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REVIEW ESSAY

Puerto Rican, Hispanic, or Latino? Recent Debates on National and Pan-Ethnic Identities

JORGE DUANY

Latinos Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People.

By Arlene Dávila.

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

287 pages; \$22.50 paper

Perspectives on Las Américas:

A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation.

Edited by Mathew Gutmann, Félix V. Matos Rodríguez,

Lynn Stephen, and Patricia Zavella.

Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2003.

461 pages; \$39.95 paper

Hispanas de Queens: Latino Panethnicity in a New York City Neighborhood.

By Milagros Ricourt and Ruby Danta.

Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003.

168 pages; \$16.95 paper

Medicalizing Ethnicity:

The Construction of Latino Identity in a Psychiatric Setting.

By Vilma Santiago-Irizarry.

Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001.

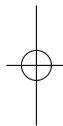
178 pages; \$16.95 paper

Latinos: Remaking America.

Edited by Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco and Mariela M. Páez.

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

490 pages; \$19.95 paper

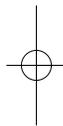




Over the past two decades, the Hispanic population in the United States has become increasingly diverse with regard to national origin. States, cities, and counties formerly dominated by a single Hispanic group—such as Puerto Ricans in New York, Cubans in Miami, or Mexicans in Los Angeles—have received a large influx of people from other Latin American and Caribbean countries, such as the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. The crucial political question is whether the immigrants will forge a broader alliance with other Latinos; continue to assert their distinctive national origins and transnational connections to their home countries; or perhaps combine the two strategies. Rethinking the Puerto Rican diaspora in its broader Latin American and Caribbean context offers a unique opportunity to examine the extent to which a general Latino affiliation is rooted among contemporary transnational migrants to the United States. Scholars are now analyzing the growing Latinization of such places as El Barrio—the largely Puerto Rican community of Spanish Harlem in New York—and Little Havana—the traditional core of the Cuban community around Calle Ocho in Miami (see Boswell 1995; Dávila 2003; Laó-Montes and Dávila 2001; Stepick et al. 2003). Even in those neighborhoods, recent immigration from various Latin American countries (especially Mexico and the Dominican Republic in El Barrio, and Nicaragua and Colombia in Little Havana) is reconfiguring ethnic, pan-ethnic, national, and transnational identities among Latinos.

It is now well established that current strategies of immigrant adaptation do not always lead to complete assimilation by the second or third generation, as earlier theories had predicted. Less understood is how transnational migrants forge new identities, based exclusively neither on their home countries nor on the dominant groups in the host society, but on pan-ethnic allegiances such as those often pursued by Latinos or Asians in the United States. Much of this process of identity construction responds to ethnic and racial labels imposed by public officials, media executives, and intellectuals (see Flores 2000; Oboler 1995). However, how common folk define themselves in transnational settings remains poorly documented. One possibility is that they do not necessarily incorporate into mainstream culture, but into an ethnic or racial minority such as Hispanics, African Americans, or “people of color.” Recent research has found that Dominican immigrants in New York City and Providence, Rhode Island, tend to adopt the pan-ethnic label Hispanic or Latino as an intermediate racial category between whites and blacks (Bailey 2001; Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral 2000). For Puerto Ricans in the United States, questions of identity remain extremely elusive, as they may choose to define themselves as an ethnic, national, or transnational group, as well as a part of a larger Latino community, according to various political projects, social and geographic locations, and historical moments (see Duany 2002; Negrón-Muntaner and Grosfoguel 1997; Padilla 1985).

The five books reviewed in this essay attest to lively academic and public debates about Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Latino identities in the United States. For some authors, Puerto Ricans are Hispanic or Latino almost by default, because they can easily trace their origin to a Spanish-speaking country of the Caribbean. Furthermore, Puerto Ricans are the second largest group of U.S. Latinos after Mexicans, which together constitute the prototypes of the Hispanic category popularized since the 1970s. For others, *Latinidad* or *Hispanidad* refers to the idea that, despite their differences, the peoples originating in Latin America share a cultural background due to similar geographic, historical, and linguistic forces.





