

# 4

## Co-Cultures: Multiculturalism in the United States

*No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive.*

MAHATMA GANDHI

In the previous chapter, we looked at international cultures—those cultures located outside the immediate borders of the United States—and, generally, focused on a single cultural group. In this chapter, we turn to the United States, where cultural diversity is commonly recognized as an important part of our history and future. Therefore, we now examine the dynamics of domestic multiculturalism by investigating some *co-cultures*—those diverse cultural groups that reside inside the United States. The co-cultures often have many of the defining characteristics found in any culture—a specialized language system, shared values, a collective worldview, common communication patterns, and often a common history. Also, members of a co-culture usually share a number of similar characteristics, such as religion, economic status, ethnic background, age, gender, or sexual preference. And with growing frequency, people residing in the United States may hold dual or even multiple co-cultural memberships. A gay African American man would be considered as a member of two co-cultures. A lesbian Jewish American woman over 65 would be a member of multiple co-cultural groups.

These diverse co-cultures bring new experiences and ways of interacting to an intercultural encounter. Their unique communicative behaviors may sometimes be confusing and baffling to members of the dominant culture. This diversity can be particularly salient when, for instance, members of a collectivistic co-culture, such as Vietnamese Americans, interact with someone from the highly individualistic Euro-American dominant culture. For example, a Vietnamese American, with strong extended family ties, might feel it important to ask for time off from work to help celebrate his uncle's birthday. But a Euro-American, more focused on the nuclear family, may view such a request as an inappropriate excuse for a day off.

Because the United States is a pluralistic, multicultural society, there is a vital need for competent communication between the dominant culture and the numerous co-cultures, as well as between the co-cultures themselves. You cannot communicate effectively with a member of a co-culture until you learn to appreciate the unique and rich opportunity offered by that co-culture. Insufficient knowledge about, stereotypes of, and prejudices toward people from co-cultures often lead to incorrect, hurtful, and even insulting assumptions. An awareness and understanding of the unique experiences of these co-cultures will help you overcome many communication problems.

The rich cultural diversity and complexity of U.S. society flows from an almost overwhelming number of co-cultures. As a result, we are obviously unable to examine each co-culture in this chapter. Thus, our selections are based on three considerations: (1) we need to make efficient use of limited space; (2) we want to include some social groups that are often in conflict with the dominant culture; and (3) we want to emphasize the range of different co-cultures. To this end, we selected representations from both the major co-cultures and from those less often encountered. You will also encounter additional co-cultures in subsequent chapters.

We begin this chapter with an essay that presents an ideological position informing intercultural communication among co-cultures. According to the author, Young Yun Kim, the theme of individualism is central to this ideology. In "*Unum and Pluribus: Ideological Underpinnings of Intereethnic Communication in the United States*," Kim examines the historical development of American social institutions that were based on such liberal themes as equal rights and equal opportunity, which form the cornerstone of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

Even with the historical tradition of equality, as Kim quickly points out, "Americans today are far from being of a same mind about various social issues" such as interethnic and interracial relations. As she notes, "intereethnic relations have become a perpetual sore spot in the American consciousness" in which many Americans are galvanized into an "us-against-them" posture in the form of "identity politics," which can also be considered as "politics-of-difference" and "politics of recognition."

After providing an overview of the current U.S. domestic social dilemma, Kim uses the issues of race, ethnicity, and interethnic relations to examine interethnic communication. She then offers an in-depth discussion of four types of interethnic messages—*assimilation*, *pluralism*, *reconciliation*, and *extremism*—that we frequently hear in the media. Kim follows this discussion with a synthesis of the messages and concludes that interethnic relations remain salient in U.S. society, but the future remains unclear as Americans continue to "struggle with competing visions of *Unum* and *Pluribus* . . . and what it means to be Americans." She concludes with a note of optimism in that "the very fact that interethnic issues continue to engage American passion is itself an affirmation, and a hallmark, of the American liberal tradition. This tradition contributes to the stability of the American democracy."

Conflict is an inescapable part of any relationship and if managed improperly can lead to irreparable breakdowns—alienation at the interpersonal level or war in the international arena. As you might suspect, how conflict is viewed, managed, and resolved within a society is a function of cultural values. For the dominant U.S. culture, differences are considered inevitable, healthy, and valuable. Thus conflict is viewed as a natural part of social intercourse and resolution is usually accomplished through a dialectic process. In other cultures, particularly those with a group orientation, conflict represents a threat to good social order and is something that should be avoided. As a result, cultures, including U.S. co-cultures, often have dissimilar means of managing and resolving conflicts. This is illustrated in Charmaine I. Ka'imika's essay, "*Ho'oponopono: A Hawaiian Cultural Process to Conflict Resolution*."

The essay begins by explaining that *ho'oponopono* is a traditional form of communication used by Hawaiians to resolve conflicts and maintain harmonious interpersonal relations. The process is carried out using communal interaction and incorporates five distinct steps—problem identification, confession, restituting, forgiveness and release, or closure—which are discussed separately. Ka'imika's tells us that this process,

rooted in ancient cultural traditions, continues to be practiced among Hawaiians and has been used to resolve conflicts in a variety of contemporary contexts. The essay demonstrates that culture has devised different ways of managing conflict to sustain positive relations.

Conflict is also a central theme in our next essay, "America in Black and Brown: Exploring Sources of Intercultural Tensions between Blacks and Latinos in the United States," by Peter Ogom Nwosu, which looks at existing tensions between two U.S. co-cultures. Nwosu examines the often contentious relationship between Black and Latino Americans from historical, cultural, and political perspectives. Arguing that neither group has a good understanding of the other, he provides a comprehensive comparison of their different historical experiences. The essay then uses these varied historical backgrounds as a foundation to explain how and why the psychological, cultural, and political perspectives of each group differ. Nwosu contends that although Latinos are generally aware of the *Black experience*, there is little understanding of *Black culture*. Equally problematic is the lack of awareness among Blacks about Latino culture. A particularly salient problem that tends to exacerbate the schism is the culturally based, contrasting communication styles employed by Blacks and Latinos. The essay concludes with a call for greater understanding and cooperation between Blacks and Latinos and for the need to view efforts to gain greater representation and opportunity not as an ethnic struggle but as one for human rights for everyone.

The next co-cultural group we consider is the disabled community. For many people, the disabled are not recognized as a distinct co-culture. There are, however, approximately 14 million disabled Americans between the ages of 16 and 64, and that number is increasing rapidly with the return of injured veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2007, there were over 150,000 Iraq war veterans receiving Veterans Administration disability benefits, and that number will continue to increase as the VA processes the flow of new applications. These veterans may suffer not only from physical wounds that may have resulted in lost limbs, paralysis, blindness, or dementia, but also from posttraumatic distress disorder (PTSD) which in essence can be a disabling dysfunctional emotional condition.

The disabled, including war veterans, often find themselves misunderstood, marginalized, or even cut off from the dominant nondisabled culture. Dawn O. Braithwaite and Charles A. Braithwaite look at some of the reasons for this isolation in "Which Is My Good Leg?: Cultural Communication of Persons with Disabilities." They specifically examine how disabled persons view their communicative relationships with nondisabled persons. Reviewing research consisting of more than 100 in-depth interviews with physically disabled adults, the Braithwaites discovered that disabled people go through a process of redefinition involving three steps: (1) redefining the self as a part of the "new" culture, (2) redefining disability; and (3) redefining disability for the dominant culture. Being familiar with these steps will help you improve your ability to communicate effectively with members of the disabled co-culture.

The final essay in this chapter will introduce you to the communicative behaviors and dynamics associated with the gay and lesbian co-culture. In his article, "In Plain Sight: Gay and Lesbian Communication and Culture," William F. Eadie acknowledges that there is a disparity of views, ranging from hostility to acceptance, regarding the gay and lesbian community. Nevertheless, he challenges you to become acquainted with the cultural characteristics and communication style of the gay and lesbian members in our society.

In his essay, Eadie specifies three general statements about lesbian and gay culture: (1) being open about sexual orientation is a political statement; (2) lesbian and gay culture must deal with tensions relating to how open to be about one's sexuality; and (3) although lesbian and gay culture is generally characterized as being about sexual attraction and desire, being lesbian or gay is about much, much more than sex. The essay also provides insight into lesbian and gay communication behaviors and how sexual attraction and intimacy are negotiated. Eadie's essay provides first-hand insight into the lesbian and gay community and offers you a much greater understanding of this co-culture.

