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The Chicano in America Today
A Sociological Analysis

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Sources of Social
Theory

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In this paper, I shall attempt to analyze the position of the Chicano in American society relative to that of the dominant Anglo culture. While doing so, I shall touch upon Marx's work, The Communist Manifesto and Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, comparing and contrasting the ideas in these two works with the contrasting cultures and values of the two groups. It is not my intent to favor one group or idea over the other, but to apply the concepts and ideas applicable in the two works to an analysis of the differences between the Chicano and the Anglo.

To begin with, it is difficult when studying groups of people to apply appropriate titles to them. For the sake of simplicity, I shall use the word Chicano in reference to Americans of Mexican descent and Anglo to the white American population.

Today, Chicanos are the second largest minority in the U.S.A. They constitute a blending of Spanish and Indian blood, and their culture is also a unique blend of these two backgrounds. In contrast to Black Americans who were brought to this country by force, and like the Native American, the Chicano is a victim of American Manifest Destiny. The Southwest has been home to the Chicano for centuries.

There are several distinctive features about Chicano culture which are different from the features of Anglo culture. First of all, the native

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language of most Chicanos is Spanish. However, fewer and fewer Chicano children are learning Spanish, because of the unavoidable need to learn English in today's American society.

Currently, there is wide use of Pochos among Chicanos, a dialect which is neither Spanish or English but a synthesis of both.

Another distinctive feature of Chicano culture is the role that religion plays in it, specifically that played by the Roman Catholic Church. Because the Spanish brought their Church with them when they conquered Mexico, they forced the native Indian populations to accept it.

As the two groups intermarried and became one, the Church became an integral part of mestizo or Mexican culture. The Catholic Church has often been blamed for being a repressive tool used by the Spanish to enslave the Indian. To a large extent this was true, but the mestizo gradually saw the Church in a favorable light. The mestizo and today's Chicano have accepted the values instilled by the Catholic Church. To the Chicano, the Church is an integral part of his culture.

An example of this is the tradition of celebrating the feast day of the Virgin ^{de} Guadalupe. Largely a folk tale, the story of the Virgin appearing to the Indian boy Juan Diego, is known by virtually all Chicanos, and ~~is~~ the day, December 12th, is still celebrated as a major holiday within the Catholic Church in Mexico and in the Southwest.

The morals and values of the Chicano are

highly influenced by the Catholic Church. Some of the more general values include an emphasis on family relationships and the extended family. In my own family, to cite an example, when my grandfather was alive his ranch was a focal ~~was~~ location for the whole family. A week would not go by when everyone, including my aunts, uncles, and cousins, would get together at the ranch to eat a big meal, play music and just enjoy being together. The Chicano family has a strong tendency to stay together, and take care of each other in times of need. Within my immediate family, it's interesting to note that six of my parents' seven children, all grown, still ~~the~~ live here in Tucson, their place of birth. The tradition of getting together has carried on into my father's family.

In terms of economics and material things in general, the Chicano sees the making of money, not as an end in itself, but as a means for providing food and shelter for the family. This is a distinctly Catholic influenced attitude (as Farjari points out in Catholicism, Protestantism, and Capitalism;

"In respect to the acquisition of wealth, Catholic doctrine can be summarized as follows: Man has necessities, needs that must be satisfied, and if temporal goods can satisfy them, is it is a duty and legitimate to seek to acquire such goods, bearing in mind two

rules; first that they must be acquired by lawful means; secondly that the amount required must not exceed the need. These two rules restrict respectively the choice and the use of means of procuring wealth. A failure to restrict such limits would be an offense against God, an infraction of the rules of justice, honesty and moderation; a subversion of the divine order, which has goods to supply the needs of all, not for the greed of a few...

Another distinctive cultural feature of the Chicano is an emphasis on marriage and having children. To most Chicanos, these two goals supersede the notion of striving for an education and a "career". For this reason, it is understandable that the majority of Chicanos marry at a relatively young age, and begin to have children within the first few years of marriage.

Education and work are becoming more important to the Chicano, largely because of American cultural influence. Nevertheless, many Chicanos are content with a high school diploma and a blue collar job. Most Chicanos are in fact, ~~are~~ blue collar workers and relatively few ever enter college.

Two other features of Chicano culture

are the conception of time and the emphasis on the fiesta. In a sense, the two are related. In contrast to the Anglo's emphasis on the ~~the~~ importance of time, being on time and the view of time as money, the Chicano is much more relaxed about it. Perhaps because ~~there~~ ^{there} is little monetary value placed on it, the Chicano is in no real hurry to get things done, ~~they~~ ^{time} just ~~isn't~~ ^{isn't} that important to merit the frenziness that can occur from living by a clock. In relation to being relaxed about time, is the fiesta or party. To the Chicano there is nothing like a fiesta, with good food, good music and lots of beer (preferably Coors). It's during these times when the feeling of family and community fills the air. Everyone seems to know everybody and for some strange reason everyone seems related to each other.

