-39%. See Bill Jones, CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE, STATEMENT OF VOTE, June 2, 1998 (Primary Election). While California voters overwhelmingly approved Proposition 227, a slight majority of Latinos ultimately rejected it. See Amy Pyle et al., *Latino Voter Participation Doubled Since '94 Primary*, L.A. TIMES, June 4, 1998, at A1.

11. For a more detailed discussion of the Cordova sisters' case, see *Cordova v. Vaughn Municipal School Distr.*, 3 F.Supp.2d 1216 (1998).

12. See generally *NO MERCY*, *supra* note 9 (discussing the role of conservative think tanks and foundations in setting our social policy agenda and controlling outcomes).

II. INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION AND RACISM

Internalized racism has been the primary means by which we have been forced to perpetuate and “agree” to our own oppression.¹³

To understand the many ways in which internalized oppression operates on subordinated communities and how internalized racism conditions subordinated communities, it is important to understand these forces. Thus, this part describes internalized oppression and racism generally. It then describes how they are particularly manifested in the Latino community. This allows the reader to better comprehend why Latinos engage in the types of self-destructive behavior described throughout this essay.

A. Working Definitions of Internalized Oppression and Racism

When a victim experiences a hurt which is not healed, distress patterns emerge whereby the victim engages in harmful behavior.¹⁴ Internalized oppression has been described as the process in which these distress patterns reveal themselves.

[T]hese distress patterns, *created by oppression and racism from the outside*, have been played out in the only two places it has seemed “safe” to do so. First, upon members of our own group — particularly upon those over whom we have some degree of power or control. . . . Second, upon ourselves through all manner of self-invalidation, self-doubt, isolation, fear, feelings of powerlessness and despair. . . .¹⁵

Thus, internalized oppression commences externally; that is, dominant players start the chain of behavior through racist and discriminatory behavior. This could range from exclusion because of race (i.e., from a job or a store), to negative generalizations about a race (i.e., “we don’t need any more wetbacks - they just take away our jobs”) and capitalization on the fears created by those generalizations,¹⁶ to derogatory comments about a particular individual on racial grounds (i.e., “we shouldn’t

13. See SUZANNE LIPSKEY, INTERNALIZED RACISM 1 (1987).

14. See *id.* at 2.

15. *Id.* at 3-4.

16. See NO MERCY, *supra* note 9, at 32 (discussing negative stereotypes of immigrants (primarily Latino), and how conservatives manipulate those stereotypes).

Like the English-only movement, the movement to cut services to immigrants draws on a set of anxieties that typify the struggling blue-collar and middle classes. . . . The movements also tap economic anxieties that the middle and working classes feel more acutely than do those at the top—fear that immigrants will take jobs, that they will require too many services thus increasing the tax burden for U.S. workers, and that English, the great binding tie, will diminish in importance.

Id.

give her the job - she'll miss too much work because Mexican women are always pregnant").

Those at the receiving end of the prejudicial behavior then internalize negative perceptions about themselves and other members of their own group, and act accordingly.¹⁷ When this internalization process occurs within a particular racial or ethnic group, it manifests itself at both the corporate and individual levels.

Patterns of internalized racism cause us to find fault, criticize, and invalidate each other. This invariably happens when we come together in a group to address some important problem or undertake some liberation project. What follows is divisiveness and disunity leading to despair and abandonment of the effort.

Patterns of internalized oppression cause us to attack, criticize or have unrealistic expectations of any one of us who has the courage to step forward and take on leadership responsibilities. This leads to a lack of support that is absolutely necessary for effective leadership to emerge and group strength to grow. It also leads directly to the "burn out" phenomenon we have all witnessed in, or experienced as, effective . . . leaders.¹⁸

There are many other ways that internalized racism impacts our behavior,¹⁹ always resulting in self-inflicted harm. The following subsection will describe how internalized racism manifests itself specifically within the Latino community.