## Unum and Pluribus: Ideological Underpinnings of Interethnic Communication in the United States

YOUNG YUN KIM

The United States was founded as a construction organized by the ideology of classical liberalism in the Enlightenment tradition—a tradition rooted in the theories of European and Anglo-American philosophers such as John Locke, Adam Smith, and John Dewey. Central to this ideology is the theme of individualism, "the social priority of the individual vis-à-vis the State, the established Church, social classes . . . or other social groups" (Abercrombie, 1980, p. 56). While recognizing the existence of infinite individual differences, classical liberalism also stresses universalism that sees human nature presupposing and transcending social group categories such as ethnicity and race. As Michael Billig et al. (1988) have noted: "The assertions 'we are all human' and 'We are all individuals' are both equally and self-evidently true" (p. 124). The liberal themes of individualism and universalism are further linked to the theme of *procedural equality*, that is, "equal rights" and "equal opportunities" afforded to all individuals in the form of "human rights"—the basic requisite of a free and democratic society. Enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and democratic and capitalistic institutions, these and related liberal principles constitute the core

of the American cultural ethos, projecting a vision of American society that seeks to transcend a monolithic tribal ancestral and territorial condition. Essayist Henry Grunwald captured this liberal tradition in a bicentennial essay (*Time*, July 5, 1976):

The U.S. was not born in a tribal conflict, like so many other nations, but in a conflict over principles. Those principles were thought to be universal, which was part of the reason for the unprecedented policy of throwing the new country open to all comers. (p. 35)

Given these traditional ideals, however, Americans today are far from being of a same mind about various social issues. In fact, the opposite is true when it comes to "interethnic" (or "inter-racial") relations. Ever since the Reconstruction era of the late nineteenth century when "civil rights" debates began (Wilson, 1998), American society has experienced an extraordinary degree of unease, conflict, self-criticism, and mutual-criticism as it struggled to reconcile the ideals of individualism, universalism, and procedural equality with the reality of inequality, real or perceived, along particular ethnic/racial group lines. In recent decades, the traditional primacy of the individual has been increasingly challenged by the claims of the primacy of ethnic group identity over individual identity, particularistic group grievances that are historically and institutionally rooted, and the necessity to redress such grievances so as to achieve equal group status.

This American dilemma continues to stir heated public debates. Indeed, interethnic relations have become a perpetual sore spot in the American consciousness. It galvanizes Americans into "us-against-them" posturing in the form of "identity politics"—also described as "politics of difference" and "politics of recognition." Essayist Russell Baker (*The New York Times*, May 5, 1994) laments this situation in an essay entitled "Come with the Unum":

I have always been an "E Pluribus Unum" person myself, but the future does not look bright for an "E Pluribus Unum" America. The melting pot in which the Pluribus were to be combined into the Unum was not the success its advertisers had promised. . . . What is new these days is the passion with which we now pursue our tribal identities. . . . O, Unum, what misery we courted when we forsook thee for Pluribus. (p. A15)

## ANALYSIS

This author has sought to better understand the often-contentious landscape of interethnic communication in the contemporary United States (Kim, 1999, 2003). To this end, the present analysis scrutinizes differing views and opinions of American people in order to identify multiple ways in which the tradition of classical liberalism plays out in the contemporary American interethnic communication messages. The term, "ideology" is employed here in terms of what Billig (1991) refers to as "lived ideology," a latent consciousness or philosophy" (pp. 27-29). In this sense, ideology refers to a set of social forces that stimulate, substantiate, and constrain the intellectual beliefs and expressions of thinking individuals. Individuals formulate and express their opinions by invoking socially shared beliefs as *their own*, rather than passively following the dictates of the mental schema within a given ideological tradition. Even in making remarks that are self-serving or even contradictory, they tend to consider their argument reasonable or even persuasive in the eyes of a rational audience. Communication messages are, thus, more than mere expressions of a communicator's own independent thoughts. That is, to say something is very often to "fight"—in the sense that messages serve as strategy and tactics for advocating a given communicator's own version of what he or she believes to be "common sense." In Billig's (1991) words:

To maximize their chances of being persuasive, speakers should make appeal to the *sensus communis*, which they share with their audience. Particularly useful were commonplaces, or the sort of moral maxims, which are laden with clichéd appeals to values. Thus, orators' discourse, which seeks to create new movements of opinion towards a position not commonly shared, will rehearse old commonly shared stereotypes. (p. 21)

Based on this social-psychological conception of ideology, a variety of data have been analyzed including messages communicated by political and civic leaders, activists, academicians, and ordinary citizens. Almost all of the data utilized in this analysis have been found in sources available since 1990. The data types range from trade books written for

general readers, news magazine articles, articles in national and local newspapers, and transcripts of interviews and talk shows broadcast on radio and television. Some of these data are captured in narratively occurring events, whereas others were expressed in the form of personal reflections and testimonials. The data have been analyzed through a qualitative-interpretive exercise to surface the ideological themes underlying the publicly communicated messages pertaining to issues of ethnicity, race, and interethnic relations. This method of analysis shares features with other qualitative investigations such as discourse (or rhetorical) analysis designed to elucidate social-psychological processes through understanding spoken and unspoken messages (e.g., Billig, 1991; Billig et al., 1988; Van Dijk, 1997). In addition, systematic data from recent public opinion polls based on representative samples are utilized to complement the primarily episodic data.

The analysis has revealed four types of interethnic communication messages: (a) assimilationism; (2) pluralism; (3) reconciliation; and (4) extremism. Each of these message types is described in the following discussion. Commonly rooted in the ideology of classical liberalism, these message types capture the differing sets of beliefs and moral visions being voiced by Americans today. Together, they represent a full spectrum of ongoing debates and arguments about what American society is, should be, and should be doing, with respect to issues of ethnicity, race, and interethnic relations.

### MESSAGES OF ASSIMILATIONISM

Three core principles of classical liberalism—individualism, universalism, and procedural equality—continue to directly and powerfully underpin the mainstream thinking of Americans about interethnic relations. These liberal ideals shape the arguments commonly referred to as *assimilationism*. Employing such metaphors as "melting pot" and "color-blind society," assimilationist messages project a societal vision in which immigrants and indigenous ethnic minorities are mainstreamed into the normative culture and institutions. In this vision, the government is responsible for universally applying societal rules to all

its citizens irrespective of skin color and religious creed. Immigrants and ethnic minorities, in turn, are expected to assimilate themselves socially and culturally, so as to become fully functional in the American society.

Assimilationist messages celebrate personal achievement and self-reliance. These messages place individual identity over and above group identity and question the validity and morality of categorical thought. Although each person is unique, all humans are also endowed with the same set of universal human needs, rights, and responsibilities. Prejudice directed for or against individuals simply based on group membership is morally wrong, not only because it is irrational but also because its focus on social categories contravenes the intellectual or moral prescription to value the unique qualities of every individual. The primacy of the individual over the group hinges on the value of equality as it pertains to the premise of common human nature and basic human rights that call for equal applications of laws and rules to all people regardless of their group categories. A fair society is one in which all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds, are granted equal rights and equal opportunity. Equality in this view means "fair play"—a notion rooted in a biopsychological (or naturalistic) worldview and the notion of "equity." This view accepts and appreciates differential individual merits in the allocation of resources and status based on the presumption that "there is a natural distribution of human talent, ranging from the few individuals of genius and talent to the defective and delinquent" (Rossides, 1976, p. 9).

As columnist David Brooks puts it, "when achievement and equality clash in America, achievement wins" (*The New York Times*, January 14, 2007, p. WK12). Each person, and each person alone, is seen as ultimately responsible for his or her own achievement of status. Everyone is expected to "play by the rules." Insistence on group-based policies such as affirmative action in college admissions and employment practices is "un-American"—one that endangers the larger fraternity of all Americans and obscures differential individual merits that must be earned individually. Emphasis on group identity over individual identity is deemed wrong because it renders itself to what essayist Pico Iyer (1990) calls "state-sponsored favoritism" that mandates racial or

ethnic "preferences" or "quotas" and "reverse discrimination." Iyer, himself an Indian-born immigrant and world traveler, expresses his objection to such practices as follows:

As an alien from India, I choose to live in America precisely because it is a place where aliens from India are, in principle, treated no better (and no worse) than anyone else. . . . The problem with people who keep raising the cry of "racism" is that they would have us see everything in terms of race. They treat minorities as emblems, and everyone as typecast. . . . As an Asian minority myself, I know of nothing more demeaning than being chosen for a job, or even a role, on the basis of my race. Nor is the accompanying assumption—that I need a helping hand because my ancestors were born outside Europe—very comforting. . . . Are we, in fact, to cling to a state of childlike dependency? (p. 86)

The assimilationist emphasis on individualism, universalism, and procedural equality has been repeatedly promoted in presidential inauguration addresses. Presidents, regardless of their party affiliations, have exalted the assimilationist values as the very heart of the American identity—a common identity constituted by individual identities and one that transcends category-based distinctions. Former President William Jefferson Clinton, for example, spoke of American citizens' "primary allegiance to the values America stands for and values we really live by" and stated: "Long before we were so diverse, our nation's motto was *E Pluribus Unum*—out of many, we are one. We must be one's neighbors, as fellow citizens; not separate camps, but family" (*Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 31, October 23, 1996, p. 851). The universal principles of individual identity and procedural equality are amply echoed in remarks of many other Americans. A newspaper reader wrote to the editor of *The New York Times Magazine* (April 29, 1992), objecting to an earlier article "Cultural Baggage" on the significance of ethnic group identity:

