The racialization of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans: 1890s–1930s

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the basic processes of racialization. The paper begins by analyzing how Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans were racialized during the first decades of the 20th century. This was a significant time, when the ideologies of scientific racism and imperialism became part of the popular culture; it was also a time when Puerto Ricans and Mexicans were being colonized, both in their nations of origin and in their diasporic homelands. While there is some significant descriptive work on contemporary racialization in the Chicano and Boricua experience, very little comparative and theoretical understanding of this period of American history has been made.
Racialization is a process that includes socialization into a culture signified by race, with individuals internalizing patterns of behavior and thought that contribute to their own subordination and to the perpetuation of the system.

**Scope and concepts**
Renato Rosaldo (1987) developed the useful notion of “cultural citizenship.” This idea is central to how we understand racialization. For Rosaldo, racialization is challenged by a whole range of strategies and practices, which allow a group to establish a contested territory or social space, in which Latinos can challenge and survive subordination. The process of creating a social space is called “cultural citizenship.”

Efforts challenging racialization include resisting the polarized system of racial categories in the United States.

A recent attempt to utilize Rosaldo’s concept is found in William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor (1997). However, while these narratives serve as data for work on the comparative dialectic of racialization, which is in its core a process of creating meaning, one must use a comparative approach.

Early work on the racialization of African Americans was conducted by W.E.B. Du Bois in his classic treatise *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903). In this work, he introduced the concept of “double consciousness” as a pivotal component of racialization. However, while much can be gleaned from the African American experience, the racialization of Latin American people requires a historically specific and comparative approach to be understood.

It is important to recognize that the racialization of Africans occurred in a comparative taxonomy that included whites as the “non-other.” As Haney Lopez (1996) has revealed, the legal process of determining which immigrants were “white” (so that they could be naturalized as U.S. citizens) implicitly recognized the dialectic of racialization:

No court offered a complete typology listing the characteristics of Whiteness against which to compare the petitioner. Instead, the courts defined “white” through a process of negation, systemically identifying who was non-White.

This means that if we are to understand racialization, we must do it in a comparative way. We need to see the striking similarities and differences that occur in the racialization of groups. In the United States, the “black/white” relationship was the foundation for the construction of the racial grid of the United States.
The experience of people of Latin American origin is so very significantly different, a different framework is required. Additionally, people of Latin American origin have been incorporated into the racial grid in more diverse ways. Some came from nations or regions that were conquered and colonized as the United States expanded. This meant that while the relationship of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans with the United States was similar, it was not exactly the same as that of European immigrants. For example, the trauma of the African middle passage was not part of their historical memory as a group. Instead, many persons of Latin American origin came to the United States strongly believing in the American Dream. There was no possible American Dream for enslaved Africans.

The racialization of people of Latin American origin (in particular Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans) was also distinct from the racialization of others in the United States because emigrating Latinos came from countries where miscegenation was common and where the idea of mestizaje was part of nation-building efforts (Klor de Alva 1997). Furthermore, their racial hierarchies, contrary to the polarized system of the United States, had intermediate or gray categories for people of mixed ancestry. This allowed for a more fluid and complex system of racial classification.

In Benedict Anderson's terms (1991), Mexico imagined itself as a mestizo nation and incorporated Mexicans of African descent into the concept of the mestizaje. Therefore, the tercera raza (African) is conspicuously absent from the Mexican imaginary. In Puerto Rico, the racial system was not a bifurcated system of categories, making it easier to move from one racial category to a more prestigious status. The Puerto Rican racial hierarchy was not based on an either/or framework but rather a series of racial categories constructed to move into whiter categories; in the United States, however, “passing” was only possible in exceptional circumstances. The extensive experience of miscegenation among Latinos has led to a strong challenge regarding this “othering” process, especially in response to the bureaucratic racializing of the U.S. Census Bureau. In recent decades, 42.2 percent of Latinos, when asked to choose a racial category for the census, have chosen the category “other” instead of black, white, or American Indian. And in the 2000 US Census more than 80.5 percent of Puerto Ricans in the island chose “white” when asked to answer the racial categories question, given for the first time since 1950. In contrast, only 46.4 percent of Puerto Ricans in the mainland chose to describe themselves as white, while 38.2 percent chose “other” (Inter-University Program for Latino Research 2002). This is a trend that, according to Duany (2002), signifies a gap in the outcome of the racialization experience of Boricuas in Puerto Rico and those in the United States.

