

**Globalization, Immigration, & Identity: The Transformation and Perception of Mexican Identity in the United States**

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to and express my deepest appreciation for my thesis advisor, Professor John Waldron, without whom this thesis would not have been written. I would also like to thank my committee members, Professor Teresa Mares, Professor Ignacio Lopez-Vicuna, and Professor Thomas Macias, for taking their time to support my academic growth.

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## Introduction

Nations hardly ever have the luxury to develop their identity in strict introspection; extraneous factors intervene. The process usually includes some degree of contrasting with neighbors or ideal models. Nations develop in the context of other nations. –Juan D. Bruce-Novoa

A nation or group of people creates connections to others who are part of the same group through shared images and symbols. According to Benedict Anderson (1983), the nation is “an imagined political community” and “it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). Thus, each nation or community is unified by common foundational myths, the stories it tells and how it relates its past in stories. However, the images that unite one group of people also work to distinguish and differentiate communities from one another. The tensions that arise between the US and Mexico from these imagined separations, created in part by conflicting imaginaries, and the subsequent social hierarchies they give rise to form the basis of this study.

This thesis will be a cultural study in which I deeply engage with not only academic texts, both historic and recent, but also personal and literary works in an attempt to reveal the asymmetrical power relations, specifically those rooted in coloniality, that exist between the national imaginaries of Mexico and the United States. I will examine the tensions surrounding both the formation and maintenance of identity in lieu of such imaginaries as they come into greater contact through the globalized process of immigration. Despite the presence of immigrant communities from throughout Latin and South America, the scope of this study will be limited to discussing the implications of immigration from Mexico to the US because Mexicans comprise the most prominent Latino immigrant group in the US. To accomplish this, my first chapter will analyze how the Mexican cultural imaginary, one transported across the US

border through immigration, is developed by Mexico's uniquely configured national imaginary rooted in colonial paradigms that continue to mark its relationship to the US. In my second chapter, I will focus on how such colonial paradigms are employed by dominant US society as a response to the infiltration of Mexican cultural identity, an identity perceived as entirely different from and incompatible with the United States' imaginary, which is informed by a different cultural paradigm entirely. Through understanding this employment of coloniality, I will then, in my third chapter, examine the formation of the Mexican American<sup>1</sup> cultural identity, an identity that challenges national and cultural imaginaries that have dominated the world system since colonialism. Ultimately, I aim to examine the tensions between Mexican and US imaginaries and how they have led to the unique formation of Mexican American identity, an identity representative of the possibility of more inclusive national imaginaries, imaginaries no longer reliant upon the dichotomous and hierarchical nature of colonialism. Essentially, in this study, I will demonstrate how immigration from Mexico is challenging dominant American imaginaries and ponder what this means for the nation's future. However, before this study can be explained in greater depth, it is necessary to describe the numerous phenomena and concepts that have guided its formation.

### *Imagined Communities in the World System*

The asymmetrical power relations that exist between Anderson's "imagined communities" are globalized by the highly categorical world system described by Immanuel Wallerstein in *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. The capitalist-world economy is an

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<sup>1</sup> The term Mexican American will be used in this study to refer to those of both Mexican and American origin residing in the US; however, when discussing ethnic or racial groups, the issue of labeling is often problematic. Consequently, the issue of labeling will be addressed in greater detail in the third chapter of this thesis.

economy driven by such phenomena as industrialization and colonization; this economy creates the modern world system, which is divided by power relations, creating a social, political, and cultural hierarchy that is spatialized by separating the center- the location of power- from the periphery. In this relation, the West occupies the position of power and with the so-called “rest” marginalized from it. For this study it is important to note that within the world system, the position of power is held by the United States, while Mexico is relegated a marginalized position. Such divisions have created a world system in which inequality and perceived superiority, economic, racial, or cultural, are pervasive. Such invented categorizations of the world based upon the position and epistemology of the privileged, Christian Europe are, according to Walter Mignolo in *The Idea of Latin America* (2005), nothing new. Mignolo refers to the “T and O” map to demonstrate the constructions of racism and the classification of people by continent, phenomena that continue to dictate both national imaginaries and the relationships between them. The “T and O” map separated the world into three distinct continents, with Europe occupying the position of power. Upon the “discovery” of the Americas, the fourth continent, and thus its relationship with the others, was invented. The “T and O” map demonstrates the primordial nature of the imagined global relationships, relationships rooted in hierarchy. However, complicating the static division of the globe into a world system is the movement of information, products, and people during the age of globalization.

Today, the world is characterized by increased contact, culturally, economically, and politically, between nations. The triumphalist discourse of globalization would have us believe that we live in an increasingly interconnected world, a world in which products, people, and culture are thought to easily flow across both national and geographic borders as never before possible in human history, resulting in greater interaction between national imaginaries, between

the center and the periphery. However, such interaction between imaginaries, specifically when they are found side by side, is often highly problematic. Although neither entirely even nor complete, homogenization, which cannibalizes local and national differences by assimilating them into its own processes, is an aspect of globalization frequently perceived as threatening by local cultures. Consequently, imagined nations and connections created among local groups are formed with the effect of combating the looming threat of homogenization through the assertion of difference. As I will make evident throughout the present study, coloniality, specifically as it is employed within the United States, still functions as a framework in which identity, both national and cultural, must be negotiated in a globalized world.

Due to migrations that form part of globalization, Walter Mignolo in *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (2000), argues that although the periphery has moved to the center, the horizontal structures of coloniality are still in place despite shifts in geographic location, a phenomenon that can be seen in many of the discussions currently underway regarding immigration reform and the immigration of people from Mexico to the United States. The modern world system remains defined by the lasting legacies of colonialism, legacies of hierarchy and discrimination that have been characterized by both the coloniality of power and colonial difference.<sup>2</sup> The coloniality of power and colonial difference are essential to not only how nations are differentiated or valued in

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<sup>2</sup> Coloniality of power is a term coined by the Peruvian sociologist and thinker, Anibal Quijano. The coloniality of power refers to the lasting legacies of European colonialism in contemporary societies, legacies of discrimination as well as racial, political and social hierarchies that were imposed upon Latin America during the colonial era. Coloniality of power implies and constitutes itself, according to Quijano, through the following:

1. The classification and reclassification of the planet population- the concept of "culture" becomes crucial in this task of classifying and reclassifying.
2. An institutional structure functional to articulate and manage such classifications (state apparatus, universities, church, etc.).
3. The definition of spaces appropriate to such goals.
4. An epistemological perspective from which to articulate the meaning and profile of the new matrix of power and from which the new production of knowledge could be channeled.

the world system but also the ways in which the system's hierarchies are sustained, particularly as the center and the periphery come into greater contact. Although the spatial relationship between the center and the periphery has changed due to the many processes of globalization, namely immigration, the divisions and hierarchies that categorized them as such remain, and it is from these distinctions that colonial difference and coloniality are employed. According to Walter Mignolo, colonial difference is created by "the classification of the planet in the modern/colonial imaginary, by enacting coloniality of power, an energy and a machinery to transform differences into values" (13). Ultimately, colonial difference is the physical and imaginary "space where the coloniality of power is enacted" as two kinds of local histories converge (Mignolo ix).

Global processes, such as trade and immigration, have resulted in the transformation of colonial difference as it manifests in the modern world system. Colonial difference is no longer neatly confined to the periphery or to the places beyond national borders, rather it is ubiquitous. As Mignolo observes, "Yesterday the colonial difference was out there, away from the center. Today it is all over, in the peripheries of the center and in the centers of the periphery" (*Global Designs* ix). Thus, the "center" and the "periphery" are no longer geographically distinct; the people of the "center" have moved to the "periphery" and the people of the "periphery" have converged upon the "center," carrying with them distinct national identities and histories which are often perceived by the "center" as threatening. Despite the planetary movements of people in migrations, colonial difference, which emerged as a way in which to distinguish the "center" and the "periphery," has not diminished. Systemic dichotomies of superiority and inferiority based on perceived racial differences that have commanded national imaginaries since the colonial era remain in place. Thus, colonial difference is central to the contemporary perpetuation of



hierarchical and discriminatory colonial dichotomies, serving to separate the “center” from the “periphery” even in an increasingly interconnected world. This same structure works to separate Mexico from the United States. The planetary structural design based on the “T and O” map, which imposes hierarchies on the world system, forms an essential part in the imagined community the US and the global North have created.

In spite of its continued dominance, migrations have had the effect of fragmenting the image at the core of the global North’s imaginary, challenging the assertion of colonial difference. The distinction between what has been deemed the “center” and what has been deemed the “periphery” has become complicated and questioned, leading to instabilities in the hierarchy such a conceptualization establishes. Due to immigration, an increasingly large number of people inhabit, ontologically, a transitional space between the two imaginaries, a space conducive to formation where perceived separations and hierarchies are challenged.

Inhabiting this transitional border space, as groups such as Mexican Americans do, proves to be a means of transformation. As large numbers of immigrants make their homes in new places, the ways in which people and nations think about or imagine themselves and those around them are capable of being redefined. Such transformations are the result of what Mignolo calls “border gnosis,” a concept of thinking from a position of colonial difference located at the meeting place between two dominant national imaginaries that recognizes the ways in which colonial dichotomies continue to dictate how both identity and the nation are imagined. According to Mignolo, the erasure of colonial hierarchies and discrimination as they are currently inscribed in the modern world system is dependent upon “*bringing* coloniality of power to the foreground and in *thinking from* the colonial difference” (273). Colonial difference becomes a position from which coloniality is capable of being dismantled. Patterns of massive

migration have facilitated the possibility of thinking from the border, of thinking from a space of colonial difference as interactions between diverse cultures and languages intensify, thus, challenging unilateral notions of language, territory, and identity as they have been perpetuated by colonialism. The possibility of transcending colonial difference, or thinking from it, is embodied in the use of language since it is “intrinsically related to community formation and to geopolitical configurations” (Mignolo, *Global Designs* 249). Therefore, thinking from colonial difference is rooted in dismantling the conviction that language and territory have a one-to-one relationship; Mignolo states, “An other tongue” is the necessary condition for “an other thinking” and for the possibility of moving beyond the defense of national languages and national ideologies- both of which have been operating in complicity with imperial powers and imperial conflicts” (249). As such, a new way of thinking about the modern world system emerges from a new way of speaking about or communicating difference. As immigrant populations, more specifically Mexican immigrant populations residing in the United States, become more capable of disseminating their diversity through culture and language, they combat the discrimination and disenfranchisement that is largely associated with colonial difference.

In this study, it is my contention that ultimately, immigration, as it has been exacerbated by the many processes of globalization, has resulted in the increased recognition and the transformation of colonial difference. As diverse groups increasingly interact, colonial conceptions of identity and the nation are being re-imagined; strict colonial binaries can neither define nor contain emerging cultural identities. Thus, the assertion of colonial difference as a means to combat both the forces of homogenization and the fear of change is being challenged. As local, national, and global histories converge, diversity and difference become both recognizable and problematic, resulting in the possibility of not only thinking from a position of

colonial difference but also reimagining and reordering the modern world system in which we live. The racial, cultural, and linguistic differences associated with immigration represent not only the possibility of decolonizing thought but also the unfeasibility of continued colonial difference.

### *Immigration & Colonial Difference: Mexico and the United States*

My thesis is rooted in the abovementioned concepts, showing how national and planetary imaginaries such as the world system and “T and O” map are created to identify members of particular groups, and to assert difference and power. The politics surrounding immigration from Mexico to the United States demonstrate the problematic nature of contemporary colonial difference as the hierarchies and discrimination, both legacies of colonial paradigms, are perpetuated and challenged by incoming groups who are excluded from the cultural imaginary. The presence of such groups in the US, namely Mexican Americans, is already having the effect of transforming traditional identity formations and reimagining the model of the nation. The relationship between the Mexican immigrant and the United States is indicative of colonial dichotomies, dichotomies of superiority and inferiority that continue to dictate both attitudes and policies surrounding immigration as the imagined communities of the center and the periphery converge.

The colonial history of the Mexican nation and its relationship to the US is reflective of the colonial world system described by Mignolo and as such will be the first focus of my thesis. My first chapter will focus on Mexico’s history, showing how it is characterized by indigeneity, conquest, hierarchy, and imposed inferiority. So much emphasis will be placed upon this part of my study because it is my contention that it is essential to understand this aspect of Mexican

identity since this construct of history, identity, and the resultant national imaginary are transported to the US by the Mexican immigrant. Usually we think of globalization as an expansion from the “center” out to the “periphery” in a colonizing, homogenizing process. By starting my study with Mexico, I will show how the so-called “center,” the local culture of the US, is also challenged as a result of the global design it asserts.

As I will show in my second chapter, through immigration, the local history of the Mexican immigrant comes to the “center” and thus into greater contact and conflict with the national history of the US, an imperial and hegemonic force. In this way, the histories of the “colonizer” and the “colonized” collide; however, this does not mean that the colonial difference that the US has and continues to assert changes immediately. The perception of the treatment towards both Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans in the US is rooted in the assertion of nationalism that “imagines” itself in a position of power, thus perpetuating colonial difference. Consequently, in my second chapter, I will show that dominant US society, satisfied to retain a sense of racial, cultural, and linguistic superiority, capitalizes on the perpetuation of colonial difference as a means to maintain its imagined place within the current world system. Thus, the Mexican immigrant is rejected as too “other,” seen as both unwilling and unable to fully assimilate to the American way of life. As I will describe in further depth, prominent attitudes held in the US regarding the Mexican immigrant demonstrate both nationalistic and racist responses to the infiltration of the Mexican culture and the Spanish language. Policies of assimilation and exclusion, socially and physically, reveal not only a perceived notion of superiority but also the assertion of difference, the assertion of an imagined community that offers a model, based on colonial difference that defines what it means to be an American. Social and political attitudes in the US demonstrate the discrimination toward Mexican culture

and ethnicity; such attitudes seek to perpetuate the hierarchies and paradigms of colonial difference as well as express the notion that the non-European “colonized,” people from the periphery, are not a welcome addition to American society. As a result, the Mexican immigrant is allotted a place of subordination within the US societal structure, a place often distinguished by racial and linguistic difference.