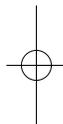
According to its critics, the Hispanic/Latino classification lumps together a wide variety of immigrant histories, colonial legacies, racial and ethnic groups, social classes, cultural traditions, languages, and dialects. Thus, Puerto Ricans should not be subsumed under a label that silences such fundamental differences. Throughout this essay, I will summarize the authors' positions on the controversy, sketch their main arguments, and assess their sources of information. Although I do not propose to settle the dispute, I will suggest a modest alternative to the intellectual and political impasse concerning whether U.S. Puerto Ricans should identify themselves nationally or pan-ethnically.

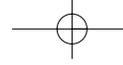
Problematizing Pan-Ethnicity

One of the recurring themes of the works under consideration is the danger that the Hispanic or Latino label homogenizes very diverse groups. In *Latinos Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People*, Puerto Rican anthropologist Arlene Dávila wisely warns against "the growing consolidation of a common Latino/Hispanic identity that encompasses anyone from a Spanish/Latin American background in the United States" (p. 1). Dávila focuses on the segmentation of U.S. Latinos into an ethnic market niche defined primarily by the preference for the Spanish language as well as by transnational commercial programming from Latin America. She argues persuasively that Hispanic advertising executives, together with U.S. public officials and some scholars, have championed "unified, uncomplicated, depoliticized, and hence readily marketable definitions of Hispanidad" (p. 13). She doubts that Hispanic marketing is a viable strategy to combat negative representations of Latinos in Hollywood films and TV networks, primarily because it tends to reproduce its own stereotypes, such as the prevailing image of the monolingual Spanish-speaking, white Mediterranean, born in Mexico or South America. For Dávila, standard notions of Latinidad have very little value; they are, for the most part, exercises in power relations rather than genuine expressions of people's lived experiences, values, and aspirations.

Aside from the federal government and the mass media, Latino pan-ethnicity has been promoted in the field of mental health, as another Puerto Rican anthropologist, Vilma Santiago-Irizarry, shows in *Medicalizing Ethnicity: The Construction of Latino Identity in a Psychiatric Setting*. She charges that some public mental health care programs in the United States have opposed an essentialist concept of Latino culture against the dominant Anglo culture, highlighting character traits such as emotional warmth, cohesiveness, caring, and consideration toward others. However, Latino practitioners have articulated these medical discourses and practices mostly in their own professional interests, not those of their patients. As a progressive anthropologist specializing in U.S. Latino cultures, Santiago-Irizarry admits to "a complex and ambivalent relation to this material" (p. 11). She is highly critical of the psychiatric establishment, even when it allows for culturally sensitive programs for ethnic and racial minorities such as Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans. For Santiago-Irizarry, such programs end up "reproducing the marginal position of Latino culture in U.S. society and contributing to its further subjugation rather than revaluing and empowering it" (p. 150). Thus, her outlook for the incorporation of Latino identity within a psychiatric setting is as pessimistic as Dávila's in the advertising industry.

In *Hispanas de Queens: Latino Panethnicity in a New York City Neighborhood*, Dominican sociologist Milagros Ricourt and Cuban anthropologist Ruby Danta

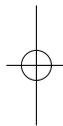


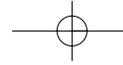


develop a very different perspective from Dávila and Santiago-Irizarry. *Hispanas de Queens* documents a vibrant community among immigrants from various Latin American countries, especially the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Puerto Rico, Peru, and Ecuador, in the Corona neighborhood. Contrary to Dávila and Santiago-Irizarry, Ricourt and Danta stress what they call Latinos' *convivencia diaria*, "or 'daily life interaction' in apartments and houses, on the streets, in stores, in workplaces, and in churches" (p. xi). Such grassroots experiences are often institutionalized through religious congregations, social service programs, cultural events, and political organizations. In their view, Latino pan-ethnicity is not simply a homogenizing and exclusionary practice imposed on common people by "corporate intellectuals" (Dávila's term) or other professionals. Instead of lamenting the erasure of national by pan-ethnic identities, Ricourt and Danta propose that both can coexist and complement each other: "This experiential Latino panethnicity [has] added to, rather than replaced identities, ties, and sentiments based on home-country origin" (p. 37).