B. *Internalized Racism in the Latino Community*

Internalized oppression operates rather uniformly regardless of ethnicity or sexual orientation through some common patterns of behavior,²⁰ yet it also manifests itself uniquely depending on the negative stereotypes it causes a particular group to internalize. Internalized racism has its roots in internalized oppression; that is, there is always some triggering oppressive behavior. For Latinos, we "share a unique experience of oppression and survival in the United States. Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, who constitute the largest and oldest Latino/a communities within the official borders of the United States, were attacked, invaded, colonized, annexed, and exploited by the United States."²¹ Racist and discriminatory behavior toward Latinos is clearly deep-rooted. [A]fter the Mexican American War ended in 1848, people of

17. See ACUÑA, *supra* note 6, at 127.

18. LIPSKEY, *supra* note 13, at 5-6.

19. See *id.* at 5-12 (providing a detailed list of patterns of internalized racism).

20. See *supra* text at IIA.

21. Angel R. Oquendo, *Re-imagining the Latino/a Race*, 12 HARV. BLACKLETTER L.J. 93, 120 (1995).

Mexican origin faced lynchings, land theft and virulent racism. Later, in times of economic depression, people of Mexican origin — citizens and noncitizens alike — were deported en masse. . . . As a result, many Mexican-origin people internalized the racism and learned to despise all things Mexican.²²

It is our unique history which we have internalized that gives rise to our particular brand of internalized racism. Latinos, for example, may be conditioned to believe that other Latinos, particularly recent immigrants, are unfairly taking advantage of U.S. Social Services,²³ or we may refrain from using Spanish in professional settings because it will betray our heritage, or we may believe that whiter is better. “From the Latina/o viewpoint, the desirability of whiteness represents the internalization by the colonized of the colonizers’ predilections.”²⁴ The remainder of this subsection elaborates on how internalized oppression leads to internalized racism in the Latino community, both at the corporate level and at the individual level.

At the corporate level, internalized racism involves harmful or destructive conduct by members of a group toward other members of the group. “[Internalized racism] has been a major ingredient in the distressful and unworkable relationships which we so often have with each other. It has proved to be the fatal stumbling block of every promising and potentially powerful . . . liberation effort that has failed in the past.”²⁵ Internalized racism at the corporate level can thus thwart Latinos’ empowerment efforts. For example, Latino groups often wither when leadership issues revolve around how “ethnic” one is. To wit, at California Western School of Law, one year a majority of the La Raza law students refused to elect a blond student to a board position because she was not perceived to be “Mexican” enough, even though she was born in Mexico and was a committed activist. Politics of race impeded her advancement and prevented her from performing work beneficial to the Latino community. The same politics of race exists among the La Raza Lawyers Association of San Diego, where members’ credibility is

22. Roberto Rodriguez and Patrisia Gonzales, *Teacher Fights School Ban on Chicano Studies*, FRESNO BEE, Mar. 17, 1997, at B5 (citing Jeanne Guana, Director of the Civil and Environmental Rights South West [sic] Project).

23. I have heard my grandmother, a New Mexican by birth, whose mother was born in New Mexico and whose father was born in Mexico, lament how “those people” (her own people) are taking away her social security. For another description of Latinos’ attitudes towards Latino immigrants, see Ken Chavez, *Wilson Ads’ Latino Effect Tough To Tell Could Even Help Governor*, SACRAMENTO BEE, May 21, 1994, at A3.

24. Berta Esperanza Hernández-Truyol, *Borders (En)gendered: Normativities, Latinas, and a LatCrit Paradigm*, 72 N.Y.U. L. REV. 882, 900 (1997).

25. LIPSKEY, *supra* note 13 at 1. While this quote arose in the context of black liberation movements, it is equally applicable to liberation movements of other subordinated communities.

sometimes based on whether they are perceived as "too dark" or "too light," depending on the issue.

Internalized racism at the corporate level also reveals itself through the way we view other Latinos. Many people in our community believe the tired notion that immigrants are a drain on social services. As early as 1913, "the Commissioner of Immigration . . . publicly announced his fear that Mexicans might become public charges, since according to these authorities, Mexicans came to the United States only to receive public relief."²⁶ Today, many harbor that same belief about recent immigrants,²⁷ and too many Latinos believe it.²⁸ If those who believe this propaganda looked beyond the myths to the facts, they would learn that many immigrants contribute more to our society than they take.²⁹ In researching campaigns to limit immigration, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic found that many conservative think tanks conclude that "immigration is a net benefit, not a drawback to the regions in which immigrants settle."³⁰ Their research uncovered conservative spokespersons emphasizing that "legal immigrants are more likely than natives to participate in the labor force, . . . and that immigrants earn roughly \$700 more a year per capita than natives, with those who entered the United States before 1980 earning nearly \$4,000 more."³¹ Moreover, many immigrants, particularly Latinos, exhibit entrepreneurial spirit and often start their own businesses.³² "According to the Greenlining Institute in San Francisco, most of the new small business development in California that helped to move the state's economy forward was fueled by Latino entrepreneurs."³³ Thus, rather than deceitfully taking more than their share from the economy, Latinos, in many cases, contribute to the economic health of the United States.

