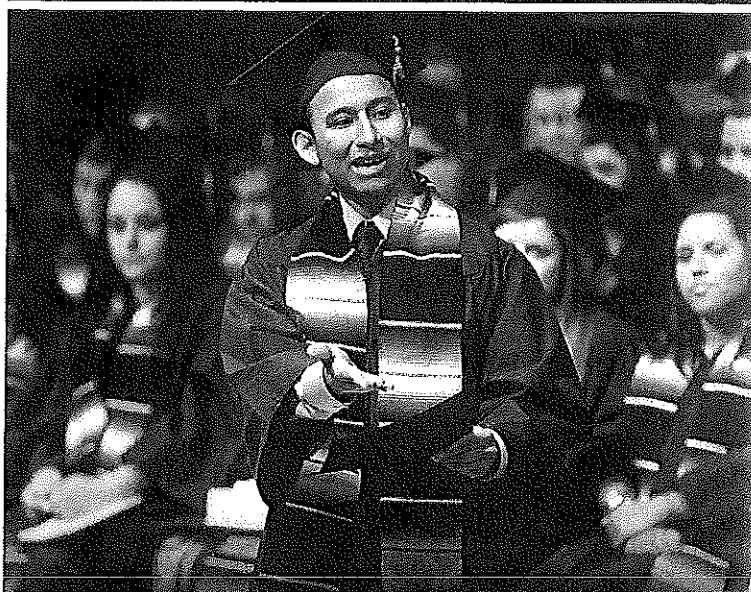


U.S. Latino Issues

Second Edition



Rodolfo F. Acuña



ANOTHER POV (POINT OF VIEW)***Should Latinos Be Categorized as White?***

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Should Latinos be categorized as white? When we, Mary Pardo and Marta López-Garza, discussed how best to approach this project we decided to approach it together. We otherwise felt forced into a discussion that was restricted to two opposing positions, limiting the discussion to a binary worldview. We prefer to problematize what we consider to be an assimilationist way of examining the issue of race classification. We believe it is important to be cognizant that it is the history of colonization that has placed us in the position of having to answer questions of racial categorization in a dichotomist, Western way of thinking and seeing the world when, in fact, racial identities are fluid and a result of social constructs.

Racial classifications were created during European conquest and colonization of the Americas and other parts of the Southern Hemisphere, beginning around the 1400s, as a means to control indigenous populations. Racial designations have since been dictated by ruling groups and used to bestow or withhold privileges and promote an ideology of white supremacy. In terms of racism and racialization, there is continuity between that historical time—when European countries (the British, Portuguese, and French along with the Spaniards) invaded and colonized the Americas—and now with our experiences as Latinos in the United States.

With the presence of Latinos in the United States over the past 150 years, racial classification of Latinos has changed throughout this country's history of census taking, confirming the argument that race is a social construct. Recently, the 2000 U.S. Census allowed Latinos to self-identify as white, black, Asian, or Native America, but many Latinos hesitated to choose among these racial classifications because Latino racial identity is complex and the classifications fall short of capturing what it means to be "mestizo," of mixed ethnic/racial heritage. The racialization of Latinos in the United States and the resulting inequalities continue into the 21st century regardless of the shifting census classifications for Latinos. Obviously, therefore, neither restricting racial classifications nor allowing Latinos to classify themselves will ensure equity.

We have been raised and instructed for generations to believe that assimilation will save us. In other words, the "whiter" or "more American" physically, psychologically, and/or culturally we are, the more likely we will succeed. The common notion is that the more one assimilates (i.e., the "modernization theory"), the more likely one is to achieve the "American Dream." The underlying premise of the modernization theory is that people of color should leave behind their culture, traditional languages, practices, and beliefs and assimilate into the European American culture, and in so doing, be considered more rational, civilized, *gente de razon*. This theoretical approach suggests that the cultures of immigrants and people of color are substandard. It further suggests that "white" (European) culture is superior and therefore by assimilating into that culture/identity one can embody that superior status.

Since the era of colonization, what has occurred as a result of Latinos accepting "white" culture as superior and their/our own culture as inferior is the devastating consequence of internalized racism. This Eurocentric ideology has influenced our values as Latinos since our colonization centuries ago. Racial classification is a phenomenon we continue to experience in different but oppressive ways. The underlying message is to appear as assimilated as possible.

We have observed that the way students classify themselves is shaped by what family members believe or tell them, or what they have heard in school, or from the media and society in general. It is context driven. That is why ethnic and Chicana/o studies in schools are crucial. This is where many of us are awakened to our history and can reinscribe our cultural identities.

Some argue that the U.S. Census Bureau's policy of "allowing" people to self-identify will lead to Latinos losing entitlement rights. In our estimation, this argument is spurious. The so-called entitlements or privileges, which in fact are our rights and for which we fought long and hard, are already being taken away, regardless of how we classify ourselves as Latinos and people of color in general. For example, affirmative action continues to be contested in the courts ever since the 1978 California Bakke case. More recently are the two contentious 2013 U.S. Supreme Court rulings. One overturned a key provision of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, allowing states to enact new and stricter voting laws that have resulted in depressed voter turnout, particularly among people of color. The second 2013 ruling was in regard to the University of Michigan undergraduate affirmative action admissions policy where the Court ruled against the affirmative action policy.

What the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s demonstrated is that while racial classification has been used to oppress and segregate,

ethnic and racial identity can and has been used to forge political consciousness and activism. We agree that while racial classification is often an individual act of self-identification, when it occurs in a collective consciousness arena, it is a political decision and can be a social justice tool; for example, applying an affirming classroom exercise where students identify their family origins, the continent(s) from where their ancestors came, and their racial origin. The purpose of this pedagogical approach is to help students from every part of the globe reflect on the modernization theory, the assimilationist propaganda with which they have been raised, and affirm their indigenous roots. With this pedagogical approach, the racial classification is applied as an affirmative educational tool to begin the discussion of how "white as superior" is a social construct. This pedagogical approach gives way to a sociopolitical understanding of colonization which led to the racialization of Amerindians as well as of those forced to come to the Americas from African, Asia, and elsewhere. Identifying with their roots allows students to embrace their indigeneity instead of claiming the assimilationist colonial identity that signifies internalized racism.

Question: Will racism be eliminated if racial classification is no longer practiced? The answer is No. Abolishing racial classifications or categories will not ultimately dismantle racism, which is the real problem. So even if we take away all racial classifications, racial domination will still exist if we as a society do not address the underlying cause and origins of racism.

This response leads to a different discussion, which we will not pose in this section, of why racism continues to exist and how it can be eradicated.

Is there a Latino race? Why would someone call themselves a mestizo?

What Race is a Latino? Some Mexican Americans in California Aren't Even Sure (Neither Are We)

Dennis Romero, *LA Weekly*, May 25, 2011*

Have you ever looked at your light-skinned, green-eyed Latino neighbor—or perhaps he's kinky haired and the color of cinnamon—and asked, "What the hell are you?"

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