Another kind of defense of the pan-Latino category comes from demographers and public policy analysts, such as those represented in Marcelo Suárez-Orozco and Mariela Páez's edited volume, *Latinos: Remaking America*, based on an interdisciplinary conference held at Harvard University in the year 2000. The editors, an Argentinian anthropologist and a Puerto Rican educator, designate Latinos in "the broadest, most inclusive, and most generous way" (p. 3), that is, as any segment of the U.S. population with a Spanish, Caribbean, or Latin American origin. They underscore Latinos' pan-ethnic rather than national ties, emanating particularly from their common language, Spanish, and predominant religion, Catholicism. According to Suárez-Orozco and Páez, "the Spanish language in all its varieties plays a central role in the construction and transformation of the Latino community in the United States" (p. 9). Most of the contributors to this collection accept the U.S. Census Bureau's definition of Latinos as a comprehensive demographic category without exploring the cultural differences among Latin American immigrants, with the exceptions of Juan Flores, Peggy Levitt, Alex Stepick, Carol Dutton Stepick, Silvio Torres-Saillant, and Ana Celia Zentella. Many employ official data on Latinos produced by the census and other government agencies, but do not disaggregate the results by national origin. Much of this collection illustrates the pitfalls of uncritically taking the category "Hispanic/Latino" as a point of departure for social research and policy, as I will elaborate below.

A more successful attempt to ponder national and pan-ethnic contentions is *Perspectives on Latinas: A Reader on Culture, History, and Representation*, edited by Anglo anthropologists Matthew Gutmann and Lynn Stephen, Puerto Rican historian Félix Matos Rodríguez, and Mexican-American anthropologist Patricia Zavella. The main purpose of this collection is to "illustrate the internal differences among Latinas/os and Latin Americans but also provide material for translating between the two fields" (p. 15) of Latino and Latin American studies. The book tries to accomplish that goal by juxtaposing a wide range of essays, primarily in anthropology and history, on colonialism, resistance, political economy, identities, popular cultures, and regional, national, and transnational politics in both Latin America and the United States. Ten of the twenty-five chapters develop the editors' third major theme, the "emerging identities that come through processes of migration from Latin America and settlement in the United States" (p. 1). Noting the problematic use of the terms "Hispanic" and "Latino," Stephen and her co-editors rightly insist





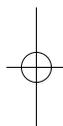
on the “differences of history, identity, and culture tied to people’s specific stories of immigration, settlement, or long-time history of living in the United States” (p. 4). Consequently, most of their collaborators focus on a single national origin group, such as Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans in the United States; or Brazilians, Belizeans, Ecuadorians, Nicaraguans, and Colombians in their home countries. Overall, *Perspectives on Las Américas* helps to dismantle Latino stereotypes by bringing out the profound national distinctions among immigrants, and by weaving together many common threads between U.S. Latinos and Latin Americans, such as those embedded in gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and class in both settings.

Deconstructing Identities

All of the works reviewed in this essay tackle the difficult issue of defining and analyzing people’s constructions of who they are and how they differ from others. Dávila’s sophisticated approach is grounded on an eclectic synthesis of recent writing in anthropology, political economy, and cultural studies, especially on national identities, popular culture, and the mass media. She clearly inserts her work within a growing scholarly concern with the media’s role in the construction of collective identities, particularly in the production, circulation, and consumption of discourses about race, ethnicity, nationality, and gender. Following Néstor García Canclini and other contemporary cultural theorists, Dávila considers advertising as “a relatively privileged discourse of communication” (p. 9), especially given the penetration of U.S. commercial media in most parts of the world. She then takes the images, meanings, tastes, and desires promoted by the media as the stuff that shapes public representations of Latinidad. Although she is well “aware that media analysis is incomplete without an analysis of the reception and consumption of these advertising strategies by the people to whom they are addressed” (p. 20), her book concentrates in the production rather than circulation (and contestation) of such strategies.

For Santiago-Irizarry, ethnicity is “a requisite component of personal and collective identity” that should be located within “the redistribution of material and symbolic resources in the United States” (p. 25). Unlike Dávila, Santiago-Irizarry is primarily interested in the day-to-day workings of ethnicity in the highly restrained contexts of total institutions (to use Erving Goffman’s celebrated phrase) such as mental health centers. Like Dávila, Santiago-Irizarry distrusts current discourses of Latinidad as they have become institutionalized in the United States. *Medicalizing Ethnicity* suggests that Latino mental health programs in New York City have failed to create “culturally specific therapeutic enclaves” (p. 60). Instead, they have espoused a slanted view of Latinos as predominantly Spanish speaking, largely Puerto Rican, emotionally expressive, and radically different from white, English-speaking Americans. Thus, Santiago-Irizarry proposes that the “Western medical ideology of care” (p. 60) continues to pathologize Latinos as psychiatric subjects and does not provide an effective method of diagnosis and treatment for their emotional and behavioral disturbances. Although the author’s criticism of existing mental health services for Latinos is compelling, her alternative proposal is unclear, short of continuing to disregard linguistic and cultural differences from Anglos, as many psychiatric programs do.