26. ACUÑA, *supra* note 6 at 110.

27. See Kevin C. Wilson, *And Stay Out! The Dangers of Using Anti-Immigrant Sentiment as a Basis for Social Policy: America Should Take Heed of Disturbing Lessons From Great Britain's Past*, 24 GA. J. INT'L & COMP. L. 567, 578 (1995).

28. To illustrate,

An August 1993 Field Poll showed that 74 percent of Californians believed that illegal immigration had a negative impact on the state, and 76 percent agreed that it was a serious problem. *Among Latinos, 58 percent responded that immigration negatively impacted the state, while 64 percent said that it was a serious problem.*

ACUÑA, *supra* note 6, at 122 (emphasis added).

29. See, e.g., CENTER FOR THE NEW AMERICAN COMMUNITY, STRANGERS AT OUR GATES IN THE 1990s (1990); Wilson, *supra* note 27, at 578; NO MERCY, *supra* note 9, at 30.

30. NO MERCY, *supra* note 9, at 30.

31. *Id.*

32. See Robert P. Haro, *Latino Voters in California*, internet. Available e-mail: latino-law-profs@ucdavis.edu (Aug. 5, 1998 15:44:12).

33. *Id.* See also NO MERCY, *supra* note 9, at 31 ("Indeed, statistics released in the Manhattan Institute's report show that immigrants, especially those who arrived before 1980, are more likely even than the native-born to own their own businesses").

Internalized racism in the Latino community also reveals itself at the individual level. For example, members of my family, as well as their friends, have attempted to one-up each other about how “*guero*”³⁴ their children or grandchildren are. My mother’s best friend once bragged about how *guera* her first granddaughter was as she pulled out a photograph of a hirsute, dark baby with thick black hair. Rather than question why her friend felt compelled to assert her granddaughter’s “*guera*-ness,” my mother and I instead later compared the granddaughter’s “*guera*-ness” to the “*guera/o*-ness” of our own family members. We succumbed to the conditioning that white is better. Latinos also use this grading process to rank the acceptability of boyfriends, girlfriends, spouses and partners. Lighter is preferred, darker is acceptable so long as that person is Latino. To go any darker may put you at risk of family alienation. As one Latino expressed:

The unpleasant truth is that whether or not Mexican-Americans consider interracial relationships to be acceptable has everything to do with the specific race involved. The clearest analogy: a ladder. The *social* ladder, if you will. At the top of the ladder is the color white, owing to generational assumptions that the fair-skinned shall inherit the earth. At the bottom is the color black, the color of subjugation. Inferiority. In the middle, nesting precariously between the extremes, is the color brown.³⁵

I married a caucasian and in reflecting on why, I realize that the reasons are many, complex and positive, and that I never consciously chose to not marry a Latino.³⁶ However, it is not as clear to me whether I subconsciously chose to not marry a Latino. While I spent much time with my Latino classmates, especially in connection with the Stanford Latino Law Students’ Association (“SLLSA”),³⁷ I did not date them. One reason, at least in law school, was that there were not many Latinos to choose from and many of them had girlfriends. Another reason was that I saw too many marriages in my family break up because of the man’s infidelity. Of course I did not then assume that all Latino males were unfaithful, but it made me nervous. That nervousness was compounded when I became active with the La Raza Lawyers Association of

34. “Guero” is Spanish slang for light-skinned. See Kevin R. Johnson, “*Melting Pot*” or “*Ring of Fire*”? *Assimilation and the Mexican-American Experience*, 85 CAL. L. REV. 1259, 1266 (1997) (discussing the dynamics of phenotype in one’s family), co-published in 10 LA RAZA L.J. 173, 180 (1998) [hereinafter Johnson, *Ring of Fire*].