**Historical scope**

The comparative look at racialization for Puerto Ricans focuses on the period after the Spanish-American War of 1898 and until the 1930s for a number of reasons. While Puerto Ricans had engaged in significant trade relations with the United States during the latter part of the 19th century, it is not until the conquest and occupation of the island that Puerto Ricans as a collective were significantly drawn into the process of racialization. It is during this period that racialization is established through the creation of bifurcated racial categories and a biological ideology that ascribes differences to immutable biological characteristics. A qualitative change in racialization took place between the Spanish and Anglo Saxon periods in the island. After the abolition of slavery in 1873 in Puerto Rico, Puerto Ricans of African descent experienced a relative rise in social status. In Puerto Rico, intermarriage was more common, and the skills acquired by enslaved Africans in the plantation economy, coupled with the existence of a significantly large population of free blacks, eased their gradual although subordinated integration into Puerto Rico's society.

Meanwhile, the United States' influence in the island, especially its racial paradigm, was not as pervasive as in Cuba. Unlike Cuba, which was very much in the American consciousness, Puerto Rico was not in the public imagination of the United States. The end of the “Splendid Little War” brought Puerto Rico to a more visible place in the United States imagination as the issue of citizenship and future political status became part of the political discourse (Cabranes 1979). It also brought Puerto Rican culture into direct contact with the racial paradigm of the United States. It is during this period that racialization in Puerto Rico begins to change, becoming more and more a part of the bifurcated racial system of the United States, whose understanding of biological differences are signified and encoded in ways that shape the racialization of Puerto Ricans.
“Mexican,” then, becomes a racial category rather than an ethnic descriptor. The process of racialization of Mexicans was quite advanced in Southern California by the end of the century. On August 20, 1892, Francisco Torres accidentally killed the foreman of a ranch in Modjeska Canyon (Orange County, California), where he was a ranch hand. A posse was organized, and Torres was captured and lynched, with a sign hung around his dead body saying “change of venue.” The reference was in response to efforts to have him tried elsewhere. The *Santa Ana Standard* wrote:

Torres was a low type of Mexican race, and was evidently more Indian than white. True to his savage nature he had no more regard for human life than for the merest trifle... He belongs to a class of outlaws in southern California and old Mexico. (Acuña 1988: 129)

By the 1890s, Mexicans had reached the status of a racial group in the United States; their previously held intermediate position in the racial hierarchy now gave rise to a new, more modern form of subordination. In Puerto Rico, however, while Puerto Ricans had been racialized, they still did not achieve the fully racialized status Mexican Americans had in the U.S. For Puerto Ricans in the mainland, their racialization was more intensive than for those in the island but less intensive than for Mexican Americans.

**Social theory, racialization, and popular culture**

Clara Rodríguez (2000: ix) recently argued that much work in the area of racialization is not theoretically rigorous. It is necessary to contribute to that process of theoretical grounding and clarification—not only because it makes a scholarly contribution, but also because it clarifies how theory has insinuated itself in to popular culture. No project can achieve this without having an awareness of the history of the process. It is unfortunate that only until very recently have sociologists and other social scientists begun to deconstruct the racialized character of the content and context of the origins of social science. The period in which sociology developed its fundamental character in the United States is also the period in which scientific racism and imperialist ideology developed, crystallized, and perhaps more important, permeated the popular culture of the West. This blind spot in social theory is illustrative of how steeped
That is why Spencer is crucial. His work most likely reached a wider audience than any other sociologist of his time, especially in the United States. He completed a 12-volume compendium of sociological analysis of every major area of knowledge, from psychology to ethics, from biology to philosophy. Andrew Carnegie, the United States millionaire, brought Spencer to the United States, where he became very popular on the lecture circuit. His foundation was very prominent in contributing to the development of the eugenics movement in the United States.16

Interacting and mutually supporting each other, a strong anti-immigrant, nativistic movement, along with the popularization of pseudoscientific racist thinking, became part of mainstream discourse in the United States. These prejudices were evident in congressional debates, pedagogical practices, and public discourse. Whites, as products of a socializing process that normalized racial thinking and transformed it into “common sense,” brought to their relationships with Puerto Ricans and Mexicans a paradigm steeped in the culture of casual racism. White people were socialized into the culture and acquired attitudes they never questioned. Indeed, these hidden paradigms helped them explain and classify social phenomena while also legitimating their lives of privilege in a world of inequality. White supremacy was efficiently and scientifically rooted in the basic institutional cultures of the United States. Racialized thinking was so embedded in U.S. core culture that it was unquestioned, becoming an example of Rosaldo’s concept of “cultural invisibility” (Rosaldo 1989).17

The racialization of Mexican American and Puerto Ricans

“Racialization,” in the sense that Omi and Winant use it, means “to signify the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group” (1986: 64). Racialization is also an ideological process, a historically specific concept that assigns ethnic groups a racial identity and status: “Racial ideology is constructed from pre-existing conceptual (or if one prefers, ‘discursive’) elements and emerges from the struggles of competing political projects and ideas seeking to articulate similar elements differently” (1986: 64). A more descriptive way of talking about racialization is seen as follows:

Racialization is the social and historical process of assigning individuals and groups a socially constructed racial identity and status. As populations compete for land, status and
I situate my preliminary project within what Omi and Winant call the need for accounts of "racialization processes that avoids the pitfalls of U.S. ethnic history" (1986: 64). In other words, I ask... will illustrate this model by citing historical events contributing to the racialization of Puerto Ricans and Mexicans.