However, the perpetuation of colonial difference in the US is challenged by the emergence of the Mexican American cultural identity, the focus of my third chapter. The Mexican American populace signifies the ways in which the local history of the periphery, Mexico, has exceedingly converged upon that of the center, the US, to create a new, distinct cultural identity.<sup>3</sup> As a group seeking to negotiate an inclusive identity, one expressing both parts of themselves, Mexican and American, Mexican Americans challenge and thus inhabit the space between the dichotomies of “center” and “periphery,” “colonizer” and “colonized,” “us” and “them”. As a result, they are often constricted by such binaries, isolated and unable to fully belong to Mexican or American society. As a population that does not conform, culturally or linguistically, to the perceived distinct identities or histories that dominate each side of the border, Mexican Americans suffer backlash from both Mexico and the US. Mexican Americans are not only criticized in Mexico for rejecting their homeland and corrupting the Spanish language but also chastised in the US for maintaining, culturally or linguistically, a connection to their ethnic homeland, failing to fully become “American”. Through cultivating a unique cultural identity in the face of incessant pressures from both sides of the border to conform, Mexican Americans, along with other similarly located groups, represent the possibilities entailed in Mignolo’s concept of “border gnosis” or the possibility of thinking beyond colonial

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<sup>3</sup> Due to the nature of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which redefined the US-Mexican border, it can be argued that Mexico and Mexicans were never, geographically, at the periphery of the United States.

difference, of thinking beyond long established world views, of dismantling the singular standards that have been placed upon identity, language, and culture but also the struggle to belong that this type of thinking creates. Mexican Americans have created a new cultural identity, an identity reliant upon both the recognition and erosion of colonial difference in dominant US society. The sheer number of both Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans in the US today has created an alternative discourse, a discourse that not only offers new ways of thinking about the world but also redefines the seemingly obligatory nature of total assimilation and re-imagines what it means to be American.

Through deeply engaging with the preceding concepts, my study will demonstrate the ways in which the cultural flows associated with immigration, specifically those between Mexico and the United States, represent both the perpetuation and dismantling of colonial difference, a phenomenon that is imperative to the inevitable transformation of not only the contemporary use of colonial dichotomies but also the formation of identity in an increasingly globalized world. Through uniting diverse peoples and cultures, immigration has become a central component to the reshaping of the world systems, the decolonization of the imagined constructs of culture, race, and power. As the numbers of Mexican immigrants and multi-generational Mexican Americans residing in the US continues to increase, what it means to be “American” will be re-imagined. Ultimately, the globalized process of immigration is challenging colonial difference and transforming the formation of both national and cultural identity, a particularly salient issue as immigration once again comes to the forefront of US policymaking.

## I. Colonization & Indigeneity: The History of Mexican Identity

The search for identity is characteristic of peoples bound in some common way and compelled to understand themselves in terms of their history and their relationship to the rest of the world. –  
Henry C. Schmidt

Indigeneity, conquest, colonization, independence, and nationalism are concepts that only begin to define the formation of Mexican identity. Due to the nation's history, one that is exceedingly complex, Mexican identity is distinct in that it represents a unique fusion of cultures. To be Mexican, is to be simultaneously indigenous and European, to recognize the various cultures and histories that have converged to create one. It is from this unique mixing that the expansion of colonial reason and the foundational myth of *La Malinche*, the myth of *mestizaje*, emerged as central to the shared cultural imaginary that unites the Mexican people. Mexican identity, even as it is transported across the border to the United States as part of the globalized processes of trade and immigration, is deeply connected to the nation's colonial past. In his work, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Octavio Paz (1950) states, "Past epochs never vanish completely, and blood still drips from all their wounds, even the most ancient" (11). Consequently, although contemporary Mexican identity is developed and constructed, in part, by the growing influence of both global capitalism and the philosophies of neoliberalism, the ancient wounds of conquest, colonialism, and ultimately the struggle for independence remain central to the formation of Mexican identity today. The ways in which Mexican identity is conceived in the United States as well as adapted in the formation of Mexican American identity are contingent upon the persisting colonial dichotomies of "us" and "them". Thus, in order to comprehend Mexican identity and culture as it is not only accepted and commoditized but also rejected in the US today, a background of Mexico's history and imagined place within the world

system as well as an understanding of how identity is perceived by the nation's most prominent thinkers are essential.

The indigenous people, who inhabited the territory of present-day Mexico, and their subsequent conquest by Spanish conquistadors, represent the first transformation of Mexican identity as the indigenous and European cultures collided and mixed.<sup>4</sup> Upon arrival in the “New World,” European explorers discovered a highly complex world: “The diversity of the indigenous nuclei and the rivalries that lacerated them indicate that Mesoamerica was made up of a complex of autonomous peoples, nations, and cultures, each with its own traditions... Mesoamerica was a historical world in itself” (Paz 90). The whole of Latin America was dominated by several indigenous civilizations. In Mexico, the most prominent group was the Aztecs who founded their capital, Tenochtitlán, on what is present-day Mexico City.<sup>5</sup> Despite European stereotypes of uncivilized barbarity, the Aztecs illustrated both the strength and the organization of a complex society, the remnants of which remain central to Mexican identity. The Aztec civilization was characterized by its staunch belief in gods such as Quetzalcóatl and Coatlicue to whom ritual human sacrifice in the name of universal order and the continuity of life was dedicated. The organization of Aztec society was highly connected to their religious beliefs in whose name laws and systems of universal and obligatory education were both created and maintained. Aztec society was distinguished by its military strength, surplus agricultural system, advanced craft-manufacturing industry, far-reaching market systems, and excellence in both art and literature. In the formation of their identity, the Aztecs, similar to future Mexicans and

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<sup>4</sup> The Mexican nation received its name, Mexico, from the original language of the Aztecs, *Mexica*. The Aztecs founded the city of Tenochtitlan in the valley where the nation's capital, Mexico City, is located. In 2012, President Calderon stated, “It's time that we Mexicans retake the beauty and simplicity of our motherland's name: Mexico. [It's] a name that we use when chanting or singing, a name that identifies us throughout the world and makes us proud” (Romo 2012).

<sup>5</sup> The Aztecs were a civilization characterized by war and power, brutally dominating many other indigenous groups; in a certain sense, the Aztecs can be viewed as conquistadores, albeit of other native peoples.



Mexican Americans, represented a mix of cultures and ideas: “The Azteca absorbed the cultural strengths of generations of native people” (Acuña 15). When the Spanish, led by the conquistador Cortés, arrived in Mexico in 1519, they capitalized on the preexisting tensions between the diverse indigenous populations and in only two years took control of the Aztec empire to colonize and rename it New Spain or *la Nueva España*. Thus, in many ways, the conquest of Mexico can be equated to the victory of the indigenous world against itself, a victory rooted, to some extent, in the alleged treason of *La Malinche*.

The multiracial civilization that characterizes Mexico after the Spanish conquest began with “La Malinche, la mujer del conquistador, la traidora de los indios,” (Fuentes 154).<sup>6</sup> *La Malinche*, an indigenous woman also referred to as Malinalli, Malintzin, or Doña Marina, served the Spanish during their conquest as both an interpreter and an advisor. What can be viewed as the betrayal of her people is accompanied by her own betrayal; sold by her Aztec mother, *La Malinche* became a symbol of the “victimization of women by women” (Romero 29).

Additionally, as the mistress of Cortés with whom she bore a son, *La Malinche* became the mother of a new multiracial civilization, the mother of the *mestizo*, a term that has historically been used to define one of mixed indigenous and European heritage. Thus, the Mexican was defined, born of multiple races; no longer purely indigenous, the Mexican became characterized by a complex mixture of cultures termed by some as *mestizaje*. *Mestizaje* or the mixing of races constructed “Mestizo identity” which became the basis of the current Mexican national identity. Although *mestizo* is a complex term, ripe with tensions, contradictions, and ambiguities, a large majority of the Mexican population identifies or can be classified as *mestizos*; as such, it is a central component of the Mexican cultural imaginary. Upon the conquest of the indigenous and

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<sup>6</sup> Translation: “La Malinche, the woman of the conquistador, the traitor of the Indian”

\*Also note that all footnote translations are my own.

the implementation of a colonial society, “[t]he mestizo- who some say is the key factor in Mexican identity- became the patriarch of colonial society” (Schmidt 10). The creation and subsequent rise of a *mestizo* race would have long-lasting implications on the nation’s history and the formation of identity. *La Malinche* has remained central to the determination of “Mexicanity;” according to Cypess (1991), “The sign “La Malinche” functions as a continually enlarging palimpsest of Mexican cultural identity whose layers of meaning have accrued through the years. With each generation the sign “La Malinche” has added diverse interpretations to her identity, role, and significance for individuals and for Mexico” (5). Thus, the concept of *La Malinche* also expresses the traitorous nature of the conformation to dominate paradigms or the devaluation of national identity. The ascension of a new race conceived by *La Malinche* and the growing influence of colonial power redefined Mexican identity as a society rooted in violence, racial hierarchy, and dependence took hold.

As Sandra Cypess’ observation above notes, the Spanish conquest of the indigenous lands and people remains central to the construction of what it means to be Mexican, both historically and contemporarily, as it ultimately created not only a new race but also a new social system, a system perpetuated by both racism and binary colonial dichotomies. The colonial system implemented by the Spanish was based on both brutality and exploitation as it further integrated indigenous and European cultures and identities. As conquerors and settlers descended upon the New World, the enforcement of European linguistic, religious, political, and economic models greatly changed the way of life throughout Mexico. In a world defined by a dichotomy of “us” and “them,” colonizers imagined they were bringing civilization to the uncivilized; native languages were replaced by Spanish and native religions were replaced by Catholicism. Carlos Fuentes describes the system created under Spanish colonialism as one

centered, in part, upon religious education; he states, “El sistema de dominación instalado por los conquistadores se llamó la Encomienda, una institución en virtud de la cual los servicios y el tributo de los indios eran requeridos, a cambio a la protección y la salvación de sus almas mediante la enseñanza religiosa” (178).<sup>7</sup> In reality, the *Encomienda* system and the subsequent *repartimiento* system exploited and abused indigenous laborers in a manner similar to slavery, creating both an economic and a social system highly based upon forced labor and racial hierarchy. Throughout colonial Mexico, “There were four categories of race: a peninsular, a Spaniard born in Spain; a *criollo/a*, born in the Western Hemisphere; an *indio/a*; and a *negro/a*. There were also innumerable subcategories of mixtures” (Acuña 25). The numerous *castas*<sup>8</sup> of colonial Mexico were determined by not only race but also the degree of acculturation to the Spanish culture, a culture thought to be tremendously superior. Thus, despite the formation of a new *mestizo* race, enforced racial hierarchies resulted in numerous social and political differences as the coloniality of power exerted by the Spanish allocated Mexico and its people into an inferior place within the world system. Throughout colonial society, status, importance, and worth were dependent upon ones location within the racial hierarchy. Superiority and power were determined by gender, race, and culture; “[t]hinking white” was part of the Spanish colonial pecking order” (Acuña 81). Such concepts surrounding race have facilitated further exploitation and remain influential in both Mexico and the US, whether in perpetuating or in contesting a sense of inferiority, in the creation of Mexican identity.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Translation: “The system of domination installed by the conquistadores was called *La Encomienda*, an institution by virtue of which the tribute and services of the Indians were required, in exchange for the protection and the salvation of their souls through religious education”.

<sup>8</sup> *Casta* paintings, which portrayed detailed representations of racial classifications, were used to help people locate themselves, racially, in the Hispanic, colonial order.

<sup>9</sup> In Mexico today, “*ser indio*,” or to be indigenous, remains one of the most insulting terms in which to refer to someone; thus, demonstrating the lasting impact of colonial hierarchical dichotomies.

Colonial Mexico was dominated by the imposition of new social and racial hierarchies that accompanied the infiltration of European culture; however, colonial Mexico was also defined by a unique racial and cultural mixing. In the creation of New Spain, the conquistadores “retained or adapted many of the native institutions,” a unique aspect of Spanish colonization in the New World that has facilitated the formation of an identity founded upon duality, being in a sense both indigenous and European (Acuña 24). Indirectly, this practice facilitated the indigenous population in both preserving and incorporating aspects of their culture into colonial society; thus, a connection to indigeneity continues to influence the formation of Mexican identity. Religion provides unique insight into this phenomenon: “La mezcla religiosa de la fe cristiana y la fe indígena, es una de las fundaciones culturales del mundo hispanoamericano” (Fuentes 208).<sup>10</sup> As exemplified by religion, Mexican culture and identity are defined by multiple origins; conquest created a Mexican identity that is neither fully indigenous nor fully European; rather, it is a unique mixture: “Latinos are not just Spaniards, but a mixture of Spaniards, Africans, and indigenous people” (Morales, 2002, 2). However, in the wake of an emerging multiracial and multicultural civilization, colonial dichotomies of “us” and “them,” of superiority and inferiority ensured the existence and perpetuation of racist systems, systems that remained even after independence from Spanish colonial rule.

“After nearly 300 years of colonial rule, Spain’s empire in the Americas began to unravel as independence movements spread” (Acuña 41). In 1810, on the verge of the Mexican War of Independence, Spain’s colonial empire encompassed the entirety of the land which would become the Mexican nation. The invasion of Spain by Napoleon and the subsequent weakening of Spanish control in the New World made the possibility of independence a reality. Due to the

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<sup>10</sup> Translation: “The religious mix of Christian faith and indigenous faith is one of the cultural foundations of the Hispanic-American world”.

strict racial and class systems that dominated the people of colonial Mexico, the rebellion against Spanish rule, first led by Miguel Hidalgo, was in many ways a reaction to the discrimination and hierarchy imposed by colonial systems. The large colonial empire was not only racially and culturally mixed but also radically divided along the lines of racial and cultural hierarchies. Such divisions ultimately led to the rebellion of the indigenous and *mestizo* peoples, who sought greater equality through social and economic reform. The struggle for and independence of Mexico was exceedingly complex, lasting 11 years until all the classes of society, including the elite, rejected the authority of Spanish rule. Upon gaining independence in 1821, Mexico inherited lasting colonial legacies, the need to form a nation-state despite growing instability, and the need to assert a national identity.

At the dawn of independence, the Mexican state struggled to assert its newly gained national prowess; however, both the hierarchical legacies of colonialism and the powerful, looming presence of the United States greatly weakened the emerging nation-state. Mexico was characterized by both political and economic instability, and at the mercy of the United States' desire to expand its territory in the name of manifest destiny.<sup>11</sup> The war for Texas in 1836 and the Mexican-American war in 1845 demonstrate the ways in which manifest destiny continued to incite both territorial and societal change within both the US and Mexico. The war for Texas between US American colonizers and the Mexican government, a war which coined the term, "Remember the Alamo!" ultimately led to not only the annexation of Texas to the US in 1845, but also paved the way for the Mexican-American War in which the US defeated a "poorly

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<sup>11</sup> Manifest destiny was central to US political policy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, dictating the belief that American settlers were destined to expand to control the entire continent. Although criticized by many, manifest destiny resulted in large territorial acquisitions for the US.

equipped and poorly led Mexican army” (Acuña 49).<sup>12</sup> Upon the US invasion of Mexico City<sup>13</sup> and the realization of their loss, Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, simultaneously ending the Mexican-American War and redefining both national borders and identities. The war resulted in a humiliating loss as Mexico was forced to relinquish almost half of its territory, ceding the present-day states of California, New Mexico, Nevada, and parts of Colorado, Arizona, and Utah to the US in exchange for a meager \$15 million. The loss was not merely territorial; it was also devastating to the national psyche: “En 1848, México perdió la mitad de su territorio nacional y la nueva frontera sobre el Rio Bravo se convirtió, para muchos mexicanos, en una herida abierta” (Fuentes 398).<sup>14</sup> The Mexican-American War and both the territorial and emotional repercussions greatly redefined Mexican identity, as the nation struggled to reassert national pride despite the loss of over half a million square miles of Mexican land. Additionally, the annexation of Mexican land and the simultaneous rejection of former Mexican citizens on that land by the US government is representative of the colonial dichotomies of difference that continued to define US-Mexican relations well after independence. According to Waldron,

The results of invading Mexico caused the US to pause and rethink its expansionist policies. Up until 1848, the US had always incorporated lands acquired through expansion eventually making them states with little litigation in Congress or courts. However, with Mexico, the US encountered the limits of its own ideological horizon formed, in part, by racism. (7-8)

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<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that the annexation of Texas to the US was organized, in part, by southern senators with the hopes that they would gain another slave state in their efforts to keep slavery legal in the US.