35. RUBEN NAVARRETTE, JR., A DARKER SHADE OF CRIMSON: ODYSSEY OF A HARVARD CHICANO 107 (1993).

36. This is in contrast to the assimilationist strategy of intentionally marrying Caucasians in order to better “blend.” See Johnson, *Ring of Fire*, *supra* note 34, at 1272, 1290, & n.120.

37. During my second year of law school, my classmate, Linda Davila, and I, co-chaired SLLSA.

San Diego. At parties and out-of-town conferences, I noticed that a significant number of men suddenly lost their wedding rings and seemed to spend too much time with women who were not their wives. So I remind myself that this behavior is characteristic of many men, not just Latinos. Am I succumbing to internalized racism by believing negative stereotypes about Latino men or am I being practical? That is one of the dangers of internalized oppression; we frequently do not realize when or how we are prejudiced against ourselves.

Many Latinos inwardly, and sometimes outwardly, question the qualifications of other successful Latinos.³⁸ It is heartening that this is not uniform—several Latinos I know try to provide a mutual support network. For example, we intentionally and systematically refer business to each other. Nonetheless, there are too many instances where we not only neglect to provide support but, even worse, actually conspire against each other. This tendency is illustrated by a popular Mexican folk story:

A man stumbles upon a fisherman who is gathering crabs and placing them in a bucket with no lid. When the passerby asks the fisherman whether he is concerned that the crabs might climb out of the bucket and crawl away, the fisherman replies that there is no need to worry. "You see," he says, "these are Mexican crabs. Whenever one of them tries to move up, the others pull him down".

Internalized racism is also displayed when Latinos experience self-doubt upon receipt of either admission into a top university or a prestigious job offer.³⁹ This impostor dilemma haunts many of us - how did I get here? Do I truly belong? The answers, respectively, are through hard work and perhaps some serendipity, and *yes*. But because of internalized racism, we doubt our qualifications and hard-earned credentials,⁴⁰ and succumb to the often not very delicate suggestions that we do

38. For a more general description of the pattern of doubting our colleagues' qualifications, see *supra* text accompanying note 18.

39. [I]n spite of all that these high-powered, well-educated Latino students would achieve in lives full of promise, it would be many subsequent springs before they could overcome the stigma attached to them when their acceptance letters arrived in their parents' mailboxes. Because others thought less of them in high school, they thought less of themselves in college. NAVARRETTE, *supra* note 35, at 16.

40. Latinos are not the only ones who suffer from the impostor dilemma, it is common among all outsiders. Even white males suffer. "Like all white Americans, I was living with the fear that maybe I didn't really deserve my success, that maybe luck and privilege had more to do with it than brains and hard work." Robert Jensen, *Diversity Debate: There's a Dirty Little Secret of White Privilege*, HOUSTON CHRON., July 26, 1998. But as Jensen admits, white privilege ameliorates that suffering. He described the benefits of white privilege as follows:

I walk through the world with white privilege. What does that mean? Perhaps most importantly, when I seek admission to a university, apply for a job, or hunt for an apartment, I don't look threatening. Almost all of the people evaluating me look

not belong.

We also denigrate ourselves through our treatment of the Spanish language and our support of the "English only" movement. By the former, I mean that Latinos can cavalierly use Spanish when convenient - for example, to temporarily bond with other Latinos,⁴¹ while also being embarrassed by it when it reveals too much of our heritage.⁴² Through support of the English-only movement, we admit Latino inferiority—that our inherited language is something we should be ashamed of. When we support this movement, we accept negative stereotypes and the notion that Latinos are "dangerous because of their language. It perceives the Spanish language as a threatening foreign influence that must be eradicated to preserve cultural purity."⁴³ Accordingly, internalized racism plays itself out by causing Latinos to distance themselves from the Spanish language. By doing so, we accept "[t]he assimilationist ideal [which] would have Latinos learn English and completely lose their Spanish-speaking ability."⁴⁴ But rather than being a source of embarrassment, our language, as one academic suggested, should be a source of cultural pride. "Latino/as must learn to celebrate their language if they are to find strength in their common identity."⁴⁵

There are many ways that internalized oppression causes Latinos to accept the "colonized mentality." By accepting that mentality, we engage in internalized racism, we believe negative stereotypes about ourselves and other Latinos, and we act on those beliefs. The consequences can be severe, especially, when proposed legislation directly harms the Latino community. Thus, it is critical, as a starting point, to recognize internalized oppression and racism and how they impact our communities. The focus should then turn to what we can do as individuals and as a community to overcome internalized oppression and racism.

like me - they are white. They see in me a reflection of themselves - and in a racist world, that is an advantage. . . . Every time I walk into a store at the same time as a black man and the security guard follows him and leaves me alone to shop, I am benefitting from white privilege.