Ricourt and Danta extend Felix Padilla’s (1985) concept of *Latinismo* as a situational and political strategy capable of advancing the common interests

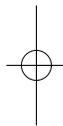




of various Latino populations, such as Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago. But Ricourt and Danta foreground the cultural and interpersonal dimensions of pan-ethnicity, such as shared experiences, mental categories, practices, institutions, and ideologies. Arguing against discourses of Latinidad sponsored by the elite, government, or media, they advocate a fine-grained analysis of the organizational activities of working-class men and women in everyday life. In the beginning of their book, the authors note that changing residence patterns, especially in New York City, have placed Latinos from different origins in close proximity to each other. In the end, they suggest that Latinos in Queens “may be a unique case” (p. 151), but in fact they are not: as I mentioned in the opening section of this essay, recent demographic trends have made multinational Latino communities more common throughout the United States. I would expect that other groups of Latin American and Caribbean immigrants elsewhere will follow, adapt, or resist the pan-ethnic path outlined in *Hispanas de Queens*.

Suárez-Orozco and Páez’s collection lacks an overall theoretical framework because of its large array of topics, disciplines, and authors. The book constitutes Latino studies as “a broad range of social science and humanistic scholarship” on “the Latino population of the United States and its transnational links to the Caribbean and Latin American worlds” (p. 2). As an interdisciplinary, comparative, and collaborative enterprise, *Latinos: Remaking America* samples several analytical perspectives that mix but do not blend well, such as psychoanalysis, cultural ecology, positivism, anthropological linguistics, feminism, postmodernism, and transnationalism. Each of the book’s twenty-one chapters elaborates a particular angle of the Latino population, its identity, culture, and politics. Their only common project seems to be “to extend the conversation” about Latinos beyond individual subgroups. In this venture, according to labor union specialists John Trumbour and Elaine Bernard, scholars “may occasionally need to remind their more postmodern colleagues in the social sciences and literary studies of some sociological realities about Latinos and labor markets” (p. 128).

A wide variety of standpoints also characterizes the volume edited by Gutmann, Matos Rodríguez, Stephen, and Zavella. Although loosely bound together by a concern with cultural representations, each author approaches identity in his or her own way. For instance, the Mexican-American sociologist Néstor Rodríguez argues that similar ethnic and racial relations now span both of the Americas as a result of globalization and transnational migration. However, the Cuban-American sociologist Rubén Rumbaut insists on the distinctive histories of the three major sources of Latin American immigrants in the United States (Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba), even though he recognizes that these countries have all formed part of the U.S. periphery since the 19th century. Furthermore, the Puerto Rican-Mexican anthropologist Ana Celia Zentella submits that the “revolving-door migration” of Puerto Ricans “represents a distinct departure from the usual immigrant pattern” (p. 246) of permanent settlement and linguistic assimilation. As another example of this individualizing trend, the Dominican literary critic Silvio Torres-Saillant dwells on the “peculiar historical experience of the Dominican people” (p. 280) with race, both at home and in the diaspora. Thus, most of *Perspectives on Las Américas* deliberately moves away from any overarching perspective or generalization about Latinos in the United States or in Latin America itself. This feature of the text can be both an asset and a limitation, especially for pedagogic purposes.





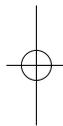
Researching Latinidad

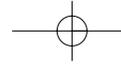
All of the books under review draw on original and systematic research on various Latino groups, settings, and periods. Dávila conducted ethnographic fieldwork in sixteen Hispanic advertising agencies, mostly located in New York City, between 1997 and 1999. Her research techniques included interviews with industry leaders, participant observation of their activities, content analysis of print and broadcast advertisements, and five focus groups with ordinary Latino consumers, including Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Mexicans, and South Americans. She tried to maintain a balanced sample of her informants by birthplace, language, class, and gender, as well as nationality. Dávila's book is a solid and innovative example of "doing fieldwork on a fieldless site" (p. 17), even if it sometimes overrepresents the view "from above," that is, the advertising executives who originated and control much of the Hispanic market in the United States. Moreover, one wonders if the results would differ had her research been based in Miami or Los Angeles.