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, the US invading forces were comprised of many future Civil War leaders, such as Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, and Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson.

<sup>14</sup> Translation: “In 1848, Mexico lost almost half of its national territory and a new border on the Rio Grande became, for many Mexicans, an open wound”.

The creation of a new border between the US and Mexico perpetuated racial and cultural hostilities between the nations as difference was not only recognized but also asserted. The notion that Mexicans were inassimilable to dominant US society characterized the relationship between the US and the Mexican citizens whom the border crossed when the Treaty was signed. The antagonistic relationship that had developed between the US and Mexico ultimately led to the creation of border identities, a concept that will be further discussed in the third chapter of my thesis. The influence of the US, much like the influence of the Spanish, greatly shaped Mexican identity and continues to do so.

Spanish colonizers invaded a unique cultural world, ultimately redefining an indigenous society and what it meant to be Mexican both due to and in spite of the growing influence of Spain and the US. The infiltration of European culture through the lasting legacies of colonial systems and the growing global dominance of the US resulted in the creation of a Mexican identity defined by both indigenous and Western values. Henry Schmidt ponders the ways in which Mexican identity and culture have come to be defined in terms of European, rather than Mexican, values; he states, “The question now was the extent to which the European idea of Mexico had become the Mexican one” (21). Colonialism was characterized by the political, economic, and social infiltration of European values, which both mixed with and distorted indigenous cultural identity. According to Rodolfo Acuña, “Spanish colonialism and 19<sup>th</sup> century Mexican liberalism altered Mexican identity...In the Mexican national period, Mexican elites attempted to define the Mexican nation and its cuisine in European terms” (162). Mexican identity, a product of a unique indigenous culture and a stark colonial history, could not and cannot be defined in European terms. Rather, Mexican identity must be defined in Mexican terms, through the nation’s unique colonial history. Mexican identity is distinct from that of the

European due to the lasting impacts of colonialism; in this case, the colonized must assert their local identity despite the continuous influence of not only Europe but also the United States. As the Mexican people struggled to assert a unique national identity that contrasted with the global nature of Western identity, conflict arose: “Culturally Mexicans and Euroamericans grew further apart as the twentieth century approached” (Acuña 119). The Mexican Revolution of 1910 provides an imperative example of the assertion of Mexican identity as defined by the Mexican himself.

As the Mexican nation struggled to reassert itself in a world increasingly dominated by the global power of the US, it entered an era that would redefine it forever: the Mexican Revolution of 1910. The Revolution, although complex, was a response to the dictatorship of President Porfirio Díaz, who ruled Mexico from 1876 until 1911 under the motto, “Order and Progress”. The 33 year span of the reign of Porfirio Díaz, termed the *porfiriato*, was characterized by internal stability, modernization, and economic progress. However, it was also an era characterized by practices of violence, intimidation, and the implementation of reforms that failed to benefit the whole of Mexican society; the many landless and starving were outraged. The political uprising against the *porfiriato* was a nationalistic response as revolutionaries sought democracy and equality in a nation still dominated by the social and economic hierarchies created by colonialism: Mexicans more closely associated, racially, culturally, and economically, with Europe and the US benefited, while the poor and indigenous were further disenfranchised. Thus, three hundred years of political and economic dependence instituted by the colonial system prevented the creation of an authentic Mexican identity; thus, “on the eve of the Mexican Revolution, Mexico did not yet have a national identity” (Acuña 40).



Interestingly, it was the Revolution not independence that allowed for the formation of Mexican identity:

The 1910 Revolution would provide the basic machine for the Mexican as he sought to become the modifier of himself and his country and to expand his critical consciousness. He would then strive to achieve an awareness of self and stake his identity on the re-creation of a society denied him by historical fallacy. (Schmidt 37)

The Revolution of 1910 signified a recreation, as Mexicans were able to look differently at not only their past but also their future identity: “Thanks to the Revolution, the Mexican wants to reconcile himself with his history and his origins” (Paz 147). According to Thomas Macias, the revolution provided Mexico with a “unifying national identity that ostensibly placed great pride in the indigenous contribution to Mexican culture”; thus, the value placed by Mexicans upon indigeneity shifted (121). Although motivated by divergent political views, revolutionaries such as Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata connected the Mexican people through their mutual struggle, creating a common Mexican identity that had never been seen before: “En este abrazo revolucionario, los mexicanos finalmente supieron cómo hablaban, cantaban, comían y bebían, sonaban a amaban, lloraban y luchaban, los demás mexicanos” (Fuentes 460).<sup>15</sup> Through civil upheaval, the Mexican people were able to both realize and declare their newfound common identity as both distinct from and created by the nation’s colonial past. However, the Revolution was an extremely violent era in Mexican history resulting in the first large scale migration of Mexican people to the US, a movement with significant future implications that will be discussed later in my thesis.

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<sup>15</sup> Translation: “In this revolutionary embrace, Mexicans finally knew how they spoke, sang, ate and drank, sounded like they loved, cried and fought, the other Mexicans”.

## *Mexican Thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

As previously described, Mexican identity is undoubtedly connected to the history of the nation; it is through understanding the nation's colonial past that Mexican thinkers have been able to define what it means to be Mexican, specifically in a world increasingly dominated by Western policies and modes of thought. According to Mignolo,

“Coloniality of power” and “historico-structural dependency” are two interrelated key words tracing the particular, local history of Latin America, not so much as an existing entity where events “happened” and “happen,” but as a series of particular events whose location in the coloniality of power and in the historicostructural dependency has made Latin America, what Latin America has been and is today. (53) <sup>16</sup>

Thus, Mexican identity, what it has been and what it is today, is contingent upon externalities, the ways in which the world views Mexicans and the ways in which Mexicans view themselves. Post-revolutionary Mexico was an era of self-definition; hence, the prominent and influential Mexican and Latino thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century provide insight into how Mexican identity is connected to not only the nation's colonial past and its position within the world system but also its future in an increasingly globalized world.

The assertion of Latin American identity emerges as one of the most prominent responses to the lasting implications of colonization and globalization. Although José Martí is a 19<sup>th</sup> century Cuban thinker, he represents the rejection of the Western world, the rejection of an imposed sense of inferiority thrust upon Latin America, rejections that would greatly influence other Latin American thinkers. The essay *Nuestra América* by Martí demonstrates both the

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<sup>16</sup> “Historico-structural dependency” is a term employed by Quijano to refer to the center/periphery dichotomy of domination that has continued to characterize the world system after colonization, allowing for the exercise of coloniality of power. Mignolo argues that “historico-structural dependency” cannot be restricted to the center/periphery dichotomy, but rather it is applicable to the current modern/colonial world system.

importance of and the struggle to assert Latin American identity in a world dominated by the power and influence of the US and Europe; although written in 1892, Martí's essay remains salient as the processes of globalization continue to complicate the formation of local identity. According to Martí, the Latin American way of life has been exchanged for the cultural, economic, and political systems of the Western world, a dangerous incompatibility as the connection between the government and the people disintegrates: "El espíritu del gobierno ha de ser el del país. La forma del gobierno ha de avenirse a la constitución propia del país. El gobierno no es más que el equilibrio de los elementos naturales del país" (web).<sup>17</sup> The revolutions and violent uprisings that characterize the history of not only Mexico as seen in the Revolution of 1910 but also Latin America as a whole symbolize the danger of what Martí calls an unnatural government, one without an inherent connection to the people. As a response, Martí calls for a return to nationalism, to a reassertion of Latin American identity against imperialistic forces that call for assimilation and conformation: "Los políticos nacionales han de reemplazar a los políticos exóticos" (web).<sup>18</sup> For the Latin American, it becomes imperative to look inward; local knowledge, custom, and a sense of national pride that have long been forgotten are essential to not only the establishment of government but also the assertion of an independent identity. Thus, Martí asks, "¿Cómo somos?" se preguntan; y unos a otros se van diciendo cómo son" (web).<sup>19</sup> There exists a desire within Latin America to affirm an identity that is does not completely conform to Western cultural ideals. It is only through resistance, not assimilation that Latin America will prosper; however, Martí recognizes the power of the US: "Pero otro peligro corre, acaso, nuestra América, que no le viene de sí, sino de la diferencia de

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<sup>17</sup> Translation: "The spirit of government must be that of the country. Its structure must conform to the rules appropriate to the country. Good government is nothing more than the balance of the country's natural elements."

<sup>18</sup> Translation: "Nationalist statement must replace foreign statement."

<sup>19</sup> Translation: "What are we?" is the mutual question."

orígenes, métodos e intereses entre los dos factores continentales, y es la hora próxima en que se le acerque demandando relaciones íntimas, un pueblo emprendedor y pujante que la desconoce y la desdeña” (web).<sup>20</sup> The inevitability of the relationship between the US and Latin America is not lost on Martí, and amidst an increasingly globalized and hegemonic world, he calls for a reassertion of national pride and identity. Thus, both national pride and the sense of inferiority projected upon Latin America by the Western world are essential to understanding the formation of identity not only by the people of Latin America but also by immigrants in the US.

In his work, “Visión de Anáhuac,” Reyes reiterates Martí’s assertion of the importance of national pride, a pride in the indigeneity and the culture that was lost upon conquest.<sup>21</sup> It is through not only the loss but also the reclaiming of indigenous culture that Mexican identity is created; Reyes states, “La emoción histórica es parte de la vida actual” (121).<sup>22</sup> However, unlike Martí, Reyes acknowledges that there cannot be a separation between the indigenous culture and the European culture introduced by the Spanish conquerors and colonizers; the brutality and hierarchies that characterized colonialism have not disappeared from Mexican consciousness, but continue to play a role in its formation. Rather than contributing to “civilizing” indigenous civilizations, the conquest of Mexico’s indigenous people destroyed a thriving culture, a loss that is lamented by Reyes: “Hay que lamentar como irremediable la pérdida de la poesía indígena mexicana” (114).<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, Reyes looks back to the nature and the art of Mexico’s ancient civilizations as a way in which to both remember and reassert the true nature of Mexican

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<sup>20</sup> Translation: “But perhaps our America is running another risk that does not come from itself but from the difference in origins, methods, and interests between the two halves of the continent, and the time is near at hand when an enterprising and vigorous people who scorn and ignore out America will even so approach it and demand a close relationship.”

<sup>21</sup> Additionally, Reyes was the founder of *El Ateneo de la Juventud*, an association of Mexican intellectuals. José Vasconcelos and Samuel Ramos are other noteworthy members of this generation of Mexican scholars.

<sup>22</sup> Translation: “The historic emotion is part of life today”

<sup>23</sup> Translation: “There is irremediable regret at the loss of indigenous Mexican poetry”

identity: “La materia principal para estudiar la representación artística de la planta en América se encuentra en los monumentos de la cultura que floreció por el valle de México inmediatamente antes de la conquista” (113).<sup>24</sup> Reyes views the history of conquest and the infiltration of European culture as essential to the formation of Mexican identity, but so too is the nation’s indigenous past. Reyes calls for all Mexicans to look back at their indigenous roots not only to lament the utter loss of this unique aspect of themselves but also to forge an identity reconciled by their complex history and culture, an identity shaped by both indigenous and European ancestry. Fuentes demonstrates the existence and importance of looking at the present through the past; he states, “Y veríamos también la manera como ese pasado se convierte en presente, en una sola creación fluida, sin rupturas” (527).<sup>25</sup> Thus, it is only through engaging with the past that the Mexican people will be able to move forward, especially in a world increasingly characterized by the processes of globalization.

The necessary balance between indigenous and European that characterizes Mexican identity referred to by Reyes is emphasized again by Samuel Ramos, who described such balance in terms of cosmopolitanism and nationalism. Influenced by both Mexican positivists and contemporary European thinkers, Ramos examined the emergence of national character and the sense of inferiority that has beset the Mexican since colonization. Ramos states, “The Mexican psyche is the result of reactions that strive to conceal an inferiority complex” (58). As a result of a cultural imaginary rooted in inferiority, Ramos believes that Mexico “accepted the notion that European culture repressed the national spirit, which should therefore be isolated from all foreign influence” (Schmidt 154) and this, due to the nation’s colonial history, is problematic. Ramos states, “By Mexican culture we mean universal culture made over into *our own*, the kind that can

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<sup>24</sup> Translation: “The principle subject to study the artistic representation of the plan in America is located in the monuments of the culture that flourished in the valley of Mexico immediately before the conquest”

<sup>25</sup> Translation: “And we would see the way the past turns into the present, in one fluid creation, without ruptures”.

coexist with us and appropriately express out spirit. Curiously enough, the only way open to us- in order to shape this Mexican culture- is to continue learning about European culture” (108). Ultimately, Ramos called for balance; the nation could not ignore the influence of the Western world, it must appropriate European culture in a way in which it benefited and enhanced Mexican culture. The balance between asserting national identity and further assimilating to European culture is one in which Ramos is greatly preoccupied: “The loss of morale resulting from the imitation of foreign culture forced Mexico to become aware of its national character, and from that time on, Ramos stated, the Mexican became introspective, a condition Ramos regarded as a sign of maturity” (Schmidt 154). For Ramos, the recognition of a national character that was distinct from that of the European resulted in a sense of inferiority; yet, it is only through becoming aware of this sense of inferiority that Mexicans were able to overcome it. However, “The trouble arose...when the Mexican measured himself on a scale of values that did not correspond with that of his own culture” (Schmidt 156). According to Ramos, the Mexican must be able to balance not only his indigenous and European roots but also his national character and the continuing influence of the Western world, a task becoming increasingly complex today due to the forces of globalization.

The hybridity of Mexican identity, the culmination of indigenous and European ancestry referred to by Ramos, is also represented in the work of renowned Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo.<sup>26</sup> “My Grandparents, My Parents, and I (Family Tree)” painted in 1936 and “The Two Fridas” painted in 1939 are only two of Kahlo’s many paintings that symbolize the coming together of two parts, the reconciliation of a Mexican and a European self, and the search for wholeness. “The Two Fridas,” one of Kahlo’s most well-known works, depicts “a literal split between her

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<sup>26</sup> Both Samuel Ramos and Frida Kahlo demonstrate the hybridity of Mexican identity; however, Ramos’ definition of Mexican identity is an overwhelmingly masculine one, while Kahlo illustrates a more feminine perspective.

two selves... On the right is the Mexican Frida in traditional *tehuana* dress. On the left is European Frida in a colonial white dress” (Gillingham web). At this time in Mexican history, Kahlo and a large majority of the Mexican populace were struggling to define themselves, struggling to discover and accept a dualistic identity; Gillingham states, “Kahlo meant for her art as well as her life to serve as the example that her “spilt-personality homeland” so desperately needed. In exploring and attempting to heal her own schism between worlds with her paintings, she helped Mexico to heal its own” (web). Ultimately, Kahlo’s work, an artistic representation of duality and identity, symbolizes the struggle faced by the Mexican people to define themselves, an attempt to reconcile a complex dualistic nature.