The historical context of racialization occurs during the period when the United States became an empire and its economy effected a transition from competitive capitalism to the capitalism of trusts and the concentration of capital. During this time, place, and not only are minorities managed, but also aristocrats and theirs, occurs within the context of racialization, which is commonly referred to as "imposition," or "subalterns," those who are positioned in "the" system of power.

Historical Processes of Racialization

There are at least four identifiable phases or moments in the racialization process (Rodríguez 2002a: 9). The four moments of racialization are delineated in the table below:

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| Imposition/subordination | The first stage is a process of subordination that entails limiting the collective control and/or access to land. This stage also set the scene for the migration of millions of Mexicans, who were transformed into racialized subjects in the United States. These events excluded millions of Mexicans from having control and/or access to land, both in their homeland and in the diaspora. In the Southwest, this process included the legal and illegal ways in which the white, Anglo power structure took control of the millions of acres of lands that were in the hands of the Mexican landed elite (Acuña 1988). The lands were appropriated by laws that eased the expropriation of the landed elite, by outright theft (through squatting), and by the intermarriage between Anglo men and the daughters of the landed and lighter-skinned Mexican elite (Acuña 1988: 89). Although the United States signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo with Mexico (1848), which included protection for the religious, civil, and land rights of the Mexican community in the United States, American legal institutions did not impede the almost complete expropriation of the Mexican community. In the words of Mexican American historian Griswold del Castillo: "The promises the U.S. government made with respect to the conquered Mexican populations... have remained largely unfulfilled" (1990: 173). This first moment of racialization not only led to the expropriation of Mexicans in the newly conquered territories of the Southwest, it also extended itself, geographically, to the interior of the Mexican nation. In a recent essay, Gilbert Gonzalez and Raul Fernandez (2002) explain how the expansion of U.S. imperial hegemony inserted itself into Mexico, creating "internal migration movements, mass population concentrations along the border, the bracero program, low wage maquila plants, Mexico's agricultural crisis, and more important, a century of migrations to the United States" (2002: 42). These are the dynamics in Mexico that run parallel to institutional changes taking place in the Southwest, which in the late 19th and 20th centuries led to the later crystallization of a Mexican American racial group. If political, economic, and cultural dynamics are examined, rather than limiting the focus to a cultural model, as traditional Chicano historians have done, the history of the Mexican American/Chicano community is not a continuous history beginning in 1848, but a discontinuous process with an early phase of expropriation, disenfranchisement, and conquest, leading to a second phase forming a racialized Chicano population. While it was true that the racialization process began earlier, it did not produce a racialized subject until this last period described by Gonzalez and Fernandez (1998).

This distinction is crucial because it underlies a distinct periodization of the racialization process, a process quite different from that envisioned by traditional Chicano historiography. It provides a framework to understand the forms of resistance to racialization that took place in the Southwest, particularly in the late 19th and 20th centuries, as insurrectionist movements. This periodization also helps us understand how the Mexican American community managed to resist and challenge the racial hierarchy that was impos...
other U.S. corporate interests. It is within this historical context that Puerto Ricans were racialized. American forces and interests eventually would give rise to the forces that created the process of migration and the beginning of the Puerto Rican diaspora.

During this stage Puerto Ricans were racialized in the diaspora and in the island with distinct consequences. In Puerto Rico, the Puerto Rican landed elite was not entirely expropriated, as happened in the U.S. Southwest. Instead, members of the elite were integrated into the sugar plantation complex controlled by major United States sugar corporations and interests. The integration of the landed elite took place in the form of central sugar mill owners, or as colonos, who were small- and medium-scale farmers who cultivated sugar cane for the sugar mills. A significant number of the Puerto Rican elite were able to develop and maintain their own sugar mills and control a significant amount of agricultural land. In fact, during the 1920s, Puerto Rican producers were in control of 58 percent of the sugar output in the island. This percentage was even higher than the percentage under the control of the Cuban bourgeoisie at that time.21

The Puerto Rican elite served as a force mediating between the colonial institutions and the Puerto Rican population. This mediation was much more complex because of two basic factors: one, contrary to the Mexican landed elite in the Southwest, who not only were expropriated of their land but were also integrated by marriage into the Anglo population, some members of the Puerto Rican elite supported forces that offered opposition to the colonial nature of Puerto Rico; and two, while only 100,000 Mexicans lived in the conquered Southwest, close to one million Puerto Ricans were living in the island when the United States conquered it. These two factors made the process of racialization more complex and its outcome more diverse in Puerto Rico than in the Southwest.