41. Temporary bonding might occur when one does not normally speak Spanish but then suddenly feels compelled to speak Spanish, for example, in a Mexican restaurant.

42. I remember being embarrassed when my mother would call me *mija* (roughly translated as "my daughter" but it really means much more because it connotes "my daughter who I love so much," and is typically spoken with the requisite degree of *cariño*) or make me *cariños* (demonstrations of love and affection) too loudly in public. Of course, this may not be different than the typical embarrassment that a child generally feels when her parent shows too much public affection.

43. Oquendo, *supra* note 21, at 124.

44. Johnson, *Ring of Fire*, *supra* note 34, at 1294.

45. Oquendo, *supra* note 21, at 124-25.

III. OVERCOMING INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION AND RACISM

Internalized oppression and racism are deeply embedded in United States history. The roots of internalized oppression and racism for Mexican-origin groups, for example, originated over 150 years ago. Preceding the Mexican-American War of 1848, "Anglo-Americans perceived the Mexicans' military weakness and technology to be evidence of the inferiority of the 'half-breeds' and their inability to govern themselves."⁴⁶ Thus began the stereotyping of "Mexicans as stupid and inferior hybrids."⁴⁷

With such a prolonged history of Latino oppression in this country, it will take a concerted effort, including group change and individual change, to undo the effects and behavior associated with internalized oppression and racism. These types of changes will be extraordinarily difficult, as are changes that must combat the reconstructive paradox.⁴⁸ In essence, the reconstructive paradox posits that the most insidious types of social evil tend to be so ingrained in our society that we barely notice them.⁴⁹ Accordingly, it takes a herculean effort to overcome the evil.⁵⁰ Moreover, because of the scope of the effort, it is bound to be highly visible and its very visibility will cause tremendous resistance and ultimately, backlash.⁵¹ That is not to say that the Latino community should not undertake efforts to overcome internalized oppression and racism. Despite the enormity of the task and the risks involved, we cannot and should not avoid the effort to overcome internalized oppression and racism. As one academic reminds us, the "issue for us is how to overcome the decades of racism" that have shut us out of "centers of power, learning and decision making."⁵²

Roberto Chené eloquently describes why it is essential to undo internalized oppression at the corporate level as follows:

It is necessary to realize that classism, ageism, racism, sexism and all other forms of oppression are within our social institutions and have a life of their own. It is essential to recognize that it is not enough to promote change at the individual level but rather that empowered individuals collaboratively pursue changes at the systemic and insti-

46. Martha Menchaca, *Chicano-Mexican Cultural Assimilation and Anglo-Saxon Cultural Dominance*, 11 *HISPANIC J. BEHAV. SCI.* 203, 212 (1989).

47. *Id.*

48. See generally Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *The Social Construction of Brown v. Board of Education: Law Reform and the Reconstructive Paradox*, 36 *WM. & MARY L. REV.* 547, 558-560 (1995).

49. See *id.* at 559.

50. See *id.*

51. See *id.*

52. Flores, *supra* note 2, at 2.

tutional levels. Allying with each other and changing the institution of which we are a part is an essential part of the process of becoming an ally.⁵³

Understanding why it is crucial to overcome internalized oppression and racism at the institutional or group-wide level is only the first step. The more difficult challenge requires sustained efforts to eliminate behavior resulting from internalized oppression and racism.

As Chené suggests, a critical beginning requires alliances such as those formed at Latino Critical Race Theory (“LatCrit”) conferences and other Critical Race Theory conferences.⁵⁴ In fact, this spirit of alliance is partly what prompted the movement to organize LatCrit I in 1996 in La Jolla, California.⁵⁵ Given that initial alliance is easier than sustained alliance, it is crucial that participants not desert the LatCrit project or the larger project of creating and sustaining alliances within the Latino community.⁵⁶ This requires honest communication, constructive criticism, and respect. Chené elaborates that we must also have: “a mutual commitment to maintaining the relations; an understanding that allies are flexible and persistent at working on the relationship although conflict may arise; and an understanding that allies are able to give positive instruction to each other so that they will learn from one another.”⁵⁷

While understanding how internalized oppression operates at the group level is an important starting step, as important is the crucial next step of reducing internalized oppression at the group level. This can be accomplished by continuing to meet in group settings, supporting the group as well as group members, and creating alliances with other oppressed groups. Additionally, it is important to refuse to allow dominant groups to persistently create, perpetuate and manipulate stereotypes

53. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITIES, *supra* note 1 [Module II] at 2.