José Vasconcelos is another central figure regarding the development of modern Mexico and Mexican identity.<sup>27</sup> Vasconcelos’ most prominent and controversial work, *La raza cósmica*, is “still widely cited as a pioneering attempt at thinking beyond race” (Lund, 2008, 1418). Vasconcelos describes the central idea of his work as follows: “La tesis central del presente libro que las distintas razas del mundo tienden a mezclarse cada vez más, hasta formar un nuevo tipo humano, compuesto con la selección de cada uno de los pueblos existentes” (web).<sup>28</sup> In his work, Vasconcelos examines the mixing of races and how this phenomenon is central to both Mexican and Latin American identity as a whole. The implications of racial mixing that began during colonization are profound: “La colonización española creó mestizaje; esto señala su carácter, fija su responsabilidad y define su porvenir” (Vasconcelos web).<sup>29</sup> The recognition of the *mestizo* changed the course of history, creating an identity complicated by its simultaneously

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<sup>27</sup> It is important to note the controversy surrounding Vasconcelos, particularly his ideas of race. Both racial and cultural purity are realistically unattainable.

<sup>28</sup> Translation: “The central thesis of this book is that the various races of the earth tend to intermix at a gradually increasing pace, and eventually will give rise to a new human type, composed of selections from each of the races already in existence.”

<sup>29</sup> Translation: “Spanish colonization created miscegenation; this draws attention to its character, fixed its responsibility and defined its future”

indigenous and European nature. Vasconcelos examines and criticizes how indigeneity was abandoned: “nosotros los españoles, por la sangre, o por la cultura, a la hora de nuestra emancipación comenzamos por renegar de nuestras tradiciones”.<sup>30</sup> Vasconcelos demonstrates the necessity of the fusion of both race and culture; he is critical of both the abandonment of tradition and the rejection of modernity. As such, the assertion of an indigenous identity that has not fully merged with Spanish blood is also somewhat problematic; Vasconcelos states, “El indio no tiene otra puerta hacia el porvenir que la puerta de la cultura moderna, ni otro camino que el camino ya desbrozado de la civilización latina” (web).<sup>31</sup> Here, Vasconcelos reiterates the need for balance. As he calls for the adaptation of culture and the mixing of races, Vasconcelos asserts an ideology based upon what he deems to be the “fifth race,” found in America:

Su predestinación obedece al designio de constituir la cuna de una raza quinta en la que se fundirán todos los pueblos, para reemplazar a las cuatro que aisladamente han venido forjando la Historia. En el suelo de América hallará término la dispersión, allí se consumará la unidad por el triunfo del amor fecundo, y la superación de todas las estirpes. (web)<sup>32</sup>

The fifth race represents the final culmination of all races, creating a new civilization; a phenomenon that Vasconcelos thinks will occur in the colonized regions of America, which hold the ability to unite the world. Although Vasconcelos’ approach is problematic and highly racialized, contingent upon hierarchical classifications, the power and prestige he attributes to the

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<sup>30</sup> Translation: “We Spaniards, by blood or by culture, when it comes to our emancipation started to renege on our traditions;” it is interesting to note here that Vasconcelos includes himself in the category of “Spaniard”.

<sup>31</sup> Translation: “The Indian does not have another door to the future than the door of modern culture, nor another path other than the path cleared by Latino civilization”

<sup>32</sup> Translation: “His predestination is due to the plan to form the cradle of a fifth race in which all peoples will melt, to replace the four that individually have been forging history. On the soil of America, the end of the dispersion will be discovered, unity consummated by the triumph of fertile love, and the overcoming of all lineages.”



Mexican represents a new perception on identity that hinges on superiority rather than the inferiority so greatly perpetuated by colonial hierarchies.

Octavio Paz provides another response to the inferiority forced upon the Mexican people both during and after colonialism; *El laberinto de la soledad*, written in 1945 by Paz, uses solitude as a defining trope for *la mexicanidad* and remains one of the most notable examinations of what it means to be Mexican.<sup>33</sup> Paz articulates that the idea of solitude pervades Mexican identity: “The Mexican, whether young or old, criollo or mestizo, general or laborer or lawyer, seems to me to be a person who shuts himself away to protect himself: his face is a mask and so is his smile... The Mexican is always remote, from the world and from other people. And also from himself” (29). The Mexican remains afraid to assert his own identity, ultimately resulting in the use of a “mask” and the acceptance of solitude. According to Paz, the concept of solitude as it relates to the creation of Mexican identity and thought is characterized by the inferiority thrust upon Mexican people by their Spanish colonizers and reconfirmed by the growing presence of the US. Paz states,

The character of the Mexican is a product of the social circumstances that prevail in our country, and the history of Mexico, which is the history of these circumstances, contains the answer to every question. The situation that prevailed during the colonial period would thus be the source of our closed, unstable attitude (71).

Thus, solitude is a response to the nation’s history. Mexican identity, as described by Paz, is unique in that the “Mexican does not transcend his solitude. On the contrary, he locks himself up in it” and it is “by means of the *fiesta* society frees itself from the norms it has established” (64, 51). Mexican identity is therefore defined by the acceptance of solitude and the masking of identity, rather than assertion: “Everything that makes up the present-day Mexican, as we have

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<sup>33</sup> Translation: *The Labyrinth of Solitude*

seen, can be reduced to this: the Mexican does not want or does not dare to be himself” (73). This rejection of self is central to understanding the way in which Mexicans react to the world around them: “Mexicanism is a way of not being ourselves, a way of life that is not our own. Sometimes it is a mask; sometimes it is a sudden determination to find ourselves” (169). The Mexican people live in a world in which they feel they do not belong, a world defined by both European values and colonial difference; however, Paz identifies hope for the sons of *La Malinche*, as they will one day be able to remove the masks that confine their identity: “Mexicanism will become a mask which, when taken off, reveals at last the genuine human being it disguised” (171). The masks and the solitude that characterize Mexican identity create a people struggling to understand both their history and their future, hoping one day to be unafraid of revealing their true identity.

Both the solitude and the masks of Paz demonstrate the ways in which the *mestizaje* has redefined Mexican identity, making it inseparable from the nation’s colonial past. The lasting legacies of colonialism have led to an identity in tumult, an identity characterized by its hybridization of both the European and the indigenous. As demonstrated by the writers and philosophers mentioned previously, the complex nature of Mexican cultural identity has resulted in not only assimilation driven by a sense of inferiority but also a reassertion of nationalistic pride. As Spanish power waned, that of the US increased. Mexican identity remains both associated with and contrasted to the US and Europe. After 300 years of colonial rule, independence, revolution, and continual political and economic dependence upon the West, the people of Mexico remain searching for their sense of self: what it means to be Mexican in a world seemingly characterized by the rise of a global identity rooted in the West. Thus, the Mexican, a racial and cultural conglomeration, who has both disguised himself under the masks

of Paz and asserted himself through the polyphonic nationalism of Martí and Reyes, is continually impacted by not only the nation's position within the increasingly globalized world but also the ways in which the Mexican nation itself has been imagined. Through the transnational flow of race and culture, expanded by technological advancements and the free market economy, Mexican identity has become more apparent, especially in the US, as the opposing "imagined communities," as coined by Benedict Anderson, collide. Immigration from Mexico to the US, as it has been perpetuated by the processes of globalization, has both complicated and recreated the struggle for identity, a struggle that has been rooted in colonial difference.

The consequences surrounding the infiltration of Mexican culture and identity, specifically the concept of *mestizaje*, into the US will shape the remainder of my thesis. As the imaginaries of the "center," the US, and the "periphery," Mexico, converge, the assertion of colonial difference emerges as a means to combat cultural change. The revival of American nationalism against the Latin American "other" and the unique commodification of Mexican culture emerge as mechanisms of colonial difference. The ways in which the Mexican cultural imaginary, as it has been described, is perceived by dominant US society will be made evident in the following chapter. Additionally, in the third chapter, I will discuss how the Mexican imaginary, as it is brought to the US through immigration, has also contributed to the transformation of the Mexican American, an identity, much like its Mexican counterpart, that is both defined and obscured by its dualistic nature. Ultimately, I will demonstrate how the Mexican imaginary is both interpreted and transformed through immigration.

## II. The Assertion of “Americanity”

They're afraid we're going to take over the governmental institutions and other institutions. They're right. We will take them over. We are here to stay. –Richard Alatorre

Since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the Gadsden Purchase, two events that created the current US-Mexican border, and the mass migration that accompanied the Mexican Revolution of 1910, Mexican presence in the United States has been both continuous and contentious. With the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, many Mexican people, formerly residing inside the national territory of Mexico, suddenly found themselves now residing on land controlled by the United States; thus, there exists the notion that these Mexicans did not cross the border; rather, the border crossed them. Yet, due to historic, racial, linguistic, and cultural differences, Mexicans, more so than any other immigrant group, have been viewed by dominant US society as not only incompatible with but also as a threat to the “American way of life”.<sup>34</sup> As the numbers of both Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans in the US have increased due to the processes of globalization, these views have not abated; rather, they have intensified. Throughout the US, particularly in the Southwest where the numbers of both Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans are the highest, there exists a resurgence of American nationalistic pride, a pride contingent upon amplifying the differences between what has been deemed to be “Mexican” and what has been deemed to be “American”. As such, differences, specifically those stemming from colonialism, have dictated not only the ways in which Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans are perceived in the US but also how Americans<sup>35</sup> define themselves in response to a nation that has become increasingly influenced

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<sup>34</sup> Due to the central role of Mexican immigrant labor in constructing the US nation, such negative feelings directed toward the group are highly antagonistic.

<sup>35</sup> Although using the term “Americans” as a way to classify US citizens is controversial, this paper will use the term when referring to US citizens, most specifically those of non-Mexican ancestry, because it is most often how they refer to themselves or their national identity. The monopolization by the US of such a classification despite the

by both the Mexican culture and the Spanish language. Thus, the lasting impacts of colonialism and the dualistic nature of Mexican identity discussed in depth in the previous chapter become central to understanding the antagonism characterizing US perception of Mexican immigrants today. As people, products, and culture flow across the US-Mexican border as never before in the nations' histories, Mexico and the United States are forced to confront colonial difference, the struggle for identity, and inevitable change. In confronting colonial difference as well as the unavoidable cultural, racial, and linguistic changes associated with high levels of immigration from not only Mexico but also Latin America as a whole, the US has adopted policies of restriction and discrimination ultimately redefining the struggle for identity which characterizes a globalized world. Despite the presence and sharing of distinct cultures due to the growing interconnection around the globe, the battle of "colonizer" and "colonized," the struggle between "us" and "them," between "Mexico" and the "United States" rages on.

Conflict between Mexico and the US, between Mexicans and Americans, surrounding immigration is a phenomenon rooted in historical encounters. The struggle for Mexican land that characterized the US era of manifest destiny and the subsequent violence and war that resulted in the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 have shaped the relationship between US citizens and Mexican immigrants today.<sup>36</sup> Many Mexican people are returning to a territory, the southwestern United States, which had been controlled by the Mexican state prior to 1848; consequently, as the conservative thinker Samuel Huntington (2004) has said, "No other

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numerous other peoples and nations that comprise both North and South America is representative of not only power relations but also a national identity rooted in both the desire to remain superior to and different from its neighboring countries.

<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, in New Mexico and other portions of the southwestern United States, some, namely those of Spanish colonial descent, viewed Mexico as a colonizing force. Thus, they often culturally distance themselves from the Mexican American population, calling themselves "Hispanos".

immigrant group in American history has asserted or has been able to assert a historical claim to American territory. Mexicans and Mexican-Americans can and do make that claim” (229).<sup>37</sup>

The ancestral and native connections many Mexican people can claim to the land in which they are now deemed “immigrants” are not only reminiscent of bloodshed for the sake of expansion but also perceived as threatening to an American society that has struggled to differentiate between “us,” Americans, and “them,” Mexicans. It is from this deep connection to the American Southwest that the Chicano focus on Atzlán, which will be discussed in the following chapter, is rooted. The legacies of the Mexican-American War and the cries of the Alamo create an ongoing opposition between the Mexican and the American people, reinforcing not only the notion of Mexicans as a conquered people but also that of American domination as well as highlighting a sense of conflict and difference that has evolved rather than diminished. The racial, cultural, and linguistic discrimination faced by those Mexicans who remained in the Southwest after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexican immigrants, and Mexican Americans is indicative of reiterated colonial difference. The citizens of Mexico, and thus also Mexican immigrants, are viewed by dominant US society and often by themselves as a conquered, inferior people; subject to both instability at home and the whims of their powerful northern neighbor. The two distinct people and cultures have come into greater contact due to the processes of globalization; the implementation of NAFTA in 1994 and the subsequent rise of the *maquiladora* industry along the US-Mexico border demonstrate the ways in which globalization has elicited increased political and economic interaction between the two nations. Interaction that has been and continues to be characterized by discrimination rooted in both the perpetuation and evolution

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<sup>37</sup> It must be noted that Samuel Huntington, who is referenced here and will be referenced again throughout this chapter, represents a heavily conservative viewpoint towards immigration, assimilation, and identity.

of colonial difference. The difference between Mexico and the US, between Mexicans and Americans, can be illustrated by the rhetoric surrounding immigration.

According to Samuel Huntington, “For much of its history the United States...has been a racist nation” (53). Historically, white Americans have distinguished themselves from other ethnicities, using race and superiority as a justification for both invasion and enslavement. Thus, Americans have in many ways perpetuated the notion that Mexican immigrants are more “foreign” than their European counterparts and thus deserving of racial, cultural, and linguistic discrimination. Mexican identity is characterized by duality, the legacies of Spanish colonialism are intrinsically combined with the nation’s indigenous past; however, the US, despite its history as an English colony and comparable conquest of indigenous peoples, did not experience a similar “mixing”. Although the land of immigrants and home of the cultural “melting pot,” the US cultural imaginary lacks foundational myths of ethnic or racial mixing, myths such as that of Cortéz and La Malinche. As such, the US has remained both culturally and racially European: “The communality of difference, however, lies in that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, “America” was appropriated by intellectuals of the emerging states as different from Europe but still within the West” (Mignolo 134). Such a phenomenon is both indicative of colonial difference and holds lasting importance for immigrants, specifically those of non-European descent: “When the formal colonial states ended through wars of independence and what we today call decolonization, the colonality of power did not end; instead, Americanness’s colonality of power continued in the form of a socio-cultural hierarchy of European and non-European” (Saldívar xi). The “socio-cultural hierarchy of European and non-European” referred to by Saldívar depicts the inferiority-superiority complex that continues to dominate relations between Mexico and the United States, influencing the ways in which both Mexican immigrants and the

culture they represent are perceived. “At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Latin America still occupies a “subordinate place” in its relation to North America...and the United States continues to occupy the top place;” as such, Mexican immigrants are not only viewed as culturally, linguistically, and economically inferior but also increasingly pressured to assimilate (Saldívar xvi).