While racialization was developing in Puerto Rico, thousands of Puerto Ricans found themselves thrown into the migratory outflows created by economic and colonial policies. The collapse of the coffee industry, hurricanes, and labor brokers from Hawaiian sugar plantations all contributed to a process of out-migration that involved coercion more than the exercise of free will.22 The coffee industry did not receive the same tariff protection sugar did, and was unable to compete in the U.S. While Puerto Rican immigrants in the United States, particularly before U.S. citizenship was imposed on Puerto Ricans, found themselves vulnerable. They were stateless in the sense that they were citizens of a colony with no international standing, and did not have the protection of a consulate or an embassy in the United States. They did not speak English, and a significant number were black or mulatto.

In summary, by the end of the 19th century the United States had extended its imperial hegemony over Mexico while at the same time completing the subordination and racialization of Mexican Americans. The neocolonial process in Mexico began in earnest during the 1870s. John Kenneth Turners' description of the process in his classic study Barbarous Mexico (1911): "The partnership of Díaz and American capital," he argued, "has wrecked Mexico as a national entity. The United States, using threats of military intervention, invested heavily in the Mexican economy, particularly in the later decades of the 19th century, was rooted in their transformation into proletarians, namely, workers. It was in Mexico that the first full-scale imperial model of control, which Gonzalez and Fernandez (2002) call the "transnational mode of economic domination," was implemented. The United States invested heavily in Mexico, and the Mexican elite became increasingly dependent on U.S. capital. The integration of the landed elite took place in the form of central sugar mill owners, or as colonos, who were small- and medium-scale farmers who cultivated sugar cane for the sugar mills. A significant number of the Puerto Rican elite were able to develop and maintain their own sugar mills and control a significant amount of agricultural land. In fact, during the 1920s, Puerto Rican producers were in control of 58 percent of the sugar output in the island. This percentage was even higher than the percentage under the control of the Cuban bourgeoisie at that time.21

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This ideology, similar to thinking in regard to Puerto Rico later in the 20th century, led to the export of racializing social economic practices, such as the dual wage system, in which whites and Mexicans received unequal wages for the same work, and the segregation of Mexican workers from U.S. personnel and their families. In mining, oil, and railroad camps, U.S. companies kept separate quarters for their Mexican and U.S. employees. The civilizing efforts never had the objective of equalizing colonizer and colonized; instead, they merely had the objective of teaching the Mexican his or her proper place in the racialized order.

Also, the ideology assumed a biological content as it crystallized into a way of understanding the differences between Mexicans and U.S. whites. One writer, Chester Lloyd Jones, commented: “It must be confessed that (mestizos) often exhibit the well-known tendency to follow the vices and weaknesses of both sides of their ancestry rather than the virtues” (Gonzalez 2000: 10).

This ideology was then applied in the United States to the education of Mexican Americans as they underwent the process of being transformed into racialized proletarians. The stereotyping isolated Mexican Americans; racialized workers were described as childish, brutish, and highly sexual. Wallace Thompson, in his book The Mexican Mind: A Study in National Psychology (1922), argues that Mexicans have compulsive sex drives and that they “have a child’s or savage’s unwavering grasp of the details of desire.” These negative representations were then said to be related to the fact that Mexicans were a product of miscegenation (Gonzalez, 2000: 16).

It becomes clear that a racist ideology was implemented in the development of an educational policy that justified segregation and the Americanizing of Mexicans into racialized Mexican Americans. As racialized subjects, Mexicans would eventually be domesticated, becoming the docile and obedient labor force that the various sectors of the U.S. economy needed. A racialized view of Mexicans was already anticipated in the writings of various authors who influenced educational policy, including Victor Clark, who also wrote a significant book on Puerto Rico, entitled Puerto Rico and Its Problems, in 1930 and who earlier was in charge of the island’s educational system. In 1908, Clark describes the Mexican worker as “unambitious, listless, physically weak, irregular and indolent. On the other hand he is docile, patient, usually orderly in camps” (Gonzalez 2000: 27).