There are many occasions which call for a fiesta: among them weddings, birthdays, quinceañeras, sometimes funerals, the traditional holidays such as Easter, Christmas and New Year and the Mexican holidays, the 5th of May and the 16th of September, both days of Independence in Mexico. Sundays are also times for family gatherings and picnics. Among Chicano youth, cruising the park in one's car is a very important ^{weekend} ritual. It's a time to meet people, to be with friends, and to just enjoy the day and have a good time.

The aforementioned aspects of Chicano culture have yet to be destroyed by Anglo culture. However, more and more Chicanos are climbing the American ladder of success. Some make it through college, some manage to buy fancy cars and homes outside the barrio, and some turn away from teaching their children Spanish. In other words, there are some who have successfully assimilated into American society. Former governor of Arizona, Paul Castro, is one of these people. At a speech he gave to delegates at the 1976 Arizona Boy's State, I personally heard him ^{say} that Mexicans can make it in America if they so desired, they can pull themselves up by the bootstraps and be successful, if they really put an effort into it. He said he did it, and that he came from a poor barrio in Douglas. The ~~gov~~ governor had nothing good to say about his cultural background, it was but a giant ^{obstacle} which had to be overcome.

What then is it, that creates such disparity between cultures? The answer lies, I believe in the different value systems of the two cultures. American cultural values stem from Protestantism and Capitalism, whereas Chicano culture ^{values} stems from Catholicism and ^{a form of} peasant communalism. American culture places great emphasis on money, individualism, education ~~and~~ time, and the need to get ahead. Because the U.S. is an industrial capitalist country, money and the profit

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motive permeate through^{out} all aspects of the society as a focal concern. The average American is bent upon making money, not only to eat and support himself, but to get ahead. The stereotypical middle class values and the whole conception of the "American Dream" are still very much in existence. Although the sixties questioned all those things, the seventies saw a resurgence of them, and that resurgence is still growing; students are more concerned than ever about getting good jobs; the corporate structure is as ~~strong~~ competitive as ever, and Americans are still consuming more and more each year.

Tying in the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism to the contrast and conflict that exists between the Chicano and American cultures is not hard to do. It's clear, that because the U.S. is a capitalist country, that Weber's work has relevance. According to Weber, "the essence of the spirit of capitalism is that man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life"² Seen in this light, the American culture is easier to understand. However, to the Chicano, the pursuit of money as an end in itself and for profit aren't the ultimate purposes of his life. Again, it is worth noting, that the Chicano is a product of Catholic influence.

It would be wrong to indict ~~my~~ Weber for not seeing the differences. My guess is, that as a historian, he would probably be able to see very clearly the relevant historical and cultural facts and ideas that led to the formation of the Chicano culture. Weber would probably look back to ~~to~~ the Spanish colonial period in Mexico, when the conquistadores, conquered, influenced, and intermarried with the Indian cultures, and he would be able to see how the Catholic Church played such an important role.

Turning to ^a more Marxist viewpoint, before the Mexican American War and the Gadsden Purchase, Mexicans living in the Southwest were primarily peasant agriculturalists, tilling the earth. In a way, they've always been the ~~to~~ economic underdogs or the proletariat, dominated by the ruling class, ~~#~~ in this case the Spanish landowners. As a tool to keep the Mexican dominated the Spanish used the Catholic Church, and it worked for a very long time. The Church taught the Mexican a set of values that were repressive in an economic sense. It's interesting to note, however, that when Mexico revolted against Spain, it kept the Church and its values as its own.

After the Gadsden Purchase and the Mexican American War, Americans rapidly colonized the newly acquired Southwest, bringing with them their Protestant values, while to a large extent ignoring the fact that a people

with different values and beliefs had existed ~~there~~ for centuries. Suddenly, the Mexican was engulfed by a new country, a new set of values and a new way of life.

~~For~~ To this day, however, the Chicano has yet to accept them. The melting pot theory has not worked, largely because the southwest has always been home to the Chicano and because Mexico is so close. Its influence is still there. The Chicano today is immersed between two conflicting ways of life, his own, which has its roots in Mexico and in the church, and that of the U.S.

It would be easy to pinpoint the culture of the Chicano as the cause of his position relative to Anglos in terms of economics and education. However, this would be a classic example of blaming the victim. There are many politically aware Chicanos today who know that the cultural and economic differences exist. Yet they strongly feel America has repressed and exploited the Chicano, ^{through} manipulation and control of the government, the schools and countless other institutions.

For example, the position of the Chicano in the U.S today ~~is~~ in terms of economics and education is poor when compared to the dominant Anglo segment of the population.