### *From Revolution to Immigration*

The first significant wave of immigration from Mexico to the US occurred during the violent Mexican Revolution of 1910. The novel by José Antonio Villarreal, *Pocho* (1959), illustrates the struggles faced by Mexican immigrant families who fled the violence that characterized their homeland throughout the years of the Revolution. Immigrant families, such as that of the novel’s protagonist, endured not only ceaseless pressure to assimilate, to reject their traditions, culture, and language, to “Americanize,” but also unwarranted and severe discrimination. In response to such discrimination, the father of the novel’s protagonist states, “All the people who are pushed around in the rest of the world come here, because here they can maybe push someone else around...That is why they teach their children to call you a cholo and a dirty Mexican...It is not in retribution because they remember they were once mistreated, my son; it is because they forget” (Villarreal 100). Mexican immigrants enter a Euro-American society in which colonial difference and dominant notions of superiority justify discrimination. Generally, Americans do not seek to understand or relate to Mexican or non-European immigrant populations; rather, in placing them in a subordinate position, Americans are able to protect, at least for the moment, their perceived dominance.



As described in the previous chapter, Mexican identity is largely defined by the nation's colonial past, a past distinguished by Spanish conquest, violence, instability, and hierarchy; however, despite a history of English colonial rule, the United States developed an entirely different relationship with colonialism, one that fostered not only a sense of cultural superiority and exceptionalism but also a desire to both conquer and colonize others. According to Mignolo, "the two Americas [exist in] terms of two languages, without questioning the fact that such a link between language and territory and such a conflict between England and Spain... was a significant point in the reordering of the modern world system and in the ways languages, subcontinental cultures, and nations were tied up together" (230). Thus, the mistreatment of Mexican immigrants in the US as noted by Villarreal is both a response to as well as a result of colonial difference, which has not only validated discrimination but has also transformed American identity.

### *"Americanization"*

In the 1910s, after the first wave of immigration from Mexico to the United States, it became evident that an immigrant's homeland affected how he or she was perceived by the American populace. According to Acuña, "In Los Angeles the rapid extension of industry causes social problems which Euroamericans blamed on the Mexicans. In placing the blame, the Euroamericans focused on the arrival of 50,000 Mexicans, while ignoring the flood of 500,000 new Euroamericans" (175). It was and in many ways continues to be racial and cultural, not spatial proximity, that marks a "good," non-threatening immigrant population. Throughout US history, immigration has been problematic, resulting in the implementation of such policies as the Immigration Act of 1924 or Johnson-Reed Act, which limited the number of immigrants

allowed to enter the United States through the implementation of national origins quotas, quotas often racially determined. The main goal of the act was “to preserve the ideal of American homogeneity,” demonstrating the ways in which immigration and the assertion of difference have been historically prevalent in US society (Office of the Historian). Mexicans have, in many ways, become the new focus of such anti-immigration policies and racist sentiments. Racially, culturally, and linguistically, Mexican immigrants differ from the majority of the American population, thus they are often viewed as threatening and the pressure to assimilate is exacerbated. Acuña elaborates by discussing the process of “Americanization,” a process designed to enforce assimilation to the dominant Euro-American culture and thus erase difference:

The advocates of Americanization said that it was necessary to give the newcomer an appreciation of the institutions of this country. Americanization programs would make the Mexican gente de razón. The objective was to get Mexicans to drop traditions and values that conflicted with American culture. Language was seen as a “very real educational barrier.” Bilingualism was a problem. (Acuña 190)

The concept of “Americanization,” which pressures immigrants to totally abandon the unique cultural identity of their homeland in order to “belong”, highlights not only colonial difference but also the rejection of dissimilar cultures. In retaining a connection to Mexico through culture and more specifically language, both Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans embody duality, fluidity of identity as represented by *mestizaje*, and potential for cultural and linguistic change, something that proves to be problematic for a dominant US culture intent upon maintaining difference. As the presence of immigrants from dissimilar cultures intensifies, the tradition of discrimination against immigrants eventually leading to acceptance is complicated;

complete assimilation to the “American way of life” overrules the appropriation of other, non-European cultures. According to Ed Morales, “America has always been a mixed race society in denial;” (59) the US, a nation traditionally comprised of immigrants, primarily views itself as a product of European ancestry and thus any encroachment, cultural or linguistic, of non-European influence is viewed as threatening and problematic. Thus, immigrants, such as those from Mexico, and cultures of non-European backgrounds are often unwelcome, resulting in the reassertion of Euro-American culture as a response to the growing influence and presence of a people perceived as historically, racially, culturally, and linguistically different.

As the influence of Mexican immigrants in the United States continues to grow, so too has the backlash against them. For many Americans, Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans represent not only a very different culture but also the threatening desire to maintain, in some way, Mexican identity, the desire not to fully assimilate or to become “American”. Consequently, they threaten to change the fabric of American society; Huntington (2004) states, “The continuation of high levels of Mexican and Hispanic immigration plus the low rates of assimilation of these immigrants into American society and culture could eventually change America into a country of two languages, two cultures, and two peoples” (256). In response to the threat of such change, Mexican culture has been rejected throughout the US as something entirely different and inadmissible, as something threatening, as something that needs to be changed. Mexico’s history as a Spanish colony, its deep connection with its indigenous roots, its cultural imaginary founded on *mestizaje*, and its language contrast greatly with that of the US; therefore, the pressure thrust upon Mexican immigrants to assimilate is immense. In order to become American or to “belong”, they must abandon their Mexican identity; Mexican

immigrants are told that in order to succeed they must fully become part of a society that views their nation, their culture, and their language as inferior, they must accept colonial difference.

Language is a key aspect of culture. As both the monolingual and bilingual Spanish-speaking population grows throughout the US due to continuous immigration from not only Mexico but also all of Latin America, language becomes a center of contention, a means of differentiation. Thus, the pressure placed upon immigrant populations by American society to not only learn English but also abandon their native tongue is vast. The novel, *The Brick People* (1988), written by Alejandro Morales chronicles the lives of and discrimination faced by Mexican immigrant workers in the US. In illustrating the perception of Mexican immigrants and their language by dominant American society, Alejandro Morales writes, “Speaking Mexican is un-American, subversive and should be declared a felony and unconstitutional. Don’t these greasers know that the official language of the United States is English?” (256). For many Americans, belonging, success, and the achievement of the American dream are contingent upon assimilation, linguistically and culturally: “There is no American dream. There is only the American dream created by an Anglo-Protestant society. Mexican-Americans will share in that dream and in that society only if they dream in English” (Huntington 256). Thus, assimilation, specifically linguistic assimilation, is critical to both success and acceptance by the dominant colonial paradigm.

The entrance of Mexican immigrants into American society continues to be marked by not only relentless pressure to assimilate but also a perceived notion of inferiority. Such a notion of inferiority has created a society in which, regardless of some level of assimilation, Mexican immigrants, their culture, and their language still do not belong. According to Macias,

High levels of immigration tend to create a heightened awareness of race and ethnicity among members of the dominant group, who perceive newcomers as reinforcing ethnic stereotypes. These, in turn, come back to negatively affect all members of the group, new and old, in the form of prejudice and discrimination. (97)

Thus, due to incessant immigration from Mexico, stereotypical perception of not only recent Mexican immigrants but also multi-generational Mexican Americans is overwhelmingly negative. Rather than embodying the hard-working, intelligent “Model Minority,” a title generally given to Asian Americans, both Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans are often dubbed with the stereotypes: lazy, unintelligent, and criminal. According to Huntington, who disregards underlying systemic issues that contribute to socioeconomic and achievement gaps, Mexican immigrants generally attain lower educational achievements, low rates of self-employment and entrepreneurship, and “are more likely to live in poverty and to be on welfare than most other groups” (235). Such perceptions of Mexican immigrants, whether stereotypical or harsh realities based on socioeconomic inequalities, solidify the American citizens’ view of themselves as superior, thus allowing blame to be placed upon immigrants for any problems facing the country, a phenomenon Macias refers to as “immigrant scapegoating” (125). As laborers willing to work for lower wages and constituents of a non-European culture, Mexican immigrants are easily blamed for the problems facing the nation. According to Morales, whose novel, *The Brick People*, chronicles the lives of Mexican immigrants working in a southern California brickyard from the 1890s to 1940s, in the eyes of many Americans, “the Mexicans were the problem: they took jobs from American workers, they were parasites on welfare rolls draining the relief funds, they were illegal aliens and should not receive any public service designated for American citizens, and they did not want to learn English” (194). Such views of

Mexican immigrants have not abated; rather, they have become not only normalized but also heightened in times of both increased illegal immigration and economic recession. The growing stigmatization towards Mexican and Latino immigrants has created a discriminatory culture in which the “prejudice directed towards them is considered by the general public to be distinct from racism. Many condone discriminatory treatment and attitudes towards immigrants that it is difficult to imagine being directed towards native-born people of color, especially African Americans” (Pulido 155). In such a culture where discrimination against Mexican immigrants is normalized and considered to be separate from racism, mass immigration from Mexico, both legal and illegal, remains one of the most controversial debates in policy making throughout the United States.

According to the 2010 US Census, 50.5 million people or 16 percent of the US population were of Hispanic origin and the majority of the nation’s growth stems from the Latino population (Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin 2011). Consequently, the issue of a Mexican or Latino America has become a contentious issue in US policymaking; as a response to economic instability, the expanding Latino population, and the subsequent growing influence of non-European cultures, the United States has implemented policies aimed at restriction. Heightened control and the construction of a border fence as well as newly implemented immigration reform laws illustrate both the continuity of colonial difference and the reassertion of a Euro-American identity which is often perceived as greatly threatened. As the number of Mexican immigrants throughout the US increases, so too does “the alarmists' fear of a foreign country” and thus the desire to assert a staunch Euro-American identity and the willingness to place blame upon immigrants for the nation’s economic and social ills (Levine 99). Both the border fence and immigration laws demonstrate the desire to “Americanize” a nation that is

increasingly becoming influenced by cultures characterized as indigenous rather than European, a nation that is increasingly becoming “Mexican”. Thus, colonial difference is employed as a means to separate the “American” way of life from the legacies of conquest and the hierarchical nature of colonization so deeply connected to Mexican identity. The distinction between the US and Mexico, between the colonizer and the colonized is reinforced.

### *The Globalized Border*

In a globalized world, “the idea of motion is crucial to the idea of the border, a place defined by an arbitrary line that cannot stop the movement of people and capital” (Ed Morales 119). According to Adalberto Aguirre (2008), “The U.S.-Mexico border engenders a discourse that encompasses the social, economic, political, and physical confines of social and geographical space” (99). However, the racial, cultural, and linguistic differences that accompany immigration and can be perceived as threatening to a traditional “American” way of life have resulted in the desire to diminish such flows by the means of a border fence. In an era of heightened fear of the “other” following the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, with the presidency of George W. Bush the funding for border security was doubled to over \$10 billion, the number of Border Patrol agents was significantly increased, and more than 6 million illegal Mexican immigrants were deported. The Secure Fence Act of 2006 implemented by the George W. Bush Administration as a means to prevent both illegal border crossings and smuggling, authorized the construction of hundreds of miles of additional fencing along the Mexican border as well as the increased number of barriers and use of technology (The White House: President George W. Bush, 2006). According to Archibold and Preston (2008), nearly 700 miles of fencing, located primarily in urban areas where the numbers of undocumented immigrants is

particularly high, has been placed on the US-Mexican border. This “Great Wall of Mexico” in conjunction with increased electronic surveillance and aggressive prosecution of undocumented immigration has become central to immigration reform, solidifying the desire to keep Mexican immigrants and their culture out of the US. The physical construction of a fence along the US-Mexico border is symbolic of the construction of a psychological, cultural, and social border between the nations, a border that is intensified by anti-immigration rhetoric.

In the immigration debate, the use of terms such as “illegal” or “undocumented” carry heavy political connotations. According to Gene Demby, referring to immigrants as “illegal” has been viewed as both racialized and dehumanizing, while the use of “undocumented” has come to be viewed as a more sensitive term, a term more often used by those supportive of comprehensive immigration reform. However, the use of either “illegal” or “undocumented” when referring to immigrants in the US demonstrates the social consequences of language, reiterating difference and the belief that these immigrants do not “belong”. The border is not viewed as “a transcultural social space, with the potential for erasing the binary distinction of us and them;” rather, the border is a place in which difference can continue to be both solidified and amplified in the face of globalized processes of trade and immigration (Aguirre 101). The border fence symbolizes an attempt to assert difference, yet it is only one way in which illegal immigration and the influence of Mexican culture is being combated.

Legislation regarding immigration has become central to policymaking throughout the United States. Amidst the heaviest flows of Mexican immigrants, both documented and undocumented, in the entire United States, Arizona has become both a national and international leader in controversial immigration policies. The implementation of immigration laws in 2006 and 2008, such as Arizona SB 1070, demonstrate the overwhelming desire to curb the influence



and presence of Mexican people and their culture. A central component of Arizona SB 1070, the controversial “show me your papers” law, which provides police officers with the ability to question a person’s legal status while enforcing other, unrelated laws, has garnered both national and international attention. Although described as means to combat illegal immigration, the law has been deemed by many to be both highly prejudiced, as it seems to condone the use of racial profiling by police, and unconstitutional; however, despite the controversy surrounding Arizona’s immigration law, in 2012, the US Supreme Court upheld the provision. According to Fernanda Santos (2012), the immigration bill passed by the Arizona legislature was not only “inherently discriminatory” but also “a violation of the 14th Amendment’s equal-protection clause”. Racially, culturally, and linguistically different, Mexicans, whether American citizens or not, are not granted the same protections and rights. The controversial law, indicative of a continuing racial and cultural dichotomy based on superiority and rooted in colonial difference, asserts that Mexican immigrants, regardless of legal status, do not belong and do not deserve the same protections: “Anti-immigrant political discourse and policy practices of elite "experts" in national institutions often sustain hegemonic or domineering processes of cultural reproduction that normalize some national citizens over others (Melissa Moreno 51). According to Ewen MacAskill (2010), “The law, which gives the police the right to stop anyone they suspect is an illegal immigrant, “opens the door to intolerance, hate, discrimination and abuse in law enforcement”, Calderón [President of Mexico] said last night. Trade and political ties with Arizona would be "seriously affected", he warned”. The reaction of President Calderón demonstrates the power of discrimination in a globalized world. The rejection of and discrimination towards Mexican immigrants is representative of the broader views held in the US of the Mexican nation and culture as a whole. When Mexican immigrants face discrimination,

are denied their rights, and made to feel inferior, the burden is shared with their homeland. As the US aims to place Mexican immigrants in an inferior role, so too does it place the nation of Mexico in a similar role. The claim of superiority, a central component of colonial difference, continues to dominate not only the relationship between Mexican immigrants and dominant American society but also the relationship between Mexico and the United States. Additionally, under the Obama Administration, Secure Communities, a project aimed at identifying undocumented immigrants through the use of fingerprinting, have been expanded and 1.5 million undocumented Mexican immigrants in the US, a record number, have been deported (Preston; Dade). Thus, the assertion of difference has become an increasingly important part of being “American”.