54. See Johnson, *Ring of Fire*, *supra* note 34, at 1297-99 (arguing for assimilation among Latino groups despite diversity in the Latino community). The first LatCrit conference (LatCrit I) convened in La Jolla, California in Spring 1996, LatCrit II occurred in San Antonio, Texas in Spring 1997, and LatCrit III was in Miami, Florida in Spring 1998. Various Critical Race Theory Conferences have occurred over the years, starting in 1989. See CRITICAL RACE THEORY: THE CUTTING EDGE xiv (Richard Delgado, ed. 1995) [hereinafter CRT]. Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman are credited with starting the CRT movement, which was quickly joined by many other kindred spirits. See CRT, *id.*, at xiii.

55. Attendees at the Hispanic National Bar Association’s convention in Puerto Rico started brainstorming the idea of a Latino Critical Race Conference and California Western School of Law ultimately sponsored LatCrit I, which was primarily organized by my colleagues Professors Frank Valdes, Gloria Sandrino, Bob Chang, and myself.

56. LatCrit, as other critical race movements, has suffered through some divisiveness which if not immediately named and addressed, could have threatened the movement. For example, during LatCrit II, some participants voiced the concern that they had been excluded and in planning for LatCrit III, the sources of that exclusion and how to more immediately respond to threats to the movement, were incorporated.

57. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITIES, *supra* note 1 [Module II] at 2.

about Latinos.⁵⁸ It is insufficient to be merely disgusted and offended by these types of actions. We must name the actions for what they are - racist and nativist behavior - in an equally public setting and hold the actors accountable. Moreover, we must be aware of the institutionalization of white supremacy and systematically undo both the subordination of Latinos through white supremacy, as well as our contributions to the perpetuation of white supremacy.⁵⁹ White supremacy is carried out ritualistically, such as through Ku Klux Klan activities,⁶⁰ legislatively through enactment of bills like California's Propositions 187 and 209,⁶¹ politically through zoning or development approval which harms Latino communities⁶² while enhancing predominantly white communities,⁶³ and symbolically through billboards such as the one which briefly appeared at the California-Arizona state line and read: "Welcome to California. The Illegal Immigrant State. Don't Let This Happen To Your State. Call Toll Free (877) NO ILLEGALS."⁶⁴ As is evident, the tasks are many: Latinos must be on the alert for racist behavior; swiftly and publicly react against any such behavior; and ensure that we are not actively supporting this behavior by voting for legislation such as Proposition 187, or inactively supporting this behavior through complacency.

In addition to overcoming destructive patterns of behavior at the corporate level, we must also focus on change at the individual level. The first and most essential step is consciousness-raising. If we do not

58. For example, politicians such as former California Governor Pete Wilson have created repugnant advertising campaigns which depict hordes of Latinos crossing the border into California, stealing jobs from hard-working Americans. See, e.g., Chavez, *supra* note 23, at A3. Yet other anti-immigrant groups have initiated the official English movement, immigration reform, and the attack on affirmative action. See No MERCY, *supra* note 9, at 9-19 (official English), 20-32 (immigration reform), and 45-81 (affirmative action).

59. See generally Cheryl Harris, *Whiteness as Property*, 106 HARV. L. REV. 1709 (1993) (discussing notions of white supremacy and white privilege); see also STEPHANIE M. WILDMAN, *PRIVILEGE REVEALED: HOW INVISIBLE PREFERENCE UNDERMINES AMERICA* (1996); Menchaca, *supra* note 46, at 204 (discussing white superiority vis-a-vis Latinos).

60. See Menchaca, *supra* note 46, at 216; see also DAVID MARK CHALMERS, *HOODED AMERICANISM: THE HISTORY OF THE KU KLUX KLAN* (1981) (describing general history and activities of the Ku Klux Klan).