I've been fighting ethnic labels since I was 12 or 13, and decided that only I had a right to define myself. . . . I am not almost WASP I am African-American. I'm also part Cherokee from both sides of my family. But so what? . . . I've taken risks with my life that only I am



responsible for, and I have reaped substantial rewards for daring to be myself and not just different. (p. 10)

Stanley Crouch, an African American essayist, speaks to the common humanity of all races in arguing against racial politics in his book, *Always in Pursuit* (1998): "We . . . observe ourselves functioning in almost every capacity and exhibiting every inclination from the grand to the gaudy, from the idealistic to the shallow ethnic con" (p. 268). Likewise, Richard Lacey, in an essay entitled "Whose Peers?" in a special issue of *Time* magazine (1993), disagreed with those who have argued for a guarantee of minority representation in jury composition in courtroom trials:

[Some] advocates argue that just such a guarantee of minority representation should be part of the law. . . . If that is so, is the only solution an outright racial-quota system? And how finely would the jury need to be divided? Could Latinos in general judge other Latinos? Or would Cuban Americans be needed for the trial of Cuban Americans, Mexican Americans for other Mexican Americans, and so on? If the goal is better justice and greater legitimacy, American juries certainly need to be more representative. But in a just society, the process of creating a true assembly of peers need not be reduced to a systematic gathering of the tribes. (p. 61)

Perhaps one of the most compelling articulations of the traditional liberal ideals and of disapproval of identity politics was offered by Glenn C. Loury (1993), a prominent economic theorist and a public intellectual. In the following excerpt from one of his earlier writings, Loury reflects on his own social identity as an African American and his individual identity as a human being as follows:

The most important challenges and opportunities that confront me derive not from my racial condition, but rather from my human condition. I am a husband, a father, a son, a teacher, an intellectual, a Christian, a citizen. In none of these roles is my race irrelevant, but neither can racial identity alone provide much guidance for my quest to adequately discharge these responsibilities. . . . The expression of my individual personality is to be found in the blueprint that I employ to guide this project of construction. The problem of devising such a plan for one's life is a

universal problem, which confronts all people, whatever their race, class, or ethnicity (pp. 7-10)

## MESSAGES OF PLURALISM

Directly challenging the aforementioned assimilationist messages are the messages of *pluralism*. Prominent in pluralist messages is the idea of the sanctity of the group. This notion is traceable to the experiences of unequal treatment, perceived or real, of certain individuals along ethnic lines. To varying degrees, pluralist messages replace the old "melting pot" metaphor with newer ones such as "mosaic," "quilt," and "salad bowl" that emphasize the distinctiveness of ethnic groups. As such, pluralist messages uphold *group identity* as a vital, if not primary, construct of a personhood, highlighting a fact of life that we are different "types" of persons defined by social categories such as race, ethnicity, language, culture, and national origin. Rooted in the worldview of *relativism* that classifies humanity into categories of distinct qualities, pluralist messages emphasize in-group sameness and point to the existence of a "natural attitude" (cf. Garfinkel, 1967) for their moral and intellectual claims for group distinctiveness.

Pluralist messages are predicated on the persistent reality of racial and ethnic prejudice—a reality in which the old liberal ideal of procedural equality is seen as not working well when it comes to serving the needs of certain minority groups. The sense of systematic mistreatment along ethnic and racial lines has given way to a new demand for a new politics of resentment and victimization. Instead of defining equality procedurally in terms of fairness of rules, pluralist messages advocate the contrary belief in *status equality* (in place of procedural equality), a demand for equal results in the interest of "emanicipation" of specific groups that are historically oppressed or presently in need of institutional support through remedial laws and public policies. This outcome-based conception of equality is opposed to the procedure-based, universalist view of equality, in that it allows for differential procedural treatments relative to different groups. Along this line, arguments have been made for a redistribution of power and resources to overcome racial inequalities (e.g., Hacker, 1992). Some pluralists advocate such an action as a remedy for status inequalities between and among ethnic and racial groups.

This pluralist position rejects the biopsychological explanation of inequality and replaces it with a sociocultural (or structural) explanation. That is, human beings are inherently equal in their original states, but their original natures become distorted and corrupted in the process of interaction with others in society and through the development of institutions such as language, culture, property, law, and social stratification among people (Tsuda, 1986). The traditional liberal notions of individual identity, universalistic application of laws, rules, rights, and responsibilities to everyone, and procedural equality without respect to equal outcomes are deemed a false ideology in that it serves only the end of legitimizing the capitalist system of "winners" and "losers" in society. In seeking group identity, relativism, and status equality, pluralist messages present race and ethnicity not merely as a basis for claiming cultural and social distinctiveness, but also as a central rallying point, a focal means to combat unjust practices such as "institutional racism." Prominent in these messages, accordingly, are terms such as ethnic "empowerment," "pride," "dignity," and "justice." Dismantling the important liberal values of American life such as intellectual freedom and "free speech," pluralist messages demand suppression of "hate speech," loosely defined as words that a minority group finds offensive.

Specifically, schools and universities have sought to bring about a greater diversity of the university curriculum by replacing it with one "that would focus on the achievements of marginalized peoples and on the sins of the nation's founders" (Traub, 1998, p. 25). In San Francisco, for instance, the school board was reported to be developing a plan to require every high school student in the district to read works by authors of color (*The New York Times*, March 11, 1998, p. A21). Many university campuses have rejected the idea of an immutable canon of indispensable Western classics in favor of recognizing the reality of ethnic diversity in the United States. Curriculum changes like these have become commonplace, reflecting the emergence of pluralism in national consciousness at the end of the 1980s advocating the normative rights of minority groups. Some advocates of pluralism have even attempted to extend the pluralist messages to arguing for a guarantee of minority representation as part of the law. Believing that race influences not only prominent cases such as the Rodney King trial but also most cases involving minority defendants, Sheri

Lynn Johnson, a law professor, believes defendants should be guaranteed three members of their own racial group of a 12-member jury (cited in Lacey, 1993, p. 61).

Also expressing the pluralist themes is the following reaction to the court decision which found the practice of race-based affirmative action programs in admission decisions at the University of Michigan (*The New York Times*, Editorials/Letters, March 30, 2001):

Even with affirmative action in place, law school classes here at the University of Michigan are overwhelmingly dominated by White men. The compelling interest in maintaining such programs applies not just to minority students, but to all students who will now see even fewer non-White faces and law school classes become even more homogeneous. Our legal system has produced yet another significantly disappointing decision, and many of us here fear that America is on the verge of taking one giant leap backward. (p. A22)

Molefi K. Asante, a prominent scholar of African-American studies, offers an eloquent argument against the "old" assimilationist ideals. In its place, Asante advocates the pluralist counter-ideals of group identity and status equality based on a particularistic view of human nature. In an essay entitled "Racism, Consciousness, and Afrocentricity," Asante (1993) reflects on his experience of growing up in a racist society and explains how he came to reject W. E. B. Du Bois' notion of "double consciousness" as a tragic outcome inescapable in the "Eurocentric" society. Asante, thus, proposes "Afrocentricity" as an alternative intellectual model based on which African Americans can claim an equal identity and status as a distinct people:

The feeling that you are in quicksand is inescapable in the quagmire of a racist society. You think that you can make progress in the interpretation of what's happening now only to discover that every step you take sinks the possibility of escaping. You are a victim despite your best efforts to educate those around you to the obvious intellectual mud sunk in their minds. . . . Even from my young adult years I thought a precondition of my fullness, a necessary and natural part of my maturity, was the commitment to be who I am, to be Afrocentric. . . . Afrocentricity is the active centering of the African

in subject place in our historical landscape. This has always been my search; it has been a quest for sanity (pp. 142-143)

The pluralistic insistence on a distinct group identity has drawn critical reactions from many for fostering division, "political correctness," and "self-segregation." In *The Dismantling of America* (1992), for example, historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., warned that pressing ethnic awareness too far poses the danger of the "disintegration of the national community, apartheid, Balkanization, urbanization" (p. 118). In *The Twilight of Common Dreams* (1995), sociologist Todd Gitlin maintained that America would be lost unless its obsession with cultural differences could be transcended in the name of the common good. More recently, Orland Patterson (2006), an African American sociologist at Harvard University, has characterized the phenomenon of self-segregation "the last major race problem" in the United States. Patterson finds it paradoxical that voluntary segregation on the part of ethnic minorities has been rising precisely as the decades of civil rights struggle to tear down racial barriers. Acknowledging that African Americans mention ethnic pride and white hostility as their main reasons for not moving to white neighborhoods, Patterson argues that "the disadvantages [of self-segregation], especially for youth, far outweigh the psychic gains" (p. A19).