Despite attempts to curb migration and thus the influence of Mexican cultural identity, the Spanish language and Mexican culture have undeniably become entrenched in US society; however, this entrenchment remains a relationship largely characterized by commodification<sup>38</sup> rather than by acceptance or appropriation. The staples of Mexican culture not merely present but accepted in the US are those aspects that pose no real threat to the Eurocentric order that has characterized American society since colonialism; such staples that are easily commoditized, including such things as cuisine, holidays, as well as music and dance. The prominence of Mexican restaurants<sup>39</sup> throughout the United States, the celebration of such holidays as Cinco de Mayo, and the popularity of traditional Mexican and Latino forms of music and dance demonstrate the ways in which Mexican culture has influenced American society. According to Levine,

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<sup>38</sup> Commodification refers to the process of transforming or commercializing goods, essentially stripping items such as food and cultural elements such as music of their cultural significance, homogenizing or “Americanizing” distinct cultural elements.

<sup>39</sup> It is interesting to note that Mexican cuisine is often presented or interpreted by American chefs such as Rick Bayless who specialize in traditional Mexican cuisine.

In popular culture, Mexicans and other Latinos have already made a deep impression. Food is not a bad initial index. Chains of Mexican food stands and more formal restaurants dot the road and claim their places in shopping malls; the chili-burger is on the menu of most hamburger joints; the taco has become as American as the bagel and the pizza. Sales of salsa outstrip those of ketchup. Similarly, Mexican popular music and other Latino streams have not only joined into popular music but have changed it. (103)

As Levine suggests, Mexican cuisine has become as common as that of other immigrant groups, such as Italian pastas and pizzas, and is found, in some form, in eateries throughout the United States.<sup>40</sup> Many traditional Mexican foods and drinks such as tortillas, tacos, salsa, tequila, and margaritas have become American staples, enjoyed around the nation; however, the cultural significance of such foods and food practices has been reshaped through the processes of commodification, processes often defined by conformation to the American palate. Additionally, Cinco de Mayo, a celebration of Mexican heritage and pride, is observed throughout the US by both those of Mexican and non-Mexican descent<sup>41</sup>. Popular culture has also been influenced by the influx of Mexican immigrants and culture. Bilingual television shows such as *Dora the Explorer*, music by El Vez, the recently deceased Jenni Rivera, Shakira, Jennifer Lopez, and Selena, featuring not only traditional Latino beats but also Spanish verses, and literary works written using a combination of Spanish and English demonstrate the shift to a bilingual society. As the ability to speak more than one language, and more specifically the ability to speak Spanish, comes to be viewed as a necessary skill, it has become a standard subject to be taught in schools. However, the inability to speak English or preferring to speak another language

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<sup>40</sup> The prevalence and popularity of Mexican cuisine is often geographically dependent; as such, it is often more common in the Southwestern US where the number of immigrants is highest.

<sup>41</sup> Cinco de Mayo is a unique example of cultural commodification in the US; Cinco de Mayo is avidly celebrated by both Mexicans and non-Mexicans in parts of the US, but is celebrated only minimally, if at all, in Mexico.

continues to be deemed “un-American”. As demonstrated by cuisine, pop culture, and language, through both globalization and immigration, Mexican culture has undoubtedly inundated American society. However, a strong connection to indigeneity and a *mestizo* cultural imaginary, an imaginary capable of inclusively reshaping identity, remains a central aspect of Mexican identity that continues to be rejected by the American masses; such aspects of Mexican culture are still perceived as “too different”. It seems as though Americans will readily incorporate and commodify aspects of culture that pose no real threat to colonial difference and the superiority it has provided. In acknowledging and accepting the indigenous roots of the Mexican immigrant population, Americans would be forced to reexamine not only colonialism and globalization but also the dominant US cultural imaginary and what this means for the future.

### *Forever Outsiders?*

Mexican people have been immigrating to the United States for over 100 years, returning to lands that were previously occupied by their ancestors, and yet the malevolence and discrimination towards them today remains as stringent as in the 1900s. Unlike the Irish and the Italians, immigrants of European descent, who have come to be viewed as an extension of and significant to American culture, Mexican immigrants continue to be perceived as “outsiders”. De la Garza (1998) states,

Unlike other immigrant populations, there has never been a slowing of the immigrant flow that allows U.S.-born generations to fully integrate into U.S. politics. Equally importantly, until at least 1975, the United States and the states where Mexican

Americans resided actively excluded them from equal and unfettered political participation. (402)

Consequently, it is a myth, one very threatening to the wellbeing of both immigrants and US citizens, that “they [Mexican immigrants] just have to wait for the immigrant to assimilate and they’ll be up there with the Irish and the Italians who also made it” (Acuña 464). Morales (2002), elaborates by stating, “If Americans like pizza and Frank Sinatra enough to accept Italians as “white,” it was only a matter of time before they would absorb rice and beans and Tito Puente into the pop culture canon” (72). While food and music have been absorbed, or commoditized, by American popular culture, continuous immigration has created a Mexican immigrant population that remains separate, a population that has not “made it” and perhaps never will. Over the past 100 years, the position of Mexican immigrants in the US has changed only slightly as generation after generation continues to struggle against discrimination. Such discrimination can be seen as the result of colonial difference and thus also the American perpetuation of a dichotomy of superiority and inferiority. Mexican identity, as it is defined in both Mexico and the United States, remains characterized by the legacies of colonialism, legacies that dictate the way people think not only about themselves but also about the people around them.

As Mexican identity and culture continues to be transferred into the US by immigrants, the legacies of colonialism come to the forefront of not only personal and social relationships but also policy. Immigrants have faced and continue to endure severe and unwarranted discrimination due to the racial, cultural, and linguistic differences. Additionally, the construction of the border fence and the implementation of strict immigration laws that threaten their rights as individuals residing in the US demonstrate not only the perpetuation of difference

but also the assertion of Mexican inferiority. The desire held by many Americans to retain a Euro-American way of life has been both complicated and threatened by the influx of cultures with a deep connection to their indigenous past. In an interconnected world where the Mexican culture and the Spanish language play an integral political and economic role and thus cannot be ignored, the commodification of non-threatening cultural practices rather than acceptance of cultural difference have become the norm. In rejecting the indigeneity that deeply characterizes Mexican identity, American society is essentially rejecting the Mexican people as a whole, continually defining them as inferior and perpetuating both discrimination and colonial difference. The increased levels of immigration and the growing influence of a non-European culture invoke fear in many Americans, fear of both change and a loss of superiority; however, in a globalized world this change seems to be inevitable, the mixing of cultures will become the new societal standard. Despite continuing strong anti-immigration sentiment, Mexicans will continue to immigrate to the US and will continue to bring with them the history and culture of their homeland.

The ongoing conflict between Mexicans and Americans as well as the discrimination against and distrust of Mexican immigrants is rooted in history and indicative of a changing world. As evident by the continuous immigration from Mexico to the US and the growing number and generations of Mexican Americans that reside in the United States, colonial difference is not only becoming recognizable but also eroding. The struggle of Mexican Americans to define themselves in relation to two distinct cultures through thinking beyond colonial difference, through thinking at the “border,” becomes central to understanding the inevitable mixing of Mexican and American cultures that will surely come to define the future of the United States. The plight of Mexican Americans, the subject of the following chapter,

illustrates the fusion of cultures, the creation of a unique identity, and the inevitable dismantling of colonial difference that is the result of the many complex processes of globalization, namely immigration.

### **III. The Formation of Mexican American Identity: Living, Speaking, & Thinking “Interlingually”**

Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incomparable frames of reference causes un choque, a cultural collision. –Gloria Anzaldúa

Mexican identity is characterized by duality, comprised of both its indigenous and Spanish roots, a duality that has been and continues to be rejected by a Eurocentric American society. A similar duality frequently defines the identity of Mexican Americans, who struggle to reconcile their Mexican roots with the globalized and hegemonic American culture in which they reside. Just as Mexican identity is defined by the struggle to manage a complex and opposing duality, that of indigenous and European, so too is the identity of Mexican Americans. As such, Mexican Americans signify not only the coming together of diverse cultures- indigenous, African, European, Asian- which has been made possible by the many processes of globalization, but also the discriminatory backlash such “mixing” of opposing cultures creates. As I will discuss in this chapter, in a US society fearful of both societal and cultural change, Mexican Americans are often pressured to identify with only one part of their twofold cultural identity; they are told that they must be Mexican or American, they cannot be both, the two cultures are not meant to mix. This goes against the Mexican cultural imaginary of *mestizaje*, however problematic, and replaces it with one of assimilation, of acquiescing to the expectations of dominant culture and thus losing one’s self.

The notion that one cannot be both Mexican and American is rooted in colonial dichotomies of difference, dichotomies of “us” and “them” from which the ideal of US society as a “melting pot” emerge; Herbert Humphrey, the 38<sup>th</sup> Vice President of the United States, stated, “The time has long passed when people liked to regard the United States as some kind of melting



pot, taking men and women from every part of the world and converting them into standardized, homogenized Americans” (Humphrey web).<sup>42</sup> Notwithstanding Humphrey’s proclamation, the perception and treatment of Mexican immigrants, and thus also those of Mexican ancestry as a whole, by dominant US society demonstrate the ways in which the desire to convert immigrants into “standardized, homogenized Americans” has not disappeared. Consequently, Mexican Americans, as a people neither fully Mexican nor fully American, continuously struggle to assert difference in a globalized world dominated by binary definitions of identity. Despite resistance from both sides, the harsh distinctions “us” and “them” are beginning to be redefined. Mexican Americans, most notably through their unique use of language, are challenging colonial modes of thinking and subsequently creating a new cultural identity that defies colonial hierarchies and unites “Mexicanity” and “Americanity”.

In the wake of the attrition of colonial difference, through the union of ostensibly opposing cultures, Mignolo states, “The “frontier of civilization” in the late nineteenth century has become the “borderland” of the end of the twentieth century” (299). It is from this “borderland” that Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) contemplates the formation of Mexican American identity; she states that Mexican American identity is the “lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country- a border cultura,” representing the convergence of two worlds that creates both a new world and a new people (25). The “border culture,” a culture continually blurring the line between the “Mexicanity” and “Americanity” that Anzaldúa describes illustrates the central struggle in the formation of Mexican American identity, the “dilemma of belonging” (M. Moreno, 2008, 50). This “dilemma of belonging” is complicated by the will to be different, as it is symbolized by Mexican American identity; the desire to not only create but also maintain a

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<sup>42</sup> Herbert Humphrey was the US Vice President under Lyndon B. Johnson from 1965-1969; this quote is salient not only because it recognizes the homogenizing forces that have historically characterized the ideal of the “melting pot” but also because it represents an era in US history in which drastic societal change was taking place.

unique cultural identity was and continues to be rejected in both the US and Mexico. According to Octavio Paz, “The pachuco does not want to become a Mexican again; at the same time he does not want to blend into the life of North America. His whole being is sheer negative impulse, a tangle of contradictions, an enigma” (14).<sup>43</sup> Consequently, Mexican American identity “is a displacement from one place, home, to another place, home, in which one feels at home in both places, yet at home in neither one” (Ed Morales 7). Therefore, Mexican Americans are often said to metaphorically reside at the border between Mexico and the United States, essentially acquiescing to belong nowhere. In discussing this concept of belonging, Cherrie Moraga states, “Chicanos with memory like our Indian counterparts recognize that we are a nation within a nation. An internal nation whose existence defies borders of language, geography, race” (54). In choosing to be “the embodiment of the *hieros gamos*: the coming together of opposite qualities within,” Mexican Americans personify the combination of cultures thought to be opposing, essentially alienating themselves from both Mexico and the US (Anzaldúa 41). Anzaldúa elaborates upon the isolation that accompanies duality through a combination of assimilation and refusal; she states,

Chicanos and other people of color suffer economically for not acculturating. This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity—we don’t identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don’t totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees

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<sup>43</sup> As a prominent Mexican thinker, Paz is somewhat critical of Mexican American identity, defining the “pachuco” as someone neither Mexican nor American and in a sense rejecting such an identity formation. In combining the thoughts of Paz with those of Anzaldúa, thoughts that are strikingly similar, the concept of the “definer” and the “defined” is suggested. Paz, as the definer, and Anzaldúa, as the defined, are essentially characterizing Mexican American identity in the same way, it is an identity created by opposition and contradiction; however, the divergent views regarding the acceptance of such an identity is representative of not only the resistance Mexican Americans face from Mexico, which will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter, but also the continuation of colonial difference.

of Mexicanness or Angloness. I have so much internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. *A veces no soy nada ni nadie. Pero hasta cuando no lo soy, lo soy.* (p. 85)

Thus, one of the most important thinkers regarding Mexican American identity characterizes it as an internal conflict, an engagement between opposing cultural forces in a world where the dialectical struggle is constricted by unary values espoused by dominant culture and its adherents.

Such conflict, belonging in two cultures yet accepted by neither one, results in the formation of a “double consciousness,” a term first used and developed by Du Bois (1903) in referring to the identity struggle faced by African Americans in the US:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels this twoness,-an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (web)

The concept of “double consciousness” is one that seeks to understand both cultural representation and the ways in which it dictates the formation of identity in a world still organized by lasting colonial hierarchies, a world in which “two-ness” remains highly problematic. Anzaldúa discusses the unique formation of double consciousness for Mexican Americans; she states, “Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos- that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave- *la mestiza* creates a new consciousness” (102). It is through this struggle of self and the acknowledgment

of “double consciousness” that the Mexican American identity is not only uniquely formulated, creating a new cultural distinctiveness, but also capable of constructing new ways of both speaking and thinking about the world.<sup>44</sup>

The formation of identity as “double consciousness” is demonstrated by the multiple ways in which Mexican Americans choose to refer to themselves. According to Bruce-Novoa, “to name oneself is an act of conscious self-creation” (39); thus, the issue of labeling when discussing those of both Mexican and American origin is exceedingly complex. The derogatory nature of the terms, *pocho*, popularized by Vasconcelos, and *pachuco*, popularized by Paz, demonstrates the power of labels, labels that have continuously characterized Mexicans living in the US, distinguishing them from both Mexican and Americans. Today, Mexican American, Latino, Hispanic, and Chicano are all labels that can be applied to those of Mexican and American heritage; however, each carries specific connotations that can be both embraced and rejected. The term Chicano demonstrates the variable nature of ethnic labels; according to *Educating Change: Latina Activism and the Struggle for Educational Equity*, ““Chicano” had long existed as a pejorative term among young Mexican Americans...By the 1960s, however, young Mexican Americans embraced the label, re-inscribing it with notions of pride in ones' Mexican heritage and defiance against institutions and individuals who practiced or condoned discrimination against Mexicans” (web). However, people living in some locations in the Southwest, particularly New Mexico, refer to themselves as “Hispanos” drawing a connection between themselves and Spain. This denomination has a long history related to the fact that

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<sup>44</sup> It is important to recognize that the struggle for identity is also complicated by gender. In *This Bridge Called My Back* (1984), Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa discuss the additional struggles faced by women of color, women who not only occupy an inferior place in a patriarchal society but also are subordinated by race and class. Moraga and Anzaldúa state, “We are challenging white feminists to be accountable for their racism because at the base we still want to believe that they really want freedom for all of us.” Thus, the fight against imposed inferiority and the struggle for identity in US society is increasingly complicated for women, particularly Latina women.

people living in that area wanted to reject the hegemony of Mexico and Mexico City in particular in the days before the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. As this brief synopsis shows, there is a lot of debate of “what is in a name”. Ultimately, Chicano has emerged as a widely accepted way in which to refer to those of Mexican descent; however, it is nowhere near ubiquitously accepted. Ultimately, there exists no clear label for those of Mexican and American descent, and notions of the proper way in which to refer to the population both fluctuate and vary based on personal preference. Thus, the formation of an identity rooted in “double consciousness” allows the group to identify as something distinct, but correctly labeling such distinction is often unclear and problematic.