For her part, Santiago-Irizarry carried out her project in three bilingual and bicultural psychiatric programs for Latinos in New York City. Beginning in 1989, she spent two years as an external evaluator working with an interdisciplinary team of social scientists at the Plymouth Psychiatric Center, the Northern Psychiatric Center, and Jefferson Hospital. Her book culls extensive information from archival material, field notes, participant observation, and interviews with Latino staff and inmates. Her writing style is reminiscent of Goffman's qualitative reporting, with a keen eye for ethnographic detail, face-to-face interaction, and visual reconstruction of field sites. Like Dávila, Santiago-Irizarry is acutely aware that her personal positioning as a light-skinned, educated, and Spanish-speaking woman gave her privileged access to certain types of data, while creating unduly high expectations of her role as a "native" researcher. Like Dávila, she often felt uneasy when her Puerto Rican background was taken as a synonym for being Latina.

Ricourt and Danta's long-term ethnographic fieldwork in Corona combined participant observation in local churches, volunteer and paid work in community organizations, interviews with residents and business owners, and several years of residence in the area between 1983 and 2000. Ricourt relies heavily on interviews conducted in 1987–88 with thirty-three working-class Latinas in Corona, including Dominicans, Colombians, Puerto Ricans, and Ecuadorians. Danta worked in several pan-ethnic community organizations such as the Ollantay Center for the Arts during the 1980s and the Latin American Cultural Center of Queens between 1993 and 1997. Together, they collected a large amount of qualitative data on the emergence of a Latino pan-ethnicity through *convivencia diaria*. Perhaps the researchers' long and intensive interaction with Corona residents led them to emphasize the residents' commonalities rather than differences, contrary to Dávila's and Santiago-Irizarry's shorter and more distanced contact with their informants. The main methodological limitation of Ricourt and Danta's otherwise fine case study is that it remains unclear to what extent their particular site represents similar experiences elsewhere.

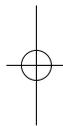
Suárez-Orozco and Páez's collection features psychologists, psychiatrists, educators, political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and literary critics. Hence, their primary sources of information range from census statistics, surveys, and standardized educational tests to archival documents, ethnographic fieldwork, and family histories. As the editors note, "the contributors to this volume include scholars who feel at home doing positivistic social science with large data sets as well as scholars in cultural studies who focus on post-modern theory and literary





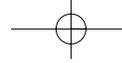
criticism” (p. 2). Nonetheless, the anthology privileges quantitative descriptions of the socioeconomic characteristics of the U.S. Latino population, over qualitative interpretations of the cultures of particular groups in specific places. (Two notable exceptions are the Stepicks’ piece on Miami Cubans and Diego Vigil’s essay on Chicano Los Angeles.) The gap between quantitative and qualitative methods partially overlaps with the distinction between pan-ethnic and national identities. To many empirically minded social scientists, the Hispanic/Latino category provides a convenient way to gather statistics on various groups of Latin American immigrants and their descendants in the United States. To many humanistic scholars, the conventional classification of Latinos is little more than a fiction devised by public authorities to separate them from non-Hispanic whites and blacks.

Like Suárez-Orozco and Páez’s anthology, Gutmann et al.’s volume is methodologically diverse. Unlike *Latinos: Remaking America, Perspectives on Las Américas* focuses on ethnographic and archival research rather than large-scale survey data. The essays included in this collection use a wide variety of sources, such as life histories, folk tales, personal narratives, intensive interviews, historical chronicles, and journalistic articles. Moreover, the editors celebrate the influence of cultural, women’s, gender, gay and lesbian, and transnational studies on both Latin American and Latino Studies. They write approvingly: “Latin American Cultural Studies (as in other regions) not only decentered political economy as the main category of analysis in social sciences, but also redefined what is meant by culture. The distinction between ‘high culture,’ which usually represented the domain of European elite artistic traditions, has been blurred with ‘low culture,’ often designated as ‘handicrafts,’ ‘folklore,’ and ‘folk art’” (pp. 7–8). Accordingly, the editors sought to cover topics ranging from peasant rebellion and community organizing to beauty pageants and *quincea éras*, the coming-of-age celebrations common among Mexican-American and other Latina teenagers. Compared with the Suárez-Orozco and Páez volume, which favors such policy-oriented issues as labor unions, immigration reform, public health, and affirmative action, the Gutmann et al. collection is more useful for teaching about Latino popular culture. This is a refreshing contribution to a field saturated with faceless “hard” data derived from descriptive and inferential statistics.