## MESSAGES OF RECONCILIATION

Straddled between the aforementioned ideological poles of assimilationism and pluralism are the voices of ideological reconciliation. These voices are what sociologist Alan Wolfe in *One Nation, After All* (1998) asserts as occupying "the vital center"—the "middle" America. Based on 200 in-depth interviews conducted in Boston, Atlanta, Tulsa, and San Diego metropolitan areas, Wolfe (1998) found "little support for the notion that middle-class Americans are engaged in bitter cultural conflict with one another" (p. 278). Instead, according to Wolfe, they are "struggling to find ways in which their core beliefs can be reconciled with experiences that seem to contradict them" (p. 281), while insisting on a set of values "capacious enough to be inclusive but demanding enough to uphold standards of personal responsibility" (p. 322).

The messages of reconciliation reflect the struggle of many Americans seeking moderation, tolerance, accommodation, integration, and balance. They are expressions of both hopes and difficulties in doing so. As such, reconciliation messages indicate a great deal of ambivalence, and even contradiction in the way many Americans think about the issues of race, ethnicity, and interethnic relations. They may, for example, support bilingual programs, but only if they are short-lived and not used as a political goal or instrument of power demanded by every group for its own separate slice of the political pie. They may support multiculturalism, but only to the extent that ethnic identity is subsumed under the common "American identity" that emphasizes individualism. They may support affirmative action programs based on group identity, but consider "quota" systems as unfair, divisive, and ultimately counterproductive. Or they may accept and even appreciate *Honkbadis* and *Kwanzaa*, but they may also find that some people have gone too far when insisting on avoiding traditional phrases such as "Merry Christmas" in favor of "mushy" phrases such as "Happy Holidays" (Haberman, 2006). William A. Donohue, President of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, made just such a case as follows.

The United States is 85 percent Christian, which means we are more Christian than India is Hindu and Israel is Jewish. Moreover, 96 percent of Americans celebrate Christmas. So why do we have to tiptoe around the religious meaning of Christmas every December? There is something sick about Friendship Trees, Winter Solstice Concerts, Holiday Parades and Holly Day Festivals. . . . Diversity means respect for the traditions and heritages of all groups, not just those which have been cherry-picked by the multicultural gurus. . . . To be excluded is normal. Mother's Day, Father's Day, Veteran's Day, Black History Month, Gay Pride Parades—they all exclude someone. . . . By celebrating Christmas we are celebrating diversity. (*The New York Times*, Op-Ed, November 28, 2006, p. A23)

An attempt at ideological reconciliation was voiced in a remark former President Clinton made during a roundtable discussion on race televised on PBS (Public Broadcasting System) on July 9, 1998. "I believe there is an independent value to having young people learn in an environment where they're with people of many different racial and ethnic backgrounds. And

the question is, How can you balance that with our devotion to merit?" (*The New York Times*, July 9, 1998, p. A21). A similar stance of reconciliation was taken by late former President Gerald Ford's Op-Ed article in 1999 titled "Inclusive America, Under Attack," according to columnist Jeffrey Toobin (2006). Ford wrote this article in support of affirmative action at the University of Michigan to argue that a pair of pending lawsuits would prohibit Michigan and other universities "from even considering race as one of many factors weighted by admission counselors," and that such a move would "condemn future college students to suffer the cultural and social impoverishment that afflicted my generation."

Reconciliatory views have been voiced by leaders of ethnic minorities, as well. Hugh Price, in his keynote address as the President of the National Urban League at the League's 1998 annual conference, shared his belief that the current conditions in the United States offer Blacks the "best shot we have ever had to shove ourselves the rest of the way into the American mainstream" (*The New York Times*, August 13, 1998). Racial discrimination still exists. Price pointed out, but African American parents must take greater responsibility for the education of their children.

With unemployment so low, employers are gobbling up almost every willing and able worker with a pulse. Shame on us if we don't seize this historic opening in the economy. . . . I think we are moving rapidly toward the day when if you've got something to put on the table, employers aren't going to care what color you are. (p. A23)

Likewise, on Columbus Day in 1992, Niles Bird Runningwater, then president of the Indian student association at the University of Oklahoma, communicated a message of reconciliation:

We don't choose to protest this fallacy of American history; but rather to celebrate the survival and continuance of Indian peoples. . . . By doing this we can fully acknowledge 500 years of coexistence of Indian and non-Indian peoples in America. . . . We're trying to do our part in togetherness and participation by eliciting communication and excitement concerning the respect of others' cultures. (*The Oklahoma Daily*, March 24, 1992, p. 3)

Messages of reconciliation such as these can be traced to the mainstream, integrationist civil rights

movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr. The traditional liberal ideals of individualism, universalism, and procedural equality have been largely upheld in the struggle to eliminate systematic discrimination against African Americans as a group. In an address titled "A Realistic Look at Race Relations" delivered on May 17, 1956, in New York City at the second anniversary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, King stated, "We honor our country and ourselves by being here. Contrary to all we have been hearing about the wisdom of our being here, we know that we are here in the noblest tradition of our Judeo-Christian tradition and our democratic heritage." ([www.cnn.com/specials/2007/king/papers](http://www.cnn.com/specials/2007/king/papers), January 14, 2007). In the widely quoted "I Have a Dream" speech delivered before the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963, King upheld the classical liberal ideals of individualism, universalism, and procedural equality.

So I say to you, my friends, that even though we must face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed—we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. . . . I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today. (C. S. King, 1993, p. 101)

Voices of ideological reconciliation and ethnic integration often escape media attention or get lost in the midst of loud and conspicuous voices of committed ideologues from the left and the right. Yet messages of reconciliation are all around us when we look for them. In his autobiography *Walking with the Wind* (1998), John Lewis, a leader of the civil rights movement since the 1960s and a Democratic Congressman from Georgia, articulated his abiding faith in the "Beloved Community," a vision of what society could become were people of all class and ethnic backgrounds to reach across the barriers that divide them. Richard Rorty, in *Achieving Our Country* (1998), argued for ideological moderation and objects to intransigent "leftists" and "conservatives." In *Someone Else's House* (1998), Tamar Jacoby professed her faith in interethnic integration and called for realism of appreciating the real progress between Blacks and Whites

that had taken place in American society and insisting on the need for both Blacks and Whites to stay on the long and slow course of integration. With respect to higher education, Gerald Graff in *Beyond the Culture Wars* (1992) and Alan Ryan in *Liberal Anxieties and Liberal Education* (1998) insisted that category-based ideas of cultural diversity in the academe must be moderated and put in dialogue with traditional courses to avoid continuation of a disconnected curriculum and mutual resentment.

Economist Glenn Loury, whose words were quoted earlier in this essay as an expression of assimilationism, has moved away from his earlier stance toward a more balanced position of reconciliation in recent years. In *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality* (2003), Loury argues that what keeps African Americans from achieving their goals is not simply racial discrimination ("discrimination in contract"), but the more complex reality of "racial stigma" (or "discrimination in contact"). Loury agreed with some of the pluralist views on racial inequality and points out the moral and logical limitations of "color-blind" liberal individualism. At the same time, he critiques the intellectual complacency of the conventional pluralists who would explain any and all problems with the dated cry of racism and racial discrimination.

## MESSAGES OF EXTREMISM

The full spectrum of American public discourse on interethnic relations further includes the marginal voices of separatism, often characterized as "extremist" views. Whereas the aforementioned messages of assimilationism, pluralism, and reconciliation commonly adhere to the societal goal of interethnic integration (while disagreeing on specific visions as to how to achieve this goal), extremist messages often express a preference for a maximum in-group and out-group separation. Some of the most unambiguous separatist messages come from those identified with "extreme right" groups including the Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazi, Skinheads, and those of the so-called Patriot movements. According to recent issues of *Intelligence Report*, the quarterly magazine of the Southern Poverty Law Center, such extremist groups are known for their commitment to racial purism, the supremacy of the White race, and, in some cases, even arms training and preparation for a race war.

George Buntz (a.k.a. Eric Hawthorne), who reportedly has worked to revitalize the neo-Nazi movement through a newly powerful network, the Internet, states his separatist view toward Blacks: "To put Black men and women in American society, which is traditionally and essentially established on European traditions, and to say, 'Here you go, you're an equal, now compete,' is just as ridiculous as assuming that you could move White people to the Congo and have them effectively compete (*The New York Times Magazine*, February 25, 1996, pp. 40-41). Separatist messages also come from the "extreme left" including contemporary ethnic nationalist groups such as the New Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam. Among such messages are Leonard Jeffery's description of White Americans as "ice people" and Louis Farrakhan's call for Black nationalism and economic reparations, his assertion of Black racial superiority and his condemnation of Jews as "bloodsuckers," which have been widely reported (e.g., *Time*, February 28, 1994, pp. 21-25).