61. See *supra* notes 7-8, and accompanying text.

62. See, e.g., Menchaca, *supra* note 46, at 216-7; see also ACUÑA, *supra* note 6, at 65-72 (discussing how Latino activism spared East L.A., a predominantly Latino community, from a state prison and how the region has nonetheless been the dumping ground for hazardous waste and the chosen site for an oil pipeline).

63. Dominant groups routinely place desirable amenities such as shopping centers, parks or land preserves in Anglo communities. See Martha Menchaca, *supra* note 46 at 217.

64. See Amanda Covarrubias, *1-10 Billboard to Urge Fight Against Illegal Immigrants. Group Hopes it's 'Quite Controversial.'* SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIB., May 1, 1998, at A3. The billboard, installed in May 1998, was removed within one month because Hispanic activists threatened to protest the racist contents of the advertisement. *Group Has Billboard Removed*, SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIB., June 24, 1998, at A3.

recognize internalized oppression and racism, we cannot overcome or undo them. To recognize these destructive forces, Suzanne Lipskey suggests that we ask ourselves questions like the following:

What has been good about being . . . [Latina/o]? What makes me proud of being . . . [Latina/o]? What has been difficult about being . . . [Latina/o]? What do I want other . . . [Latina/os] to know about me? How specifically have I been hurt by my own people? When do I remember standing up against the mistreatment of one . . . [Latina/o] by another? When do I remember being strongly supported by another . . . [Latina/o]? When do I remember acting on some feeling of internalized oppression or racism? When do I remember resisting and refusing to act on this basis?⁶⁵

In answering these questions, we can deconstruct others' definitions of "Latina/o" and reconstruct our identity in an affirming way. This will positively impact how we see ourselves, how we see other Latinos, and how non-Latinos see Latinos.

In addition to asking and honestly answering questions like those listed above, the process of overcoming internalized oppression and racism includes recognizing destructive patterns of behavior, including exaggerating "our feelings of rage, fear, indignation, frustration, and powerlessness. . . ." ⁶⁶ One Latina author self-deprecatingly described her feelings and the feelings of other Chicanos as follows:

I have internalized rage and contempt, one part of the self (the accusatory, persecutory, judgmental) using defense strategies against another part of the self (the object of contempt). As a person, I, as a people, we, Chicanos, blame ourselves, hate ourselves, terrorize ourselves. Most of this goes on unconsciously; we only know that we are hurting, we suspect that there is something "wrong" with us, something fundamentally "wrong."⁶⁷

In light of the racist history of our country, it is not surprising that we experience this self-loathing. After all, "[r]acism disempowers us by infecting individual consciousness with self-doubt."⁶⁸ When Latinos feel self-contempt or contempt for other Latinos, we must stop, name the feelings and their source, and eradicate race-based contempt and self-doubt.

Another expression of internalized oppression and racism is our acceptance of "a narrow and limited view of what is authentic . . .

65. LIPSKEY, *supra* note 13, at 16.

66. *Id.* at 5.

67. GLORIA ANZALDÚA, *BORDERLANDS/LA FRONTERA: THE NEW MESTIZA* 45 (1987).

68. Leslie G. Espinoza, *Masks and Other Disguises: Exposing Legal Academia*, 103 HARV. L. REV. 1878, 1884 (1990).

[Latino] culture and behavior.”⁶⁹ To a large degree, outsiders have defined what it is to be an authentic Latino.⁷⁰ We have not only accepted those definitions, even worse, when defining ourselves, we have not always been inclusive. To remedy these definitional identity problems, it is important both to participate in the process of defining ourselves, and to not make that definition so narrow that it excludes other Latinos. This is part of the broader charge of LatCrit theory - to develop a “paradigm that accepts, embraces, and accommodates persons as multidimensional entities rather than as conveniently divisible parts of that whole being.”⁷¹

Internalized racism plays itself out through our treatment of the Spanish language: it is often a source of embarrassment. Instead, we should resurrect it as a source of pride partly for the reasons one writer outlined:

The children should learn Spanish, not only because in many cases this helps their learning in general, but also because they will thus be able to secure a sense of identity and belonging. The Spanish language should also be brought to the adult population The point is not to create a prerequisite to membership in the Latino/a community, but rather to give Latino/as an opportunity to reconnect with their roots and open up a path towards a common identity.⁷²

Internalized racism also causes us “to mistrust our own thinking and analytical abilities. We carry around doubts about our own and other [Latinos’] . . . ability to think well.”⁷³ We can undo this misplaced lack of confidence through consistent and conscious support of each other. This could take place through participating in works-in-progress sessions, remembering each other when we are organizing conferences, reading each others’ works, recommending each other for visiting professorships at our institutions, and generally uplifting each other.