Latinizing Puerto Ricans, Puerto Ricanizing Latinos

One of Dávila’s most significant findings is that media-generated notions of Hispanic identity, anchored on the Spanish language, often clash with U.S. Latinos’ views of themselves. Her focus group discussions revealed that many informants felt excluded by the Hispanic media, especially Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, English speakers and code-switchers, dark-skinned people, youngsters, and second-generation immigrants (chapter 6). In her content analysis, Dávila corroborated that Hispanic advertising campaigns seldom take into account linguistic, cultural, and regional differences among Latino subgroups. Instead, such campaigns usually accentuate the immigrants’ “essential commonalities” (p. 82), especially their strong family values, cultural traditions, ethnic pride, a generic “Latin look,” white standards of beauty, and dual portraits of women as virgins or whores (p. 131). They also favor some regional accents (Mexican or South American) over others (particularly Puerto Rican and Dominican), as well as some “races” (especially Mediterranean white types) over others (Indians and Africans). In short, Hispanic advertising promotes a conservative and distorted image of Latinos. The results of this study directly contradict the

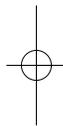


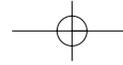
industry's claims to articulate the interests of nearly thirty-nine million Hispanics living in the United States.

Santiago-Irizarry also found that the Spanish language has remained the major identity marker for Hispanics in psychiatric programs. Like advertising executives, mental health professionals underplayed cultural differences among Latin American immigrants in order to create a homogenized, idealized, and static view of Hispanic culture. Like their counterparts in the mass media, Latino practitioners advocated a separate niche for their Spanish-speaking clients within the U.S. psychiatric establishment. But their notion of *Latinidad*, according to Santiago-Irizarry, was incongruent with the experiences of "young, urban- and U.S.-born, bilingual and even English-monolingual Latino patients" (p. 22). Moreover, the three psychiatric programs evaluated by the author supposedly crafted a pan-ethnic ambience through "the use of Latino music, the celebration of Latino holidays, and the promotion of 'native' foods" (p. 81). Upon closer inspection, this ambience indexed Latino culture primarily by means of traditional Puerto Rican icons, such as the Island's flag, seal, dances, parades, media, and art. Thus, many Puerto Rican patients in these programs might well feel proud to be Latino, but not all Latinos were equally comfortable with a Puerto Rican-centered definition of *Latinidad*.

Ricourt and Danta's appraisal of Latino pan-ethnicity in Queens is not as troubled as Dávila's and Santiago-Irizarry's with the politics of representation. According to their fieldwork, no single group dominated the construction of Latino identity, nor was this identity imposed from above or outside. Instead, Ricourt and Danta contend that "this experiential Latino panethnicity arose from everyday activities" (p. 37), especially the "ethnic mingling of diverse Latin Americans in Corona" (p. 23). The authors' view of the Spanish language is much more benign than the view of the other two scholars, because it "promoted a common Hispanic identity" as "the basis for the social relationships across nationality lines" (p. 23). In addition to language, three social factors explain the rise of a Latino identity in Corona: (1) the geographic concentration of a diverse Hispanic population; (2) its markedly working-class composition; and (3) the daily interactions among women from various Latin American countries in multiple settings, such as stores, schools, and churches. Pan-ethnic ties were further consolidated through periodicals, social service organizations, parades, festivals, cultural centers, and political campaigns. Missing from this highly sympathetic portrait of Latino pan-ethnicity is the insight that may be overdrawn in Dávila's and Santiago-Irizarry's analysis: that middle-class members of the community (such as political leaders, business owners, and professionals) often manipulate claims to cultural authenticity to advance their special interests.