In sum, when U.S. educators began to develop a pedagogy to educate Mexicans, they tapped into the materials written about Mexico. So the “Mexican Problem” was in need of a dose of Americanization in order to supply the newly racialized social and economic practices of the United States.
most active and radical Mexican labor leaders. During this period being accused of being a socialist or radical was tantamount to being accused of sedition and would ensure repatriation because socialist activity was an excuse commonly used to deport Mexicans during the 1930s (Balderrama and Rodríguez 1995: 48).

All of these interventions led to the demise of the Cannery Agricultural Industrial Workers Union (CAIWU) and to the defeat of the strike. In many ways, the role of the consular officers was to lessen the concern of growers that, in fact, Mexican workers were not as docile as they thought. The consular officers reinforced the stereotypical and racialized notion that Mexicans were innately docile and malleable. This contributed to an internalization of racial ideology by many workers who, by following the lead of the consular officers, led the union to its demise and to the defeat of their strike. A racialized ideology also led to racial and ethnic divisions between Mexican and other workers, notably Filipinos. In this context, racialization progressed much further.

The JMLA, after winning the strike, collapsed in a few years. Agricultural unions are difficult to maintain because of the seasonal nature of work of their members. The only way that local agricultural labor organizations were able to mediate between racialization and union possibilities was to find a way to have a very small presence in California, and Mexican Americans were racialized as a more docile and malleable group.

In the meantime in Puerto Rico, the same Samuel Gompers who had refused to allow Japanese agricultural workers in his AFL allied himself with Santiago Iglesias Pantín, the leader of Puerto Rico's Federación Libre de Trabajo (Free Labor Federation—FLT), which consisted mainly of sugar and tobacco workers. Black and mulatto Puerto Ricans comprised a significant part of the workforce. For example, Prudencio Rivera Martínez, referring to the leadership of the FLT in the first decades of this century, argued that of each ten leaders “8 would be mulattoes” (Guerra 1999: 22). In Puerto Rico the FLT in many ways accepted the tutelage of white men in order to develop the leverage the organization needed to deal with their local economic contenders, the sugar mill owners, who were both Anglo and Puerto Rican (Rodríguez 1988).

However, in Puerto Rico, because the labor movement had a strong presence
The American teachers enjoy a better salary than the Puerto Rican teachers, yet instructions are given to the School Boards in the official newspaper, *La Gaceta*, that all American teachers must sign their contract for next year. No mention is made of Puerto Rican teachers, who are in more need because they earn lower salaries. (1970: 55)

The dual wage system taught American teachers they were superior and Puerto Rican teachers that they were inferior. This institutional arrangement was part of the process to socialize the Puerto Rican population into acceptance of its new inferior status in regard to white Americans.

The implementation of this educational system included the use of English as the medium of instruction and the relegation of Spanish to a subordinate status within the curriculum. The Puerto Rican, like the Mexican, was being domesticated into accepting his proper place within a racial hierarchy that had whites as the archetype of what Puerto Ricans should aspire to be. This internalization was expected to be smooth, particularly since Puerto Ricans already were understood by Americans to be a malleable and peaceful people. Victor S. Clark's representation of Puerto Ricans is representative of such a concept:

The great mass of Puerto Ricans are as yet passive and plastic... Their ideals are in our hands to create and mold. We shall be responsible for the work when it is done, and it is our solemn duty to consider carefully and thoughtfully today, the character we wish to give the finished product of our influence and effort. (Negrón de Montilla 1970:13)

In a manner similar to what had happened in the Mexican experience, travelers, academics, and businessmen, began to shape the popular notion of Puerto Ricans as children, as inferior products of miscegenation, who needed the strong paternal hand of the master in order to learn their proper role in a racialized relationship. As historian Matos Rodríguez (1999) explains in his article, U.S. writers represented Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans as a problem:
the United States wanted to assure control over Puerto Rico for strategic reasons—as Pedro Albizu Campos, the nationalist leader, said, “The U.S. wants the cage, not the birds.” Second, many members of congress perceived the island as the whitest of the Antilles. This process, which enabled Puerto Ricans to be granted U.S. citizenship in 1917, included the perception that they were less socially distant than Filipinos in American popular culture (Cabrera 1979: 17–8). Sectors of U.S. congress were concerned about opening the doors to a nation of “Orientals” and worried that Puerto Rico would become a precedent for the Philippines. Once it was clear the Philippines would not be annexed, Congress granted statutory U.S. citizenship to all Puerto Ricans. The racialized comparison with regard to Filipinos was also present in museum representations of Puerto Ricans and Filipinos during the early 20th century (Duany 2002).