Extreme separatist messages are sometimes voiced by those who are unaffiliated with a recognized extremist group. Although not always explicit, separatist views can be inferred from the inflammatory rhetorical devices employed to condemn or scapegoat an out-group or position the in-group as "victims." Among such messages is the phrase "culture war" Patrick Buchanan used in a speech he delivered during the 1992 Republican convention, during his run for president in 2000 under the banner of the Reform Party, and more recently in his book, *State of Emergency: The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America* (2006). His messages connote an unmistakable line drawn to "defend" what is believed to be the authentic American culture. Indeed, separatist messages appear to be becoming increasingly louder. Robert Kimball (1990) characterizing Black studies in universities as "this war against Western culture" (p. xi), minority student protesters at Stanford University chanting "Down with racism, Western culture's got to go" (*The New York Times*, October 25, 1995, pp. A1, B8), a Black student leader at Northwestern University insisting that no Black people could be racists "because racism is a function of power" (*The New York Times*, October 25, 1995, p. B8), a group of Hispanic students at Cornell University occupying a building to demand separate Hispanic housing (*The New York Times*, April 20, 1994, p. B8).

Thus, *the extremes meet*. As much as separatist messages of the extreme right and the extreme left differ dramatically in specific claims, they converge in rigid in-group-out-group distinction, characterization of the in-group as "victims," full-blown confrontational rhetorical posturing, and fortification of mutually intransigent moral claims. Separatist messages of both kinds violate the rationality and civility normally expected by most Americans in public discourse. As such, extremist messages are deemed to be beyond the realms most Americans consider "reasonable." As Billig et al. (1988) observe, "the extreme bigot is free to play consistently and unambiguously in an area which is beyond reality but which retains reality. There is no need to hedge and qualify statements in order not to pass a seemingly unreasonable judgement" (p. 118).

It is not surprising, then, that separatist arguments do not resonate with the American public at large. Although mainstream Americans diverge in their views on the locus of American life (individual vs. group identity), the nature, rights, and responsibilities of humans (universalism vs. relativism), and the meaning of equality (procedural equality vs. status equality), they join in their objection to the separatist vision of the United States and in their shared condemnation of "hate" messages as fundamentally un-American. Exemplifying such common rejections of separatist messages are the responses of several readers to a *Time* magazine cover story featuring Farrakhan, entitled "Pride and Prejudice" (February 28, 1994, pp. 21-34). Their letters to the magazine editor characterize Farrakhan in such unflattering terms as "a wild, hate-mongering preacher," "the Minister of Rage," and "a streetwise hipster who shrewdly plays to the emotions of the most miserable and hopeless of his own people." One reader admonishes the editor for even featuring the story in the magazine: "As an African American, I find it very upsetting that every time Farrakhan speaks the media give him a microphone and an amplifier. . . . We should stop pointing fingers and making excuses that seem to confuse and anger more than unite our community. We can't continue at this level."

Others have responded to Farrakhan's separatist messages by warning against putting group identity over individual identity. Shelly Steel, an African American professor at San Jose State University,

points to the danger of excessive claims of group identity in an opinion column in *The New York Times* (March 13, 1994):

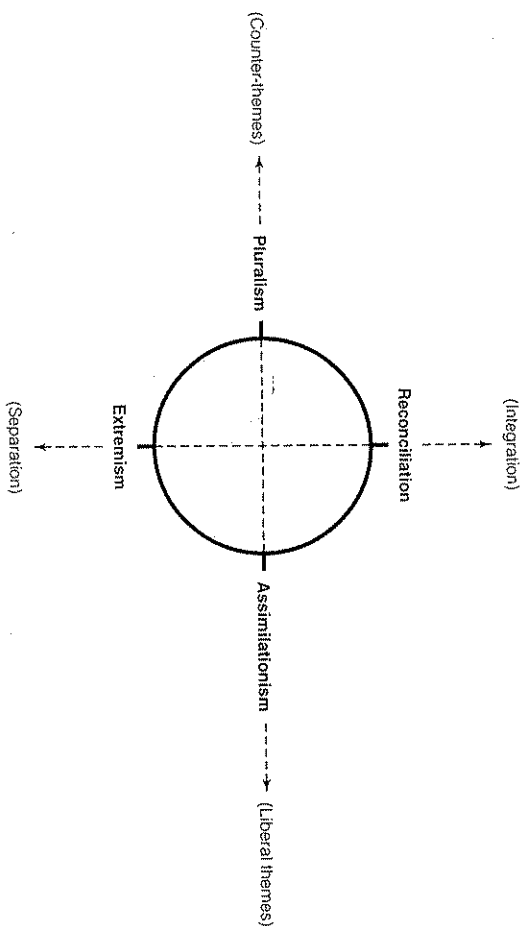
Louis Farrakhan personifies a specific territory in the collective imagination of Black America. (Only this place in the imagination explains the vast disparity between his prominence and his rather small following.) It is the territory where the group ceases to be a mere identity or culture and becomes a value in itself. Here the group becomes synonymous with truth, and no longer needs approval from others. . . . It is precisely their break from universal truths—tolerance, brotherhood, fair-mindedness—that enables them to assert the supremacy of their group. (p. E17)

## IDEOLOGICAL CIRCLE: A SYNTHESIS

The present analysis has revealed varied renditions of the liberal ideological tradition. Classical liberalism is reproduced by individual Americans not so much in terms of a set of universally commonsensical values, as in the form of often dilemmatic and sometimes embattled conflicting values. Communication messages addressing issues of race, ethnicity, and interethnic relations do not automatically mirror the traditional liberal themes of individualism, universalism, and procedural equality. Rather, they are dynamically challenged by the contrary themes of group identity, relativism, and equal group status.

This ideological dialectic undergirds messages of assimilationism and pluralism, along with messages of reconciliation and separatism. These themes and counter-themes of classical liberalism broadly help us understand the full spectrum of messages we hear today. The traditional individualistic and universalistic ideals and the principle of procedural equality are most closely aligned with messages of assimilationism, generally identified as the position of the mainstream political right. On the other hand, messages of pluralism, often associated with the mainstream political left, advocate the primacy of group identity and application of laws and public policies relative to historical and institutional conditions particular to a group, so as to close the existing unequal status between groups. Struggling between these two ideological views are the moderating, balancing, integrating, and often-conflicted messages

Figure 1 Ideological Circle Linking Four Types of Interethnic Communication Messages



of reconciliation representing Middle America. In contrast, messages of extremism are commonly identified with the views of the extreme right and the extreme left—messages that emphasize in-group vicinhood and moral superiority and maximum in-group-out-group separation.

Together, these four ideological positions constitute an ideological circle described in Figure 1. In this circle, the four positions are differentiated based on two bipolar dimensions: (1) the horizontal dimension of classical liberal and contrary themes, and (2) the vertical dimension of integrationist and separatist visions for the American society. The oppositional relationship between the assimilationist messages of liberal themes and pluralist messages of counter-themes is indicated by their respective positions of three o'clock and nine o'clock. Linking these two message types are the integrationist messages of reconciliation placed at the twelve o'clock position. The separatist messages of extremism (from both the extreme political right and the extreme political left) are merged into the six o'clock position, opposite from the position of the integrationist messages of reconciliation.

Even while being rigorously challenged by the voices advocating pluralism and extremism, the classical liberal ideals continue to occupy the mainstay of American consciousness on interethnic relations in the form of assimilationism and integrationism. The classical liberal tradition contains its own contrary themes, unresolved tensions, a dialectic—an ideological push-and-pull that often gives rise to heated debates and, in some cases, even acts of violence. These debates are not confined to the level of intellectual analysis; both themes and counter-themes have arisen from, and passed into, everyday consciousness of Americans who reflect on, and speak to, various issues of ethnicity and race. Indeed, we do not blindly follow the dictates of classical liberalism. Rather, we exercise a degree of freedom in making our own individual interpretations and judgments within the constraints of the liberal tradition.

This conclusion is largely supported by findings from public opinion polls. In a 1997 Time/CNN poll of more than 1,100 Americans, 96 percent of the respondents agreed with the assimilationist statement, "It should be the duty of all immigrants to learn English if they plan to stay in this country." In

response to the question, "Which comes closest to your view on bilingual education in public schools?" only 11 percent agreed with the pluralist view that "children of immigrants should be taught in their native language indefinitely." This is in sharp contrast with the 48 percent of the respondents who indicated "children of immigrants should be taught in their native language only until they know enough English to join regular classes," and with the remaining 40 percent who said "all children should be taught in English" (Gray, 1998, p. 70). Similar sentiments underlie the decisive passage of Proposition 227 in 1998 by California voters, thereby eliminating all bilingual education programs and replacing them with intensive English language instructions.

When "Ebonics" ("Black English") was endorsed by the Oakland Unified School District Board of Education at the end of 1996 as a legitimate language program, many public leaders who often diverge ideologically with respect to interethnic relations converged in denouncing and rejecting it as an "extremist," "dangerous," and "divisive" idea. From the camp commonly known as the "political right," Republican Senator Lauch Faircloth of North Carolina persisted in stating what had become the common view: "But I think Ebonics is absurd. This is a political correctness that has simply gone out of control." Similar voices were heard from the "political left" as well. Jesse Jackson stated: "I understand the attempt to reach out to these children, but this is an unacceptable surrender, bordering on disgrace" (cited in Lewis, 1998). Senior *Wall Street Journal* editor Joseph N. Boyce was even more indignant: "As a Black person and father of four, I find such notions insulting and, yes, racist" (cited in Palmeri, 1997). Poet Maya Angelou was also quoted to have been "incensed" by the plan, while Oakland writer Ishmael Reed labeled it a "travesty" (cited in Palmeri, 1997).