For their own reasons, the authors of Suárez-Orozco and Páez's anthology tend to support the notion of an expansive Latino community in the United States. As the editors write, "it is abundantly clear that in the context of the workings of the state apparatus, the subgroup labels are generally quite secondary to the panethnic construct" (p. 6). Although most contributors to this volume approach Latinos as a composite population, some insist on each group's historical experience and contemporary location within U.S. society. For instance, after comparing Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans in New York, the Puerto Rican cultural critic Juan Flores concludes that "the three Caribbean Latino enclaves may appear to be cousins, and distant ones at that, but hardly sisters" (p. 62). Anglo anthropologists Alex Stepick and Carol Dutton Stepick hold that "the increased diversity of Latino immigrants in Miami has not promoted the adoption of a Latino identity;





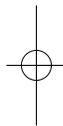
it reinforces national identities” (p. 83). Zentella emphasizes that “the varieties of Spanish spoken by national-origin groups serve as nationalist flags that symbolize each group’s unique identity” (p. 321). Finally, in Torres-Saillant’s dictum, “current assertions of a harmonious panethnic Latino have the potential to perpetuate intra-Latino exclusions and injustices” (p. 436). Despite the strong doubts expressed by these scholars, the prevailing wisdom among the rest is that “work at the panethnic level can generate more robust conceptual understandings than work at the subgroup level” (p. 6). Analysis of the data presented by Wayne Cornelius, Rodolfo de la Garza, Louis DeSipio, and David Hayes-Bautista does not substantiate that thesis convincingly. Instead, public opinion, electoral participation, and health patterns—to mention just the three examples discussed by these authors—differ significantly by national origin.

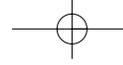
The question of national as opposed to pan-ethnic identities resurfaces in several chapters of *Perspectives on Las Américas*. The Puerto Rican cultural critic Frances Negrón-Muntaner writes playfully about New York Puerto Rican Jennifer López’s attempt to represent Selena, a Chicana, through a Latino pan-ethnicity embodied in their similar physical types—racially mixed, curvaceous, and endowed with big rear ends, all departures from Anglo standards of beauty. According to Negrón-Muntaner, “‘Latino,’ in this case, does not refer to a cultural identity, but to a specifically American national currency for economic and political deal making; a technology to demand and deliver emotions, votes, markets, and resources on the same level as other racialized minorities” (p. 293). For his part, Torres-Saillant (one of six authors featured in both edited volumes) aims to explain why “Black Dominicans do not see blackness as the central component of their identity” (p. 281). He surmises that Dominican Americans have begun to adopt the racial discourses associated with African Americans and other “peoples of color.” In a repeat appearance, Zentella argues that bilingualism and biculturalism are part of Puerto Rican identity on the Island and in the United States. Finally, Zavella shows how two Chicanas, one heterosexual and one lesbian, contest the repressive narratives of Mexican Catholic sexuality through the metaphors of “play” and “fire.” What do these four case studies have in common? Are Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Dominicans fundamentally alike because they are all Latinos? The bulk of the evidence gathered in *Perspectives on Las Américas* points in the opposite direction.

Whither Pan-Ethnic Identities?

So what is the practical significance of academic debates about Puerto Rican, Hispanic, or Latino identities? Are the daily lives of Latin American immigrants in the United States any better because the Univisión and Telemundo conglomerates broadcast their TV shows in Spanish? Do Latino patients in psychiatric institutions suffer less because their walls are covered with posters and photographs of Puerto Rico and other Caribbean countries? Are working-class Hispanics in Queens truly empowered by inter-ethnic alliances among middle-class candidates? Will Latinos gain more access to employment, health, and education if they vote as a united bloc? Is teaching integrated courses about Latin America and U.S. Latinos more effective than continuing to separate the two fields of study? These are all pressing questions for further research, reflection, and discussion.

A neglected issue in many accounts of pan-Latino ethnicity is its progressive racialization. As I have argued elsewhere, Puerto Ricans and other Latin American immigrants do not fit well in the U.S. hegemonic discourse on race and ethnicity—