Puerto Ricans living in the United States had a different experience from those in the island. Jesús Colón (1961), in his collection of stories based on his experience in New York in the early decades of the 20th century, describes how some Puerto Ricans faced the racially bifurcated system in the United States. Puerto Ricans in the United States experienced racialization by being perceived as non-white. In the early days many lived within African American communities and experienced racial discrimination in employment (1961: 44). Jesús Colón, a socialist and self-educated man with significant writing skills, had been hired to do some part-time translations for a film agency that distributed a film series popular in the Spanish-speaking community. The agency liked his work so much he was offered a job. But when Colón showed up at the agency’s door, the office manager said: “Yes, I wrote that letter.... That was to be your desk and typewriter. But I thought you were white” (1961: 51).

This experience also was reproduced with Puerto Rican musicians who performed in the United States. Juan Flores (2002) tells the story of Davilita, the Puerto Rican musician, who recalled how Puerto Ricans and Cubans, the darkest among Latinos in the United States, were paid less than other Latin Americans (Flores 2002: 69). In addition, Puerto Ricans experienced discrimination in cultural centers begun by Spanish immigrants. In her book on Puerto Rican musicians, Ruth Glasser (1995) explains how Asturian, Galician, Valencian, and other Spanish cultural clubs and centers had policies that excluded non-whites. In an effort to maintain their status as aspiring whites, Spanish immigrants coped by racially discriminating against Puerto Ricans. A similar experience occurred among Cubans in Tampa, Florida, at the turn of the century. The racial codes of the south divided white from black—
The civilizing mission of the United States utilized Americanization efforts to bring the “native” into a closer, albeit still unequal, status with U.S. whites. Native inhabitants were seen as amoral, primitive, violent, childish, overly sexual beings who required domestication. The multivalenced image of Puerto Ricans provided a contradictory image of the new colonial subjects, who were seen as docile yet violent, innocent yet amoral; these opposed categories defined Puerto Ricans as noble savages. Thompson (1995) describes how Puerto Ricans were read in their pictorial representations as living in Eden yet engaging in “uncivilized” behaviors that were not conducive to equal status with the colonizer:

They [the Puerto Ricans] live so close to nature that the things which would seem improper to us are with them the innocent affairs of their daily life. In many respects they are still in that Edenic state which thinks no evil and consequently knows none. (Thompson 1995: 30)

This characterization also leads to dehumanizing Puerto Ricans because a racialized conception of identity sees rational people as weighing the consequences of their actions, while animals are judged by instincts rather than reason. In fact, Puerto Ricans were described as animals by authors bent on perpetuating a racialized conception of self:

Morals, in the technical sense, they have none, but they cannot be said to sin, because they have no knowledge of the law, and therefore, they cannot commit no breach of law. They are naked and are not ashamed... There is evil, but there is not the demoralizing effect of evil. They sin, but they sin only as animals, without shame, because there is no sense of being wrong. (Thompson 1995: 31)

Also, the natives, in order to fit within the new system, had to have their sexuality and family life reshaped. Americanizing the culture became a way of transferring Yankee moral standards into the everyday practice of the subaltern. Suárez Findlay (1986) showed that native ethics were prohibited and colonial administrators

(Almaguer 1994).

The way of establishing the native New World inhabitants in a society become so racialized that they were seen as a “Hispano” than as a “native”. This would not make any sense, for example, in the case of the Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, who were even allied to the colonizers as a measure of a racialized conception of identity. Mexico and Puerto Rico had a process of making the categories in the racial continuum more concrete mulatto than to the real Puerto Rican. There were exceptions though, as the U.S. white colonizers of Puerto Rico by assuming a white identity which was still problematic:

Coll y Cuchi’s reference points in that critique of all races black and white were that the Puerto Rican was not resisting racialization and white identity. As a symbol of the most important of the new popular culture in Puerto Rico was composed of the category of the “Other” of the process of Americanization.
blacks and mulattos. Although there were thousands of whites who, prompted by the liberal immigration incentives of the 1815 Cédula de Gracias, migrated from Haiti, Spain, and other parts of Europe, their influence in the whitening process was balanced by the illegal immigration of thousands of blacks from the English-speaking West Indies. In fact, the first census of Puerto Rico carried out by the U.S. government in 1899 showed that 38.2 percent of the Puerto Rican population was non-white (Duany 2002: 248). By 1920 the non-white population, statistically speaking, fell to 27 percent without any major emigration of black Puerto Ricans taking place.

Additionally, according to Guerra (1998), no significant migration of whites into Puerto Rico occurred between 1910 to 1920; the 7.55 percent increase in the white population could not be justified in this way. The only thing that had changed is that Puerto Ricans did not want to be considered black. To be black in an Americanizing colony meant being left in the lowest rung of the racialized colonial order. Although the process cannot be considered genocide in the traditional sense of the word, it does suggest that certain forms of representation and identity were vanquished in the culture. The African in Puerto Rico could not be physically exterminated but could be conceptually eliminated as a form of identity and as an expression of self.