Indeed, the assimilationist-integrationist ideological stances continue to prevail in the American political landscape today. Some observers (e.g., Suarez-Orozco & Paez, 2002) foresee a continuing trend of pluralism. In *The Latino Wave* (2004), Jorge Ramos, news anchor of *Univision*, predicted this trend by highlighting the rapidly increasing numbers of Hispanic Americans who tend to maintain a strong allegiance to their countries of origin. Yet, other signs have been showing a continuing assimilative-integrative trend. The

results of Gallup polls taken over the recent decades (1972 through 1997) show a dramatic increase in the percentage of White Americans who are willing to vote for a Black candidate for president (from 35 percent to 93 percent) and who approve of marriage between Blacks and Whites (25 percent to 61 percent) (USA Today, August 8, 1995, p. A11). In a more recent CNN opinion poll, 62 percent of the participants in a CNN poll responded that the country was ready for a Black president (*The New York Times*, December 19, 2006, p. 26). Furthermore, according to a USA Today/Gallup poll reported in early 2007, 95 percent of the participants reported that they themselves would consider voting for a Black presidential candidate ([www.USAToday.com/news/Washington/2007-02-13-2008-campaign-poll\\_x.htm](http://www.USAToday.com/news/Washington/2007-02-13-2008-campaign-poll_x.htm)). The continuing efficacy of liberal ideals blurring and transcending ethnic categories is further reflected in the increase in the percentage of Americans who approve of marriage between Blacks and Whites increased from 25 percent in 1972 to 61 percent in 1995 (USA Today, August 8, 1995, p. A11). In terms of actual intermarriages in the United States, the number has escalated roughly from 310,000 in the 1960s to more than 1.1 million in the 1990s. Correspondingly, the incidence of births of mixed-race babies has multiplied 26 times as fast as that of any other group. As of the early 1990s, 52 percent of Jewish Americans, 65 percent of Japanese Americans, and 70 percent of Native Americans are reported to have married out of their faith, race, or ethnic heritage (Smolowe, 1993, pp. 64–65). In 2003, more than 7 percent of America's 59 million married couples are reported to be interracial, compared to less than 2 percent in 1970, factoring in all racial combinations (Cray, 2007).

Exactly how the nature of American interethnic relations and the underlying forces of differing ideological perspectives will unfold remains to be seen. Undoubtedly, debates will continue as Americans struggle with competing visions of *Unum* and *Pluribus*—visions of "We the People" and what it means to be Americans. Free and public debates, indeed, are essential for American society to guard itself against stagnation, disintegration, and entropy. The very fact that interethnic issues continue to engage American passion is itself an affirmation, and a hallmark, of the American liberal tradition. This tradition contributes to the stability of the American



democracy, one that most Americans recognize, cherish, and celebrate. In the essayist Grunwald's (1976) words:

So one must love America, most of all and most deeply for its constant, difficult, confused, gallant, and never-finished struggle to make freedom possible. One loves America for its accomplishments as well as for its unfinished business—and especially for its knowledge that its business is indeed unfinished. . . . One ultimately loves America for not what it is, or what it does, but for what it promises. . . . we must deeply believe, and we must prove, that after 200 years the American promise is still only in its beginning. (p. 36)

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## Concepts and Questions

1. Why has the E Pluribus Unum concept of a "melting pot" society failed to materialize in contemporary American society?
2. How do "tribal identities" contribute to interethnic conflict?
3. What characterizes messages of assimilation? From whom are messages of assimilation most likely to emerge?
4. Can or do messages of assimilation lend themselves to improved interethnic communication?
5. Give an example of a message of pluralism. How do messages of pluralism differ from messages of assimilation?
6. What are messages of reconciliation? How do they relate to messages of assimilation and of pluralism?
7. From whom are messages of reconciliation most likely to emanate?
8. What are messages of extremism? Which groups of American society are most likely to promulgate messages of extremism?
9. How can an understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of the messages of assimilation, pluralism, reconciliation, and extremism lead to better interethnic communication?
10. How can the American struggle between Unum and Pluribus be resolved?

# Ho'oponopono: A Hawaiian Cultural Process to Conflict Resolution

CHARMAINE I. KAIMIKAU

In the Hawaiian culture, *ho'oponopono* is a complex communication process that is used to maintain family relations or friendships. Usually, if a conflict occurs or a problem arises that strains interpersonal relationships among Hawaiian peoples the practice of *ho'oponopono* is used to restore peace and harmony. According to Hawaiian historian Mary Kawena Pukui, the historic significance and meaning of *ho'oponopono* (Pukui, 1972) means "to set right" or to find resolve for any wrongdoings. Although this practice may continue in contemporary times, *ho'oponopono* is rooted historically in ancestral and spiritual identifications as *aumāhūa* or deified ancestors of Hawaiians who also feel the painful presence of discord among the peoples. Any miscommunication, therefore, must be addressed for improving connectivity between sentient beings. It is important to understand that Hawaiian ideology utilizes a systems theory approach in which all living things are interrelated and connected to one another. Any disharmony, therefore, affects and is felt among animist beings and in all personal relationships. *Ho'oponopono* seeks "to make right" any wrongdoings inflicted upon family members or friends through a communal conference of problem solving and conflict resolution.

The *ho'oponopono* process is usually conducted in five stages that begins with identifying the problem. This is then followed by discussions that lead to ward confession, restitution, and finally, forgiveness and release (Shook, 2002). *Ho'oponopono* is usually

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conducted by a senior family member or respected outside elder.

The first stage is opened with *pule* or prayer asking 'aumāhuna (ancestral spirits) for assisting guidance as well as their blessings to solve the problem. The second stage consists of identifying the problem or what is called *kūhūhū kumuhana* as efforts are made to understand the discord. In this phase, if there is any resistance from family members or other relations, the senior family member or elder will reach out to that person in order to engage them more fully in the *ho'oponopono* process.

In the next stage, the focus specifically centers on the wrongdoing or *hala*, as this stage indicates that an entangled negative relationship exists between the intended victim and perpetrator. This means the troubled twosome are bound together not in one conflict but in a complex web of intricate layerings of problems or what is described as *hīna* (Pukui, 1972; Shook, 2002). It is during this phase that feelings of hurt and misunderstanding may arise between the involved persons. The leader chooses one particular problem to be discussed or what is known as *māhiki*, and as one conflict is resolved there may be an unraveling of other problematic layers to be solved in succession. If the conflict or discussion becomes too heated, a cooling off or silent period defined as *ho'onāhi* is enacted.

Once the problem has been identified and openly discussed another stage of confessing any wrongdoing and forgiveness takes place or what is described in Hawaiian as *mīhi*. It is important that forgiveness is included in the process and is usually expected as part of the resolution. In addition, this is also the stage where needed restitution is arranged and agreed upon. Also in this phase, an intense discussion or *kūhū*, may result between parties in order to achieve a loosening of any negative entanglement. Confession of wrongfulness and forgiveness are brought to the surface and begin an unraveling of the enmeshed web of hurt and anger. This is an important phase because tensions are released through the act of forgiveness or some type of restitution is paid to the victim or family.

The final stage known as *pāni* is a summary of what has been discussed to reconfirm closure and the strengthening of family ties. Thereafter, the problem is never discussed or mentioned again among family or

friends. Basically, a restatement of what has occurred within the problematic discussion between all members transpires and everyone moves forward as it is no longer necessary to restate the past. *Pāni* is also the conclusive stage that includes a closing prayer or *pule* to signify completion and that harmony is thus restored to the relationship. *Ho'oponopono* is often followed by a traditional meal or snack demonstrating commitment to familial bonding of love and friendship. The act of sharing a meal together establishes movement away from the conflict and there is a return to normalcy (Shook, 2002). Because *ho'oponopono* is a very complex communication process, it may take several sessions to restore harmony among family members and close friends.

Cultural traditions that are deeply ingrained and practiced in the daily lives of the Hawaiian people may be perceptive, intuitive, and natural processes that are culturally appropriate. The ancient tradition of *ho'oponopono* continues to be a praxis among the Hawaiian peoples that extends into modern times and may be employed to resolve conflict in various settings that fall within the Hawaiian cultural context. This is a significant cultural dynamic because Westernized approaches to conflict and problem solving sometimes fail to recognize that appropriate resolution techniques can be found within the cultural imagination.

The application of *ho'oponopono* has long-range capabilities that provide hope and possibility in imagining peaceful conclusions while keeping cultural pride and traditions intact. *Ho'oponopono* has been successfully applied among Hawaiians in social work, psychology, drug abuse treatment, prison reform, and other related areas in which social problems arise. *Ho'oponopono* provides a vehicle by which these problems can be discussed with the goal of possible resolution that can transcend the problem or conflict.