Statistical data acquired from the U.S. Census in 1979 show that 21.6% of the Spanish speaking population today is below the poverty level, compared to only 8.7% of the Anglo

population. The median income for Chicanos in 1978 was \$12,500, whereas for Anglos it was \$18,300. In terms of educational attainment of persons 25 years and older, in 1979 42% of the Spanish speaking population graduated from high school, as opposed to 70% of the Anglo population, 25 and older. As one goes beyond high school to college the disparity between Chicanos and Anglos grows even larger. ³

As the data clearly indicates, Chicanos and other Hispanics do less well than Anglos in terms of income and education. ~~It~~ As I have stated, many of the differences could very ~~well~~ likely be attributed to cultural differences between Chicanos and Anglos. I feel this argument is justified, to a degree. Values ~~do~~ do differ among the two groups, but one must not dismiss the fact that the Chicano faces similar problems along with Blacks and Native Americans in terms of racism, discrimination and prejudice. America is not a culturally pluralist society but a somewhat racist one. If one does not assimilate and accept American values, then one is doomed. To cite an example of this, up until very recently, the Spanish language was not allowed to be used when teaching Chicano children. In the socialization and educational processing of these children, the American school system has largely ignored the fact that Spanish is the native tongue spoken in many Chicano homes. English

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was the only language everything was taught in, and thus the child was forced to learn it, before anything else could be learned. The language barrier inevitably set many children back. - To me, this is one of the main reasons that Chicanos have done less well in the school system. Many are automatically at a disadvantage from the very beginning, and "catching up" is often difficult and futile. Today, bilingual education is used in some schools, but with the current cutbacks by the government in education, it is unlikely that bilingual education will get much more support.

There are many, many other examples that one could cite showing the oppression of the Chicano by the dominant Anglo population. His land, his culture, and his language have all been robbed at one time or another. To a Marxist, however, economic exploitation is what is most relevant. From a Marxist perspective, Chicanos are part of a much larger oppressed class that includes them as well as Blacks, Native Americans and working class whites. To the ^{classical} Marxist, the distinct culture and color of the Chicano is irrelevant. As Mundiola points out in his essay "Marxism and the Chicano movement:"

"Perhaps if an oppressed colored race would have existed in the Europe of Marx and Engels, their analysis of capitalist society would have been modified, and there

would not exist today the tendency on the part of Marxists to treat racism as an epiphenomenal variable. Further, the difficulty encountered in trying to incorporate race as a basis for exploitation into Marxist thought may be indicating that Marxism is not the analytical scheme needed by Chicanos to accurately assess their reality. On the other hand, Chicano membership in the non owning class of a capitalist U.S. leads one to accept Marxism and to consider the socialist alternative as an avenue for the alleviation of Chicano oppression. #

If one deals with Marx's Communist Manifesto and its propositions, asking for the abolition of private property, and the overthrow of the ruling class, in relation to the Chicano, one must deal with the cultural and racial differences as well as the economic differences between the proletarian Chicano and the bourgeois Anglo. Marx's stance is purely economic, arguing mainly that the ruling class oppresses the masses through its control of the means of production and exploitation of labor. The ruling class also controls all the institutions in America that the Chicano must deal with. This is evident in

the education system, the media, to a large extent the Church, the mass-market and the government. By not allowing the Chicanos this cultural as well as economic freedom, the Anglo ruling class has him beaten on all sides.

~~United~~ Indeed, many so called "radical" Chicano Marxists advocate a nationalistic revolt against America. To them, the Southwest is Aztlan, their homeland by divine right. Only by a total separation from America and its capitalist way of life can Chicanos find true liberation.

Returning to the main theme of this paper, it is difficult coming up with ^{of angle} a conclusion as to the causal factors involved in assessing the position of the Chicanos in America today. From a Weberian or historical viewpoint, taking into account the cultural differences between the groups and how those differences emerged is very important. Different value systems exist, largely because of ^{the} different religious and economic systems of the two groups. Still, one must not dismiss the very plausible Marxist analysis of American society in terms of the forces in operation used in keeping the Chicanos oppressed. It is my contention that both ideas are valid and that the current position of the Chicanos is a product of both influences, ~~with~~ cultural differences and economic exploitation and oppression by the ruling class.

Footnotes

- 1 Fanfani, Amintore, ^{Catholicism} Capitalism, Protestantism and Capitalism p. 128 Sheed and Ward, New York 1955
- 2 Weber, Max The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, p. 4. Charles Scribner's Sons New York 1958
- 3 U. S. Census Bureau: Population Profile of the U. S. 1979
4. Mendiola, Jotcho "Marxism and the Chicano Movement: Preliminary Remarks" in Perspectives in Chicano Studies, edited by Reynaldo Flores Macias p 185. Chicano Studies Center Publications, UCLA 1977

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