But contrary to the racialization of Mexicans before the 1890s in the United States, the tendency toward racializing the new subjects during the early part of the 20th century was rooted in pseudoscientific racism (Shipman 1994). As mentioned before, before the 1890s Mexicans were seen as a culturally distinct people. They were seen as an ethnic group which, while racialized and subordinated, is still considered to have a higher status than American Indians or African Americans. Mexicans in the newly conquered states were Christian (although Catholic), spoke a European tongue (although Spanish), and were not as dark (although brown) as the other two other groups. As long as the Mexican population was not completely subordinated, they were perceived as culturally different.

During the 20th century Mexicans become racially distinct in the new racialized order, which was shaped by a new popular culture that biologized difference. In the documentary Los Mineros, directed by Paul Espinosa and produced by Héctor Galán in 1991, we are told the history of the racialization of a mining community in Clifton/Morenci Arizona during the first four decades of the 20th century. Sylvester Morris, a mine owner, is quoted: “My own experience has taught me that the lower class of Mexicans are docile, faithful, good servants, capable of strong attachments when instructed to fit into the power of racism. Institutionalized racist stereotypes, due to coping with denying one’s true identity, become a kind of branding, marking the racialized subject. The mark is not physical but socio-psychological instead.

Internalized racist oppression becomes the carimbo, or branding, marking the racialized subject. The mark is not physical but socio-psychological instead. The changes in culture and identity that take place in this stage do not appear as the products of coercion; instead, they are perceived as innate to the individual and the culture. A racialized identity becomes a living reality. Subordination becomes embedded in the culture in subtle and powerful ways. Although parejera and pochismo in the Puerto Rican and Mexican American context don’t lead to liberation, they provide the means to survive in hostile environments.

Through this sociocultural process, identities are socially constructed to fit into the racial hierarchy. This enables white supremacy to extend the power of racism into the deepest recesses of the personhood of the subaltern. Internalized racist oppression leads racialized subjects into behaviors that are, at times, due to coping mechanisms. Other ways of coping in environments where gradations of color are what determines a person’s racial status, it is possible to pass as white. In Puerto Rico, an interesting phenomenon took place: the statistical disappearance of blacks and the whitening of the Puerto Rican population. The process of seeking whiteness had a deep impact on the population, statistically speaking, falling to 27 percent without any major emigration of black Puerto Ricans taking place.

As Guerra (1998) and González (1993) have pointed out, Puerto Rico during the 18th and early 19th century was composed of a population with a high percentage of blacks and mulattos. Although there were thousands of whites who, prompted by the liberal immigration incentives of the 1815 Cédula de Gracias, migrated from Haiti, Spain, and other parts of Europe, their influence in the whitening process was balanced by the illegal immigration of thousands of blacks from the English-speaking West Indies. In fact, the first census of Puerto Rico carried out by the U.S. government in 1899 showed that 38.2 percent of the Puerto Rican population was non-white (Duany 2002: 248). By 1920 the non-white population, statistically speaking, fell to 7.55 percent without any major emigration of black Puerto Ricans taking place.

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Puerto Ricans are tolerated within the confines of the island because there they are perceived as reformable, racialized subjects. However, in the mainland they are perceived as a threat. The threat occurs because the growers see miscegenation as so pervasive among this population that it is not always possible to distinguish who is really a white Puerto Rican and who is not. This obviously could lead to further miscegenation, which would result in the Puerto Rican population's continuing to taint and degrade the white race. This is particularly troubling for a system based on white supremacy.

Leo Stanton Rowe (1908: 98) warns the United States in the following quotation:

A country in which the mass of the population has been kept in either slavery or in a condition of social inferiority is certain to retain the sexual relations of a primitive period for a long time after the causes giving rise to these relations have disappeared.

The fear of “mongrelization” leads the supporters of imperialism and expansion to call for a settler policy in Puerto Rico. It is suggested that white Americans should begin to settle Puerto Rico to insure control and avoid the invasion of inferior races into the United States (Healey 1970).

Conclusions
Unfortunately, race was and continues to be an enduring social difference, and its systemic challenges then and today still pose a contemporary challenge to an antiracist social movement and perspective. Racialization is a powerful concept that provides insights into the way racism works in the United States and the Caribbean.