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## Concepts and Questions

1. Kai iukiaua writes that the *ho'oponopono* process involves a "communal conference." Reflecting on the Triandis essay in Chapter 1, what kind of cultural syndrome would be used to characterize the Hawaiian culture?
2. Why do you think this type of conflict resolution process evolved in the Hawaiian culture?
3. What does Kai iukiaua mean that for Hawaiians "all living things are interrelated and connected to one another?" How might this influence their worldview?
4. What are the primary differences between the Euro-American and traditional Hawaiian methods of conflict resolution?
5. Can you think of situations in your personal or work life where *ho'oponopono* could have been used to resolve a conflict?

# America in Black and Brown: Exploring Sources of Intercultural Tensions between Blacks and Latinos in the United States

PETER OGOM NWOSU

## INTRODUCTION

More than fifteen years ago, in a 1990 issue of *Time* magazine, William Henry III, a staff writer with *Time*, commented about the uneasiness among American Blacks regarding the rising Latino population in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Black uneasiness according to Henry stemmed from three factors: first, Blacks believe they have waited the longest and endured the most in the fight for equality and justice and the presence of Latinos weakens their prospects for more Black access to resources in a nation that has not treated them fairly; second, Blacks fear being supplanted by Latinos as the nation's most influential minority group; and third, Blacks fear being outstripped in wealth, and consequently in status by, in their view, this new group to America.

The last few years have witnessed a significant rise in the Latino population, thus making them the nation's largest and fastest growing minority population, exacerbating Black fears as identified above, and consequently increasing the tension in Black-Latino relations. Indeed, if ever there was any doubt about the fragile and albeit competitive nature of

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Black-Latino relations, it can be seen in the racial skirmishes between students from both groups in our nation's public schools, in the shifting alliances among both groups in the direction of where there is the largest gain for each group, and in voting booths across the nation. The 2001 mayoral election in Los Angeles, for example, revealed, to some degree, the nature of the fragile and competitive relationship between both groups. The election—a contest between the former speaker of the State Assembly, Antonio Villaraigosa, a Latino, and White city attorney James Hahn, both Democrats—ended in defeat for the once-powerful speaker. Villaraigosa lost to an unusual amalgam of Whites and Blacks. In fact, 80 percent of the Black vote went to Hahn, who also won 59 percent of the White vote. Villaraigosa secured 82 percent of the Latino vote, and as much as 54 percent of the Jewish vote, not enough to install him as the first Latino mayor of Los Angeles in over a century. In 2005, Villaraigosa ran again, this time with support of the Black community. He defeated Hahn in a run-off election to become the first Latino to govern Angelinos in more than 100 years. Villaraigosa won nearly 60 percent of the Black votes, a huge contrast to the less than 20 percent of the Black electorate that voted for him four years earlier. Political scientist Raphael Sonenshein has noted that the really interesting question is "what happens to relations between Latinos and Blacks now." Sonenshein's question is worth exploring in full because Black support for a Latino candidate is by no means "the sign of a full-scale coalition" given the fragile and purely competitive relationship between the two groups.<sup>2</sup>

This essay examines the nature of the fragile and competitive relationship between both groups from a historical, cultural, and political perspective. First, we begin with an examination of the history of both the African American and Latino experiences in the United States. Second, we examine both communities' perceptions of each other focusing on psychological, cultural, and political factors that shape these perceptions. Third, we explore some consequences for both groups of a strain in Black-Latino relations, and fourth, we offer suggestions for moving beyond the politics and the narrow vision of ethnicity that threatens to widen the relational chasm between both ethnic groups.

## BLACK-LATINO RELATIONS: TWO HISTORIES

Any attempt to understand the growing tension in Black-Latino relations must begin first with a discussion of the historical experiences of both groups in the United States. Much is well known about the African American experience in the United States. Much has been written about slavery and the quest for free labor as the driving engine of the Black presence in America. Nearly 400 years since the first set of Africans arrived on the shores of Jamestown, Virginia, much continues to be written about the institution of slavery and state-church complicity in the denial of basic rights that officially defined the nature of Black-White relations in America. Even today nearly 200 years after slavery was abolished, more than 140 years after the emancipation proclamation, and more than 40 years after the historic Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the momentous Voting Rights Act of 1965, Black freedom struggle remains fundamental to the existence of Black America.

However, because American Blacks have been consumed by their long personal and collective struggles for freedom, few have paid attention to the historical struggles for those same rights reflected in the Latino experience in America. Moreover, the paucity of research on the Hispanic experience in the United States further complicates any knowledge or understanding among American Blacks regarding the Latino freedom struggle. Most Americans, including Blacks, as reflected in Black fears noted earlier, tend to associate Latino history with immigration, and believe that most Spanish speakers are immigrants. This is not the case. Most Americans, including Blacks, in fact are unaware that Americans of Hispanic heritage have a varied history and a complicated ancestry that dates back more than 400 years. Americans of Hispanic origin are from birth "the result of the encounter of diverse people such as the Spaniards and the Portuguese with the diverse Indian nations of the Americas such as the Incas, Aztecs, Quechuas, Mayas, Tainos, Siboneyes, and others."<sup>3</sup> Americans of Hispanic origin are also the result of encounters with African peoples who were brought as slaves by force to the Americas. From these encounters emerged the different Latino people of Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, Cuba,

Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Brazil, and other Latin American countries.<sup>4</sup> Indeed contrary to popular opinion, "there are Spanish-speaking Californians, New Mexicans, and Texans whose ancestors lived in the Southwest long before their respective states became part of the United States."<sup>5</sup> In their authoritative account titled *The Hispanics in the United States: A History*, Stanford University scholars L.H. Gann and Peter Dugan note that Hispanics, like the vast majority of other Americans, trace their original homes to different countries including Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Spain, and Argentina.

Some of them are proflemin in Spanish, although others have lost the use of their ancestral tongue. Some are indifferent to their cultural inheritance and regard themselves as un-phenomened Americans; others have a strong commitment to their Hispanic legacy. Some are rich and some are poor; some are conservative and some are radical; some are fair-skinned and some are swarthy or black.<sup>6</sup>

## LATINOS AND SLAVERY

What is also significant in the context of Black-Latino relations is that few Blacks recognize the historic opposition to slavery by Latinos in the 1800s. The emerging historical account suggests that it was the opposition to American engagement in slavery that aroused a bitter debate in the United States over war with Mexico. L.H. Gann and Peter Dugan write that those who were the principal advocates of war with Mexico were Southerners who wanted to safeguard slavery as an institution within the United States through the creation of a new (possibly several) slave state(s). This desire became the imperative that shaped the discourse between those who were for war and those against war. The anti-war movement, already opposed to slavery, believed that the annexation of Texas was a conspiracy led by slave owners to essentially undermine American freedom and basic human rights. Given the charged atmosphere, James Polk, U.S. president at the time, decided on what seemed to be a middle-course solution to "satisfy both the slave states and the 'free soil' states: he

would acquire not only Texas but also Oregon and California, thus extending America's boundaries to the Pacific ocean."<sup>7</sup> President Polk not only made good on his quest by acquiring Texas and California, but he also acquired New Mexico and purchased Oregon from the British. Indeed all of the western and southwestern states of the United States—California, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, and Texas—were all Mexican territories until 1848 when the Mexican-American war ended.

## The Story of Texas

The story of Texas is particularly unique because the immediate cause for the Mexican-American war that began in 1846 derived from disputes over the territory and what behaviors were permissible within it. As English and German settlers from the United States flooded the province to engage in plantation agriculture with the aid of slave labor, the Mexican government began to insist that the newcomers abide by Mexican laws. One such law outlawed slavery. The position of the Mexican government incensed the newcomers, most of them from the American south, who argued that Mexican laws undermined their inalienable rights, and their professed notion of "manifest destiny." In 1836, the newcomers, taking advantage of the weaknesses in the Mexican leadership, declared Texas an independent sovereign state. The Mexican government under President Antonio López de Santa Anna tried to crush the rebellion, but failed due to the political problems Santa Anna was facing at home.

The next ten years saw strong political debates in the United States on whether the country should go to war to acquire Texas, and the rich territories of California and New Mexico, also at the time belonging to Mexico. The British, who were no friends of the Americans at the time, also had interests in these territories. While Mexico was willing to let Texas remain an independent sovereign state, and was being pressured by the British to recognize it as such, the Mexican government feared that the annexation of Texas by the United States might lead to the loss of other Mexican territories. The United States, on its own, feared that any failure to act might give advantage over these vast territories and the Pacific to the

British, who already had a controlling presence in Australia and New Zealand. In 1846, following months of wrangling, finger pointing, counter-accusations, and the admission of Texas as the 28th state, Mexico and the United States went to war, with the United States defeating the Mexican army, forcing Mexico to sign a peace treaty with the Americans on February 2, 1848. The treaty signed at Guadalupe Hidalgo, near Mexico City, surrendered control of California and New Mexico to the United States.