The formation of a “double consciousness” in the minds of Mexican Americans has provided the growing group with the ability to reject the isolation that accompanies “living on the border” between two worlds. In consenting to belonging nowhere, Mexican Americans are capable of evading being perceived as a threat by not only their ethnic homeland but also the dominant US culture. However, in the face of backlash from both sides, the Mexican American population has begun to assert their “Americanness,” to assert the possibility of being American without conforming to the ideal citizen created by the total assimilation required by the “melting pot”. Mexican Americans demonstrate the possibility of difference; represent the coming together of “us” and “them,” the coming together of the Mexican and the American cultures that indicates the erosion characterizing world systems that have dominated the globe since colonialism. The struggle faced by Mexican Americans, the struggle both to be different and “to belong,” is illustrated by language.

*Language: Thinking & Speaking Interlingually*

Language is the means by which internality is communicated; thus, language is an outward and easily distinguishable representation of not only diversity but also cultural identity. As such, for immigrant populations in the United States, language is the most central component of assimilation; to “belong” in the US, one must speak English. For Mexican Americans, an English speaking population with deep cultural connections to Spanish, language is representative of an identity rooted in conflicted duality, an identity rooted in Du Bois’ concept of “double consciousness”. Just as Mexican Americans inhabit a “border culture,” so too does their language; Anzaldúa describes such language as a “border tongue” (77). The concept of living on the border has become an analogy so ubiquitous that it is widely accepted, often without promoting further inquiry; Mexican Americans and their language are confined to the border, to belonging nowhere. However, language becomes not only a means for expressing a unique cultural identity in a globalized world but also a representation of difference, of the inability to neatly integrate into the prevailing binary colonial dichotomy of “us” versus “them,” ultimately forcing the creation of another category. Mexican Americans and the language they speak become “other,” an accepted part of neither “us” nor “them”.

The United States has historically been a society not only capable of asserting its dominance, both linguistically and culturally, around the world but also, and perhaps paradoxically, fearful of losing its local identity in the face of increasing migration, a phenomenon produced by globalization. The ideal of American society as a “melting pot” that requires total assimilation is exacerbated by the incessant pressure to learn English that is thrust upon immigrant populations in the US. Although the US is in reality not a monolingual nation, the ability to speak English fluently or to choose to speak English rather than one’s native tongue

are representative of a willingness to assimilate, a representation of “belonging” to dominant US society.<sup>45</sup> The need for monolingualism and a rejection of other languages is rooted not only in a relationship of dominance and fear but also results in the perpetuation of binary colonial paradigms. Consequently, throughout US society, linguistic difference is understood by the mainstream, dominant Anglo culture as a failure to or a lack of assimilation by immigrant populations. According to de la Garza (1998), “Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans are so intertwined- they are neighbors, they work together and for each other, they intermarry and, to non-Latinos, they are often indistinguishable;” thus, for many Mexican Americans, choosing to preserve the Spanish language sets them apart, diminishing the extent of which they are perceived by American society as “belonging” (408). Language becomes a means of distinction between who “belongs” and who does not; according to Bruce-Novoa (1990), “Non-Hispanics conceive of Chicanos and other Latinos who maintain our language both in speaking and writing as recent immigrants” (42) even if they have resided in the US for generations. Such categorizing of Spanish speaking Mexican Americans as newly arrived immigrants demonstrates the ways in which language is deeply imbedded in the perception of cultural identity. Speaking or writing in Spanish is perceived by dominant US society as characteristic of cultural distance; thus, those who choose to communicate or express themselves in Spanish are more “Mexican” than “American”. Consequently, Mexican Americans are subject to displacement as their linguistic choices effectively strip them of their “Americanness”.

Despite, citizenship and the ability to speak English, the use of Spanish continues to mark Mexican Americans as different or not fully assimilable to dominant US society. Consequently, the superiority attributed to monolingual English speaking ethnic populations is reminiscent of

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<sup>45</sup> Although an overwhelming majority of the US population speaks English and it is considered, in practice, to be the national language of the United States, the US has no official language. There have been Congressional efforts to nationally adopt English as the official language of the US; however, no such provision has been enacted.

why many multi-generational immigrant groups, such as Mexican Americans, have either wholly or partially abandoned the Spanish language and culture it signifies. Mexican Americans are often faced with assumptions that they behave in certain ways, cook certain foods, and are able to speak Spanish: “A lot of people assume I know how to cook certain types of food or that I should behave a certain way...People always assume that Mexican Americans have to speak Spanish with every generation, and they don’t do that with other nationalities” (Macias 108).

However, many multi-generational Mexican Americans are not only unable to communicate in the Spanish language but also isolated from the Mexican culture. Similarly, in his novel, *Pocho*, Villarreal illustrates the unconscious ease in which assimilation can take place, resulting in the loss of cultural connections such as language; in examining the pressure to assimilate thrust upon Richard, the novel’s protagonist, Villarreal writes:

It saddened him [Richard] to see the Mexican tradition begin to disappear. And because human nature is such, he, too, succumbed and unconsciously became an active leader in the change... “But this is America, Father,” said Richard. “If we live in this country, we must live like Americans.” (132-133)

Villarreal demonstrates the loss of cultural associations that accompany life in a society highly intolerant of difference; as such, the inability to speak Spanish also becomes representative of the dynamics attributing to the unique formation of Mexican American identity in the US. The loss of native language can be attributed by dominant American society to “successful” assimilation; however, due to the continuous flow of newly arriving Mexican immigrants to the US, Mexican Americans constantly come into contact with both the Spanish language and the culture it represents thus often evoking a sense of guilt in the loss of a principle connection to their Mexican heritage. In his sociological study of third-plus generation Mexican Americans in the



suburban Southwest, Macias identifies the lack of Spanish language use in many Mexican American households as well as a “common sentiment of loss among many of the respondents with regard to Spanish-language ability and ambivalence toward their parents for not passing this key cultural attribute onto their children” (33). Notwithstanding the occasional, and perhaps unintentional, “negative associations with the Spanish language” presented by the parents of those Mexican Americans “who grew up in an English-dominant social context,” being unable to fluently speak Spanish or lacking other forms of cultural knowledge has become a source of deprivation for many Mexican Americans (34). Such cultural disconnections, resulting from high levels of assimilation, have resulted in not only a sense of loss but also tensions between Mexican Americans and the Mexican people, both newly arrived immigrants to the US and nationals.

Mexican Americans, both those who speak Spanish and those who lament the loss of their ancestral tongue, face disapproval; as dominant US culture praises the use of English and admonishes the use of Spanish by Mexican American populations, Mexican society finds both linguistic assimilation and the transformation of the Spanish language to be problematic, a rejection of their ancestry and ethnic homeland. Although the reality of the existing tensions between Mexican Americans and Mexicans is extremely complex, connected to historical, racial, linguistic, and cultural hierarchies, Gómez-Peña states, “In Mexico, people still operate with a very simplistic vision of Chicanos. People believe that all Chicano artists use nationalist symbols from Mexican official culture...and that all of them speak Spanish poorly and voluntarily reject Mexico” (in Fusco 161). In the eyes of many Mexicans, Mexican Americans have lost their “Mexicanity,” have become part of the dominant US culture that has continually enforced colonial dichotomies of superiority and inferiority. Such perceptions of Mexican

Americans are illustrated in Ana Castillo's *Mixquiahuala Letters*. The novel describes the journey of and relationship between two fiercely independent women, Teresa and Alicia, as they seek to find a true sense of self, a journey that brings them from the United States to Mexico. Upon arriving in Mexico and meeting the family with whom she would stay, the novel's protagonist, Teresa, a Mexican American woman, states, "Didn't they tell anything by my Indian-marked face, fluent use of language, undeniably Spanish name? Nothing blurred their vision of another gringa come to stay as I nodded and shook their hands" (25). As a Mexican American woman, Teresa was returning to her ethnic, cultural, and linguistic homeland, only to discover that in Mexico she was not considered Mexican; she was an outsider, an American. Cherrie Moraga elaborates on such tensions and perceptions; she states, "Among Indians in México, I am guera, ladina, extranjera, not to be trusted" (116). Both Castillo and Moraga demonstrate the tensions and contradictions felt by many Mexican Americans, a populace fully embraced by neither dominant American nor dominant Mexican society.

Additionally, Mexican Americans have been both criticized and satirized by many prominent Mexican thinkers, including Vasconcelos and Paz, for their use and transformation of the Spanish language. The Spanish used by many Mexican Americans diverges from the ideal of purity in language; consequently, Mexican American or "Chicano cultural production" is often viewed as inferior (Bruce-Novoa, 1990, 39). In discussing the impacts of both rejection and perceived inferiority upon the formation of Mexican American identity, Bruce-Novoa (1982) states, "That Mexicans abhor what they call our deterioration of their language and culture explains the pain involved in becoming ourselves" (13). As Mexican Americans are told that their use of Spanish and their version of the Mexican culture are inferior, the struggle to reconcile their Mexican and American roots becomes increasingly complicated; Fusco states,

“Chicanos continue to resent the scorn Mexicans feel towards them because of their Spanish and that is a really infected wound” (161). Both linguistically and culturally, Mexican Americans face rejection from both parts of themselves. In choosing to maintain the Spanish language, Mexican Americans become unable to fully “belong” to American society; yet, they are criticized by their Mexican counterpart for either abandoning or a perceived inferior retention and use of the language of their ethnic homeland.

Whether speaking English or Spanish, Mexican Americans face both conflict and backlash for their linguistic choices, ultimately resulting in the formation of a new linguistic and cultural identity. Unlike other ethnic populations within the US, Mexican Americans are constantly exposed to the cultural and linguistic heritage of their ancestral homeland, resulting in both connection to and dislocation from the culture symbolized by the Spanish language. Due in part to the rejection that has characterized the use of both English and Spanish by Mexican Americans, the population has come to symbolize a people and a language caught between the poles of the dominating binary system, caught between English and Spanish, caught between the Mexican and the American cultures. Speaking of this position with regard to language, Bruce-Novoa characterizes Chicano culture positively as “interlingual,” a population that defies traditional linguistic, and thus also cultural, paradigms through mixing rather than switching between English and Spanish (37). According to Bruce-Novoa,

Languages are opposed in pairs, and to be bilingual is to switch codes from one to another, not to mix them...The space between the languages is a forbidden zone of neither this nor that. Those who practice a type of speech located in the zone of mixture are linguistic outlaws for the purists at either pole (33)

Interlingualism “rejects the supposed need to maintain English and Spanish separate in exclusive codes, but rather sees them as reservoirs of primary material to be molded together as needed, naturally, in the manner of common speech” (Bruce-Novoa 50). To be interlingual is not only to be on the border of two languages, on the border of two cultures but also to mold language and use it effectively. Mexican Americans, being neither fully American nor fully Mexican, “claim legitimate residence in the space between the poles, and from there they demand and exercise the right to self-determination” (Bruce-Novoa 38). Through a combination of assimilation and refusal associated with living, speaking, and thinking between languages, Mexican Americans have created not only a hybrid language but also a hybrid cultural identity.

According to Anzaldúa, the creation of a hybrid language, one combining both Spanish and English as well as the distinct cultures each represents, provides Mexican Americans with a language they “can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves- a language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés*, but both” (77). Because Mexican Americans repudiate the binary linguistic and cultural paradigms created by colonialism, language becomes representative of not only an internal identity struggle but also the forging of a new culture, affirming that “it is possible for new cultures to emerge without the loss or abandonment of the old” (Flores 189). Consequently, Mexican Americans often demonstrate their dualistic identity, an identity indicative of the coming together of so-called opposing cultures, through the use of language. “My Graduation Speech” by the Puerto Rican poet, Jesús Abraham “Tato” Laviera, demonstrates the complexity of living and thinking between two languages, between two cultures. Laviera’s “My Graduation Speech, shown in part below, illustrates not only how cultural difference is symbolized in linguistic difference but also

the inability of Latino Americans to separate the two languages and two cultures from which they are a product:

i think in spanish  
i write in english  
i want to go back to puerto rico,  
but i wonder if my kink could live  
in ponce, maygüez and carolina  
tengo las venas aculturadas  
escribo en spanglish  
abraham in español  
abraham in english  
tato in spanish  
“taro” in english  
tonto in both languages

Laviera’s “My Graduation Speech” recognizes not only how both thought and meaning are affected by the language in which they are voiced but also how language can represent the inability to “belong,” the inability to conform to a single language or culture when one is the product of two. Though Laviera is Puerto Rican, he speaks of a similar plight faced by many Latinos in the US. Mexican Americans are an “interlingual” population, often speaking in English but constantly thinking in terms of two languages, living in a world continually dominated by binary descriptions of both language and culture, a world in which colonial dichotomies of “us” and “them” persist. According to Mignolo,

The celebration of bi or pluri language is precisely the celebration of the crack in the global process between local histories and global designs, between “mundalización” and globalization, from languages to social movements, and a critique of the idea that civilization is linked to the “purity” of colonial and national monolingualism. (250)

Thus, Mexican American identity, an identity rooted in both assimilation and refusal, is indicative of a not only a “linguistic intermixture of ethnic and mainstream languages” illustrating “the changing languages of America” but also a newly emerging dialectic (Saldívar

11-12). Consequently, through the formation of a Mexican American cultural identity, the seemingly clear distinctions between Mexican and American cultures, between Spanish and English, distinctions created and perpetuated by colonial dichotomies of superiority, have begun to erode.