Latinos can engage in other efforts to boost our collective self-image. For example, Latinos can organize at many levels to demand better representation, to improve the provision of basic services, and to hold the media accountable for its portrayal of Latinos (or lack thereof).⁷⁴ Additional steps include drafting and supporting legislation

69. LIPSKEY, *supra* note 13, at 8.

70. For some unflattering descriptions of Latino, see *supra* notes 2-5 and accompanying text.

71. Hernández-Truyol, *supra* note 24, at 923-24.

72. Oquendo, *supra* note 21, at 125.

73. See LIPSKEY, *supra* note 13, at 8-9.

74. Latinos do much work in these areas and should be commended for the efforts to improve the Latino condition. For example, the National Hispanic Media Coalition works “[t]o improve the image of Latino-Americans as portrayed by the media; and . . . [t]o increase the number of Latino-Americans working in all facets of the media industry.” National Hispanic Media Coalition, History (on file with the author). Nonetheless, these efforts are often disjointed. This is

which advances Latino causes, lobbying, working together to promote Latinos to positions of power, and recommending each other for plum positions.

We must also establish bonds with our young people and include them in the process of self-definition. To learn from our young people, we should frequently seek their voices and give them more opportunities to be heard. We also need to feed and support their creativity. In addition, we could create student book clubs and mentoring programs between professionals and students, and between older students and younger students; insist on better school counseling to inspire instead of dissuade young Latinos; and create scholarship programs for Latinos. This shows young people that they are important and that we care about them, and provides them with Latino role models. If we do not create positive images, we leave a void which others can fill with distorted images of what a Latino is or is not.

Many other steps are necessary to overcome internalized oppression and racism, limited only by the boundaries of our collective imaginations. This part provided only an outline of some of the ways we suffer from internalized oppression and racism, and how to halt our suffering. As part of our institutional and individual ongoing missions, we must continue to identify internalized oppression and racism, and strategize on ways to halt that oppression and overcome its associated dysfunctions.

IV. CONCLUSION

This essay has described internalized oppression and internalized racism, and the devastating impact of these forces on the Latino community. They cause Latinos to adopt a colonized mentality and to internalize negative self-perceptions. This results in a community where individuals doubt themselves as well as those around them. Even worse, it causes us to turn against each other. For example, large numbers of Latinos supported California's Propositions 187, 209 and 227, which by and large, hurt the Latino community. Elsewhere, Latinos fired Latinas for teaching Chicano studies. This type of self-destructive behavior forces other Latinos to concentrate too much time on defensive posturing, reacting to racist behavior. The unfortunate reality is that so long as

contrary to what the right has done in designing and implementing many of its successful campaigns. As Delgado and Stefancic stated, the right has been successful because:

They use resources more precisely, concentrate their efforts on a few targets at a time, and make sure various campaigns reinforce and dovetail with one another.

They move personnel from one front to another and train the young to take their places in a future conservative regime.

NO MERCY, *supra* note 9, at 147.

there is racism, we will have to spend some time reacting to bigoted legislation, which legislation further disempowers the already marginalized while simultaneously preserving and enhancing the position of the powerful. Nonetheless, it is time to act more from a position of self-determination. If Latinos can spend less time convincing other Latinos not to support measures that are harmful to the Latino community, we will be able to engage in positive activities and can initiate pro-active efforts to empower the Latino community. Accordingly, we should defy and deny others' negative perceptions of Latinos while concurrently building positive images and working toward a better place for Latinos in our society.

With time, we can reduce internalized oppression and racism, together with their resulting negative patterns of behavior. In their place, we can create a positive Latino identity which will have a multiplier effect. We will be healthier individuals and healthier communities. If we are in a position of confidence and power, it will be difficult for others to mount and sustain the types of anti-Latino campaigns we have seen in recent years. As a consequence, instead of spending so many precious resources reacting to attacks on the Latino community, we can build and sustain a stronger and more united community.