Racialization is a process that reclassifies groups into a lower racial status. Racialization is a process of subordination and domination. It is rooted in an intellectual scientific tradition that permeated the popular culture in the United States and that emphasized supposedly biological differences. Rather than being the cumulative effect of individual actions, racism and racialism are better understood as part of a pattern that is constructed in a systemic way. All societal institutions practice racialization in particular ways, using pre-existing conceptual materials proper to the tradition (educational systems, previous racial hierarchies, religious systems, media, etc.). Racialization has a structure that can be discerned, with different consequences and methods identified with each stage.
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NOTES
1 Throughout this essay racialization is defined as a process understood to “signify the extension of racial meaning to a previously unclassified relationship, social practice or group.” (Omi and Winant 1986: 64). Racial categorization is constructed on the basis of assumed biological characteristics, which are assumed to represent some essential difference. The final outcome of racialization is the construction of a racial group that is then seen and experienced as a subordinate, homogeneous category of people in a hierarchy of racial groups.

2 There is a vast literature that has contributed to the ideological deconstruction of the racialization process in the United States. Racialization's genealogy has its origins in the efforts of the plantation elite to divide and conquer poor whites and black indentured servants in the plantation economies of the early U.S. colonies (Allen 1994). We have come to understand the legal process of delineating the boundaries of the politically constructed racial categories (Haney Lopez 1996), and there is a significant amount of work on the construction of whiteness and the racialization of European immigrants (Roediger 1991; Ignatiev 1995; Brodkin 1998). These efforts have deepened our understanding of how the categories are constructed and how new ethnic groups are incorporated into the racial system.

3 I will use the concept of “people of Latin American origin” (Mexicans or Puerto Ricans) to differentiate from “Latinos/Hispanics,” which is the term I will use for these groups after they have experienced racialization. I recognize that the category “Latino” is often used among academics who challenge the Eurocentricity of the term “Hispanic” (Oboler 1995; Acuña 1996, 2000) and the process of “whitening” people of Latin American origin, but it should be remembered that the term is as problematic as “Hispanic” is. The term “Latin America,” coined by Francophiles during the 19th century, to provide a counterhegemonic myth to Anglo-Saxon expansion. This makes both the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” problematic since they are both the outcome of European efforts to control the new nations and groups from the Americas (Phelan 1968).

4 Suzanne Oboler (1997) argues that the process of homogenization is a product of the...
with 148 of 784, or 14 percent of all marriages, being between Anglo men and Mexican females; during the same period only 6 involved Mexican men and Anglo women" (Acuña 1988: 89). In California, a similar process occurred; in some cases, it was a way for the Anglo elite to assure an incontestably “white” status for their progeny (Acuña 1988: 116–8).

Another reason for the form of resistance was the level of violence and criminalization used against Mexicans after the Mexican American War, which ended in 1848. See Alfredo Mirande (1987) for a historical description of the demonization and violent subordination of Mexicanos.

The Platt Amendment, imposed by the United States, allowed the United States to maintain a naval base in Cuba (Guantanamo) and to intervene any time it thought necessary to “preserve Cuban independence” (Keen and Haynes 2000: 431).

A recent inquiry into the land tenure of Puerto Rico, from 1899 to 1915, by Cesar J. Ayala and Laird W. Bergad (2001) argues that land tenure in fact became less concentrated in the early years of U.S. imperial hegemony. However, the power of U.S. sugar and tobacco interests, while mediated in more nuanced ways than thought before, still exercised hegemony over the island’s agricultural economy.

![The role of labor brokers in attracting Puerto Rican labor to the United States was made easier after Puerto Rico’s economic debacle caused by U.S. policies following the Spanish-American War of 1898 see E. Maldonado (1979) and B.C. Souza (1984).

A process of subordination was utilized in various shapes and forms in the racialization of Native Americans/Indians and African Americans; see Spring (1997), who provides a good synopsis of the impact of imperial education on the subaltern.

The perception that most Puerto Rican were “white” in the eyes of congress was crucial to conferring citizenship to Puerto Ricans. Since the 1790 Naturalization Act, only whites could become U.S. citizens. This did not change until the 1951 Walter-McCarren Act, which opened the door to “non-whites” who wanted to become U.S. citizens.

Internalized Racist Oppression (IRO) is defined by Anne Stewart (2000) as a “complex, multi-generational process of socialization that teaches people of color to believe, accept and live out a negative societal definition. These behaviors contribute to the perpetuation of the race construct.”

Parejeria is one way of individually challenging dominant groups or individuals without outright confrontation. Pochismo is a culture that arises out of rejection by the mainstream for not being fully “American” and rejection in the Mexican culture for not being “Mexican” enough. Other racialized coping mechanisms are gendered, as Gina Pérez in her lecture “Puertorriqueñas rencorosas y Mejicanas sufridas” points out.

“Constructing Self and Others in Chicago’s Latino Communities,” a paper of hers given...