### *The Erosion of Colonial Difference*

The Chicano Movement of the 1960s, often referred to as *El Movimiento*, demonstrates the ways in which thinking “interlingually” or thinking from colonial difference enabled Mexican Americans to challenge systemic injustices and discrimination, to empower themselves and assert their influence upon American society. The activism that spurred the Chicano Movement predates the 1960s; however, it is in this decade of radical social change that the Mexican American populace loudly declared not only self-determination but also their ethnic pride, a pride in their indigeneity, a pride in what dominant American society so readily rejected. In calling themselves “Chicano”, the Mexican American populace adopted what was for many a historically derogatory term used to refer to the children of Mexican immigrants; thus, not only accepting but also asserting their seemingly opposing nature as both Mexican and American. Through this declaration of pride and unity in the face of discrimination, Mexican Americans asserted their unique cultural identity. The poem, “I am Joaquin,” by the Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, a leader of the Chicano Movement, defines what it means to be Chicano and demonstrates not only the pressure to assimilate to dominant American culture but also the staunch refusal held by many Mexican Americans to do so, the desire to maintain a connection with their ancestral heritage. The following excerpt from Gonzales’s poem illustrates the refusal

to assimilate, the duality that comprises Mexican American identity, as well as the determination that characterized the Chicano Movement:

I am the masses of my people and  
I refuse to be absorbed.  
I am Joaquín.  
The odds are great  
But my spirit is strong,  
My faith unbreakable,  
My blood is pure.  
I am Aztec prince and Christian Christ.  
I SHALL ENDURE!  
I WILL ENDURE!

Gonzales's poem demonstrates the unity that drove the Chicano Movement as it sought to challenge the Euro-centrism that dominated US society and subsequently validated both discrimination and injustice. The Chicano Movement sought to end discrimination in schools through educational reform, addressed the plight of farmworkers, and sought political empowerment, most notably through the formation of La Raza Unida Party and collaboration with the Brown Berets. Additionally, many radicals of the Chicano Movement sought to return to Aztlán, to return to and reclaim the ancestral land of the American Southwest that was taken from Mexico under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The Chicano Movement was an era of ethnic pride, an era of unity, and an era of change. As Chicanos challenged prevailing attitudes of assimilation and what it meant to be an "American" in the 1960s, they thought both beyond and from colonial difference.

Mexican American identity, as defined through the concept of "interlingualism," and asserted in the Chicano Movement allows the growing group to view themselves as American, yet to maintain a distinctive connection to a racial, cultural, and linguistic identity that has been traditionally viewed as "un-American". For example, Cherrie Moraga refers to herself as "an *Américan con acento*" (62). Despite continuing to be viewed as "other" by dominant US society

due to their linguistic or cultural connections to Mexico, a nation which has traditionally been viewed as inferior, Mexican Americans, as US citizens, emphasize their Americanness. Moreno (2008) states, “Though not accepted as normalized US citizens, they [Mexican Americans] remain loyal to US society” (68). The desire to assert not only this sense of loyalty to the US but also the notion that Mexican Americans are significant members of the United States regardless of their distinct, non-European heritage is illustrated in Alejandro Morales’ novel, *The Brick People*. The enlistment of one of the novel’s characters, Wally Pedroza, in the US military symbolizes the ways in which the coming together of seemingly opposing cultures does not necessitate betrayal or disloyalty towards one or the other: “He decided to go [to war] so that the gringos would understand that the Mexicans feel just as American as they do” (253). Consequently, Mexican Americans are beginning to redefine not only what it means to be American but also what it means to be an ethnic population living in the US.

Mexican Americans have forged a new linguistic and cultural identity, declining to endure the “excruciating pain of being melted down and re-poured into a different mold” that has traditionally accompanied assimilation into US society (Bruce-Novoa 9). Rather, Mexican Americans have uniquely fused the Mexican and American cultures, asserting that you can belong to one country, yet simultaneously preserve and identify with the culture of another; thus, not only erasing the dichotomy of “us” versus “them” and the perpetuation of colonial difference that has characterized global identities and politics for centuries but also preserving the foundational myth of *mestizaje*. The struggle to not only assert but also maintain a cultural and linguistic identity is complicated by discrimination and nationalism, on both sides of the border. The concept of Mexican Americans inhabiting the “border,” of being a people belonging “nowhere” is indicative of the singular standards that have been placed upon identity, culture,



and language. Mexican Americans inhabit the area between “Mexicanity and “Americanity” and that is not nowhere; rather, it is a site of formation, the place in which a both a new language and a new cultural identity are both created and implemented. In choosing to embrace duality, in speaking and thinking interlingually, Mexican Americans are challenging long-established world views, challenging the binary notions of cultural identity- “us” versus “them,” European versus non-European- that have dominated global systems since the colonial era. Mexican Americans not only demonstrate the complexity of cultural identity as it exists in an increasingly globalized world but also symbolize the coming together of “us” and “them,” a union characterized by backlash from both sides.

## Conclusion

America, as a cultural space, will not need to compete with a host of global identities and diasporic loyalties. It might come to be seen as a model of how to arrange one territorial locus (among others) for a cross-hatching of diasporic communities. –Arjun Appadurai

In 1960, there were 576,000 native-born Mexicans residing in the United States or 5.9 percent of the foreign born population; in 2006, 11.5 million native-born Mexicans were residing in the United States, accounting for over 30 percent of the US foreign born population (Solimano 130). Despite ebbs and flows in the rates of immigration, the numbers of native-born Mexicans and Mexican Americans residing in the US are increasing. Consequently, the unique local history, culture, and language of Mexico are continuously transported across the border. Similar to the United States' ideal of an inclusion of diverse groups into a melting pot, the history of Mexico can be characterized as one of conquest, colonialism, and hierarchy that ultimately results in a Mexican identity in tumult, an identity rooted in the struggle to coalesce the opposing, the indigenous and the European. As the legacies of colonialism continue to dictate the formation of Mexican identity, in part due to its problematic relationship to the US, Mexican identity includes both a perceived sense of inferiority and a reassertion of nationalistic pride. Thus, as Mexican culture and identity are brought to the US through the globalized processes of trade and immigration, both the perpetuation of and struggle against colonial difference emerges. The influx of the Mexican culture and the Spanish language in the US, due largely to the process of immigration, are challenging prevailing colonial dichotomies, seeking to transform imaginaries of identity and the nation, and struggling to change the fabric of dominant American society.

In an effort to resist the infiltration of “Mexicanity” as it is transported across the border through immigration, the US has both excluded and commoditized Mexican culture, enforcing

assimilatory practices and accepting only those cultural customs that seem to pose little danger to the current order of dominant US society, a society traditionally rooted in Anglo-European culture and thought. Due to the ceaseless nature of immigration from Mexico to the US and the geographic proximity of the two nations, both the Mexican immigrant the Mexican American populations have come to be perceived by a traditional Anglo-European society as entirely different, as problematic, as “un-American”. As a result, the perpetuation of colonial difference has emerged as a way in which to promote assimilation, though the perpetuation of hierarchical colonial dichotomies, and thus combat the perceived threat of racial, cultural, and linguistic change present within the US. In the wake of high levels of immigration, specifically from Latin America, such assertion of “Americanness” has resulted in both normalized discrimination and the perpetuation of colonial dichotomies of “us” and “them”. The notion of the “American” and who qualifies to be considered as such becomes highly problematic. According to Arjun Appadurai,

The politics of ethnic identity in the United States is inseparably linked to the global spread of originally local national identities. For every nation-state that has exported significant numbers of its populations to the United States...there is now a delocalized, transnation, which retains a special ideological link to a putative place of origin, but is otherwise a thoroughly diasporic collectivity. No existing conception of Americanness can contain this large variety of trans-nations. (804)

Thus, if immigrant communities, both recent and multigenerational, are ever to belong, “Americanness,” as it is currently understood, must be re-imagined. The unique formation of Mexican American identity has challenged such ways of thinking, reordering US imaginaries of nation and identity.

The Mexican American population not only demonstrates the possibility of thinking from and thus beyond colonial difference but also represents the changing face of the “American”. According to Appadurai, “New ethnicities are direct products of and responses to the policies of various nation-states over the last century or more” (799). Thus, Mexican American identity, as it has been created through duality and opposition, is a direct product of both the hierarchical colonial history of Mexico and the incessant assimilatory practices of the United States. The Mexican American populace represents the possibility of being culturally and linguistically different while simultaneously “belonging” and holding a sense of loyalty to the United States. Mexican Americans throughout the United States have not only begun to formulate a new identity in which both parts of themselves, Mexican and American, are represented but also asserted the possibility of a thriving US society rooted in cultural and linguistic diversity, a diversity distinct from that associated with the excessively assimilatory nature of the “melting pot”. Therefore, Mexican Americans, through speaking, thinking, and living “interlingually,” are challenging the current notion of what it means to be an “American,” changing the collective imagination of the US.

According to Appadurai, “The modern nation-state, in this view, grows less out of natural facts—such as language, blood, soil and race—and more as a quintessential cultural product, a product of the collective imagination” (799). Whether due to the inevitability of drastic demographic shifts within the US or a possible growing acceptance of difference, the US imaginary that dictates the formation of not only national identity but also transnational relationships is changing. As Mexican Americans are able to think *from* and thus repudiate colonial difference, the US national imaginary can no longer be based solely upon Anglo-European imaginaries; rather, it must incorporate the racial, cultural, and linguistic difference

associated with immigration in a globalized world. The growth, both numerically and influentially, of the Mexican American populace signifies the erosion of colonial difference as well as the struggle to assert a new identity, a new imaginary. The Mexican American populace is asserting its place in American society, rejecting total assimilation and protesting the ways in which they are perceived. Mexican Americans are racially, linguistically, culturally, and politically, redefining the United States.

### *Politics of Change*

The Mexican American population has the potential to challenge dominant US national imaginaries regarding what it means to be “American” due in large part to the group’s unique demographics. Today, the United States’ largest minority group, representing 16% of the US population, is comprised of Latinos, and nearly two-thirds of Latinos residing in the US self-identify as being of Mexican origin (Pew 2012). The sheer numbers of the Mexican origin population are compounded by the group’s concentration in the western US, most predominately in California where Los Angeles County is home to a Mexican origin population of over 3.5 million. Both the size and geographic concentration of the United States’ Mexican origin population demonstrate the group’s potential for influence.

The recognition of and the possibility of thinking from colonial difference is exhibited in the changing attitudes and policies toward immigrants in California. As a state that sustains one of the highest numbers of both recent Latino immigrants and US citizens of Latin American descent in all of the United States, California is “America fast-forward,” demographically, socially, and politically (Medina web). According to Jennifer Medina,

The state's changing attitudes are driven, in large part, by demographics. In 1990, Latinos made up 30 percent of the state's population; they will make up 40 percent — more than any other ethnic group — by the end of this year, and 48 percent by 2050, according to projections made by the state this month. This year, for the first time, Latinos were the largest ethnic group applying to the University of California system. (web)

As high levels of immigration dramatically reshape the demographics of California, the employment of colonial difference and the normalization of racist attitudes toward Latino immigrants in the US become increasingly impractical. María Elena Durazo, the executive secretary-treasurer of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, stated, “For a long time, we [first and multi-generational Latino immigrants] were living in no more than four or five states, but now, we are in the smallest towns of Georgia and Alabama. And once we're there, it gets harder to ignore or hope that immigrants will just go away” (Medina web). The assertion of difference in response to the infiltration of a distinct cultural heritage, local history, and language is no longer applicable as a growing percentage of the American population identifies, in some way, with the nations of Latin America. Consequently, a growing portion of the US population is also capable of engaging with Mignolo's notion of “border gnosis,” able to think from and thus challenge colonial difference as it is employed, socially and politically, throughout the US. As a result, in some places, the dominant attitudes toward Latino immigrants are beginning to shift. Immigrants are no longer exclusively perceived as threatening or burdensome by dominant US society; rather, they are coming to be perceived by some as a beneficial addition. Such shifts in attitude, although not found nationwide, are representative of the possibility of dismantling of colonial difference and re-envisioning of an Anglo-European national imaginary, an imaginary that is becoming increasingly inapplicable to large portion of the US population.

According to Suarez-Orozco and Paez, “Latinos today are players in social spaces where racial and ethnic categories have high-stakes political and economic implications” (5). As demographic and social change begins to redefine the US population, politics, at both state and national levels, illustrate the growing influence of the Latino community, a populace with the power to not only greatly influence election results but also incite comprehensive immigration reform. The re-election of President Barack Obama in 2012 was largely attributable to his securing of the Latino vote; record numbers of Latino Americans voted in the 2012 presidential election, 71 percent of which voted for President Obama. According to Preston and Santos, the Latino vote was instrumental in “tipping the balance in at least three swing states” and “securing their [Latino Americans] position as an organization force in American politics with the power to move national elections” (web). Thus, appealing to the desires of the growing Latino population, a powerful emerging voting bloc, has become central to winning elections, both at the state and national levels. Additionally, increasing numbers politicians are of Mexican or Latin American descent. Due to high levels of immigration, the Latino American population has become not only culturally and linguistically but also politically influential, representing the possibility of inciting change through thinking from colonial difference.

The growing political influence of the Latino American community has also contributed, in some US communities and states, to a decline of dominant anti-immigrant sentiments and a new openness toward comprehensive national immigration reform. Merely six years ago, in 2007, immigration reform was popularly characterized by restriction as “limitation on immigration, either by tightening border security or imposing criminal penalties on illegal immigrants” was the governing standard (Hayes web). However, today, more elected officials, both Republicans and Democrats, seem to be publically advocating for the implementation of

comprehensive immigration reform. Despite the support currently surrounding proposed immigration reform, the plan presently fails to address critical issues such as normalized racism as well as the many exploitations and abuses often faced by immigrants throughout the US. Additionally, whether the current plan for comprehensive immigration reform will pass or have the desired outcome remain highly uncertain.

Although the outcome of proposed immigration reform is tentative and positive perceptions of Latino immigrants are not seen nationwide, the phenomenon of immigration from Mexico to the US has ultimately contributed to the possibility of one day dismantling colonial tensions and reimagining both the nation and identity. Although nowhere near universal, the increasingly positive opinions of immigrants in some parts of California and the rising political influence of Latino Americans demonstrate the inevitability of change; however, the continuance of anti-immigrant sentiments and racism reveal that such change will not be immediate. As Mexican Americans have employed their ability to think from colonial difference and asserted their unique cultural and linguistic identity, it is becoming less and less realistic for dominant US society to utilize the coloniality of power as a way in which to affirm difference. Mexican Americans and the complex cultural identity they represent, an identity that symbolizes the coming together of “us” and “them,” is becoming a flourishing and influential segment of the US population. The legacies of colonialism and colonial difference are deeply rooted in the current world system; as such, the struggle to assert a unique cultural identity is complex. However, colonial difference demonstrates not only why hierarchical and discriminatory views towards Mexican immigrants exist throughout the United States but also how, through border thinking, positive change can be enacted and the nation can be more inclusively re-imagined. However, as issues of race, class, and gender continue to dictate many aspects of US society, it is uncertain



when and how Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans will be accepted as positive additions to or truly “belonging” to American society. Despite the uncertainties of when and how, immigration from Mexico will undoubtedly continue to change the fabric of US society as the perpetuation of colonial difference vanishes and new cultural identities emerge.

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