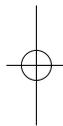




the so-called ethnoracial pentagon of whites, blacks, American Indians, Asians, and Pacific Islanders (Duany 2002: chapter 10; see also Rodríguez 2000; Torres-Saillant 2003). Recent research by the Census Bureau has tried to determine why so many Puerto Ricans, as well as other Hispanics, choose the “other” category, when asked about their race. In the 2000 census, 42.2 percent of all Hispanics and 38.2 percent of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. mainland declared that they belonged to “some other race” (Inter-University Program for Latino Research 2002). The rise of new ethnic/racial labels, such as Hispanic and Latino, has numerous implications for Puerto Ricans and other Latin American immigrants in the United States (see *Latin American Perspectives* 1992; Oboler 1995). Among other repercussions, the official adoption of the Hispanic category by the census and other federal government bureaucracies often treats Hispanics as racially distinct from both non-Hispanic whites and blacks. The popular quasi-racial use of Hispanic/Latino has allowed many Puerto Ricans to evade the binary opposition between black and white prevalent in the United States. Hence, you can be both Puerto Rican *and* Hispanic or Latino, the first term designating your national origin, and the second commonly referring to your “racial” identity.

The works reviewed in this essay reveal that scholarly discussions about national versus pan-ethnic identities have serious consequences for public policy. Dávila’s powerful indictment of U.S. Hispanic marketing admonishes against classifying all peoples of Spanish and Spanish-American origin as a self-defined, coherent, and stable entity. Santiago-Irizarry reminds her readers that incorporating the Spanish language and other tokens of Hispanic culture does not by itself improve psychiatric treatment. Ricourt and Danta provide a more hopeful assessment of the potential for organizing Latino communities throughout the United States based on daily interactions and shared interests among working-class immigrants. Some of the essays in *Latinos: Remaking America* show the danger of oversimplifying and generalizing from aggregate data about Latinos to particular national origin groups. Finally, the edited volume by Gutmann and his colleagues offers an intriguing educational solution to the dilemma of bridging transnational communities in Latin America and the United States.

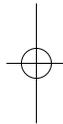
Taken together, how do these books presage the future of Latino America? I think they provide support for two opposite but overlapping trends. On the one hand, most Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Mexicans, Cubans, and so on still define themselves primarily on the basis of national origin, rather than a putative Hispanic ancestry. For most practical purposes, national identities continue to be the main organizing principle of everyday life in most immigrant communities throughout the United States. Where you live and study, what you do for a living, who your friends and neighbors are, whom you marry, and, most important, how you view yourself are largely grounded on where you or your parents come from. On the other hand, Latin American immigrants are increasingly coming together with other Latinos in such cities as New York, Chicago, Boston, Miami, Houston, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Many of these people are using the Spanish language, the Catholic religion, and other features of their Hispanic cultural background to construct a broader sense of themselves and to mobilize their communities. At this point in the history of Latino struggles for collective empowerment, the precedence of national over pan-ethnic identities seems open-ended. Depending on the circumstances, the people asking the question, and the issue at hand, many persons can reasonably assert themselves to be simultaneously Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Latino.





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Most Hispanic and Latino Americans can speak Spanish, but not all, and most Spanish-speaking Americans are Hispanic or Latino, but not all. For example, Hispanic/Latino Americans often do not speak Spanish by the third generation, and some Americans who speak Spanish may not identify themselves with Spanish-speaking Americans as an ethnic group. Not all Hispanic and Latino Americans have. The term "Hispanic" has been the source of several debates in the USA. But in recent polls of Americans of Spanish-speaking Latin American ancestry, Hispanic is still preferred over Latino among those expressing a preference, while those having no preference constitute a majority overall.[14]. Yale University "Understanding Ethnic Labels and Puerto Rican Identity. Representations of a transnational Puerto Rican identity are relatively new. [2] As Arcadio Díaz Quiñones has pointed out, throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, the political desire for Puerto Rican national sovereignty has dominated inquiries into the relationship between the United States and the island to such an extent, that the large migrant population of Puerto Ricans in the United States has been ignored (46-7). Part and parcel of the historical process, these nation narrations have reflected and shaped debates over language, puerторriqueñidad, and the ethnic character and geographical location of the island, consciously omitting the diasporic population

Recent Debates on National and Pan-Ethnic Identities | Find, read and cite all the research you need on ResearchGate. Taking as a starting point research carried out in 2000 into the concept of Hispanic identity in Spanish-language newspapers in the city of New York, this article provides a diachronic analysis of these media over the period 2000–2012. In the first study, it was established that Spanish-language newspapers reflected an intercultural dialogue among different Latino groups, thus creating a pan-Hispanic identity. In this article we wish to go a step further and explore whether the Spanish-language newspapers may also reflect, and foster, a second level of intercultural dialogue between the Hispan...