Although Mexico lost the war, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo provided guarantees that while these territories no longer belonged to Mexico, the U.S. government would respect the property, religious, and cultural rights (including language rights) of citizens of the conquered territories. In fact, as part of the treaty and to prevent any future claims, the U.S. government paid Mexico 15 million dollars in cash in exchange for the territories, and another 3.25 million dollars for claims made by American citizens on the Mexican government as a result of the war.

The propensity to expand the American frontier through the acquisition of land held by Latinos (especially Mexico) in the heydays of the American experiment has been a defining fissure in Latino-White relations. Each conquered territory resulted in the subjugation of Latinos into second-class citizens. The Hispanic struggles for justice have therefore been with respect to these rights, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo provides the basis for the struggles, and thus is seen by many Latinos as the most important document for American Hispanics.

### The Latino Population

While the Latino community in the United States has been around for well over 400 years, the rapid growth in its population began in the late 1960s as a result of refugee movements, immigration reform, and illegal immigration from several Latin American countries. By 1970, the U.S. government coined the term "Hispanic" to refer to people who were born in any of the Spanish-speaking countries of the Americas or people who could trace their ancestry to Spain or former colonial territories of Spain. Few Latinos, however, refer to themselves as Hispanics.

By 1980, Americans witnessed large Latino migrant populations settling in such places as Washington, DC,

New York, Trenton, Newark, Buffalo, and Providence in the Northeast; Miami, Houston, and Atlanta in the South; Las Vegas, Sacramento, San Jose, Santa Rosa, Anaheim, San Diego, and Los Angeles in the West; and Chicago and Lake County, Illinois, in the Midwest. In the last two decades, in some of the areas mentioned, Latinos have become a part of fully multi-ethnic neighborhoods, while in other areas ethnic Latino enclaves have emerged.

The latest Bureau of the Census numbers show that across the country Latinos are now the nation's largest minority group, numbering about 37 million, compared with approximately 36.2 million Blacks. These numbers represent a 4.7 percent rise in the Latino population since April 2000, compared with a 1.5 percent rise in the Black population; and 0.8 percent increase for Americans of European background, whose population currently stands at 196 million. The current surge in Latino population, which has made American Blacks uncomfortable, is due essentially to higher birthrates and a huge wave of immigration, including illegal immigration. By the end of the 1990s, more than 50 percent of new immigrants who came to the United States came from Latin America, compared to 1970 when only 19 percent of new immigrants came from the region.<sup>8</sup> Given current trends, demographers project that by 2050, the U.S. population will be 52.8 percent European American, 24.5 percent Latino, 13.6 percent African American, 8.2 percent Asian American, and 1.0 percent Native American.<sup>9</sup> These numbers are important in assessing how each group jockey's for a fair share of the national cake.

### DIFFERENT HISTORIES, DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS

The differing historical experiences of American Blacks and American Hispanics provide an important framework for examining the differing perceptions of each other in both communities. Such examination must draw from three explanations: a *psychological explanation*, a *cultural explanation*, and a *political explanation*. The psychological explanation is crucial because it provides a prism to understanding the how and the why of the fragile nature of Black-Latino relations in America. The cultural explanation offers a window for understanding the nature and the consequences of the culture gap between the

two ethnic minorities, and the political explanation provides a framework for exploring the basis for the emerging political divide between Hispanic America and Black America.

### A Psychological Explanation

Communication scholars, whose discipline has been informed a great deal by psychology make the case that human interactions are motivated by certain needs and desires. When people affiliate with others, they do so because such affiliation satisfies a particular need. Black-Latino relations can be likened to the sort of relations developed by two battered women who experience a low point in their lives because of abuse from their spouses or friends. The parallel experience of both women, an experience grounded in victimization, is precisely the basis of the reason for the *functional* relationship. Thus they become friends only because they have something in common. They see themselves as victims. They perform the mutually satisfying function of comforting each other. But once they get past the psychological feeling of pain and helplessness, they see no more need for the function.

One of the major crises of meaning in Black-Latino relations in America lies in this type of functional relationship. Black America and Hispanic America see each other as victims of an oppressive regime. The common enemy is White America. They come together to share a common feeling or attitude toward a perceived enemy in this case, a negative attitude. Once the attitude is gone, the temporary friendship is gone. The friendship, after all, is based on the psychological need to find succor in others who share common problems. Without appearing simplistic, what binds the two groups together is the common enemy, nothing substantive, and nothing tangible. Here is a typical conversation overheard between two angry members of both ethnic groups over their failure to secure admission into a university graduate program:

**BLACK MALE:** Man, I can't believe they wouldn't let me into the program . . .

**LATINO MALE:** Me too, that sucks.

**BLACK MALE:** That department is so racist.

**LATINO MALE:** I was so qualified. I have been trying to get in since last year. And I hear there are no Mexicans in that program.

**BLACK MALE:** You know, that's right, you're right, I never thought about that.

**LATINO MALE:** I'm tired of being put down by White people. Those racist m—f—!

**BLACK MALE:** Yeah, me too. I have had enough of being put down.

As you might guess, these two men both walked out together bonded by their common experience—a shared history of victimization, so to speak—without knowing anything about each other. What brings them together is that they are victims, and the relationship ends there—at the contact stage. The tragedy in the type of dialogue reflected by the two gentlemen is that the reliance on a common set of negative feelings toward a problem does nothing to enhance the relationship between both individuals. If Black-Latino relations are to improve, the relations must move beyond this type of casual contact. What is needed is a new kind of involvement and social bonding between both groups, where a sense of mutuality of being connected is present, and both groups learn more about each other and make a commitment to further each other's purpose. Real friendships and alliances begin with the desire to build lasting and sustained friendships.

### A Cultural Explanation

Real friendships do not grow and flourish in an environment where participants do not know one another. The cultural explanation for the differing perceptions between American Blacks and Latinos draws fundamentally from this lack of knowledge about each other. Indeed, a culture gap does exist between Hispanic America and Black America. Both ethnic groups understand little of each other. The negative cultural stereotypes and the subterranean current of animosity between both groups further exemplify this gap. In truth, most Latinos are aware of the Black experience, but few understand Black culture. The distinction between the Black experience and Black culture is important here, because the former reflects the African American experience with slavery and its legacy of racism (of which most Latinos are aware), while the latter speaks to African American cultural patterns and communication style (which few Latinos understand).

Few Latinos recognize that the majority of Blacks who came to the United States brought with them a strong



cultural heritage, which later became grounded in the spirituality of the Baptist faith. Under the weight of European oppression and exploitation however, American Blacks lost a great deal of their true cultural and ethnic identities. This is why Alex Haley's compelling book *Roots*, and its subsequent documentary as a series on national television, provided a spiritual lift in the cultural psyche of American Blacks. *Roots* also transformed Blacks in terms of their self-esteem, and spurred a new movement that placed Africa as central in the cultural lives of American Blacks.

While accounts of Africanisms or African cultural retentions in America have been provided in the numerous volumes on African history stored in various libraries across America, it is clear that not one major African language of the more than 250 languages spoken by Blacks, brought in chains to the Americas, survived the onslaught. What we know today, as Black language in America, is a patchwork of West African languages and English that most linguists and scholars now refer to as *Ebonics*. *Ebonics* has its own structure, syntax, and pragmatics, and various dialects of the language are spoken by Black people in many parts of the United States, especially in the South. A much more original strand of this language is used by the Black people of Gullah who inhabit parts of Georgia, South Carolina, Florida, and the Sea Islands off the coast of those three states. Although *Ebonics* is looked down upon as incorrect English (which it is not), most educated and middle-class Blacks clearly identify with it. They find great comfort and pleasure in the use of this language, and have developed the capacity to alternate between their native tongue and Standard American English—to code switch. What governs a person's desire to switch linguistic codes is the subject of conversation, the context of the conversation, and the gender of conversational partners. While Spanish is the *lingua franca* of many Latinos in the United States, a new language, *Spanglish*—a patchwork of Spanish and English, is emerging as the third most important language for Latinos. Like most Blacks, many Latinos are also able to alternate between these languages depending on the subject, the context, and the gender of conversational partners. But as Richard Rodríguez notes, Español (or Spanish) is "my family's language . . .

A family member would say something to me (in Spanish) and I would feel myself specially recognized.

My parents would say something to me and I would feel embraced by the sounds of their words. Those sounds said: I am speaking with ease in Spanish. I am addressing you in words I never use with los gringos (Europeans). I recognize you as someone special, close, like no one outside. You belong to us. In the family.<sup>10</sup>

In a sense, the use of these languages in both Black and Hispanic America suggests a particular comfort level and a strong feeling of belonging that one does not necessarily have when one uses a language outside of one's cultural experience. Language therefore is an important instrument for maintaining group identity.

Black cultural patterns and communication styles are also a patchwork of Africanisms and some (not all) European American ways. The European ways present in African American cultural patterns and communication styles reflect the historical experience of American Blacks in the context of slavery. For example, inherent in *Ebonics* or Black English is a communication style that values animation or excitement, is loud, colorful, very direct, overt, and very straightforward. This approach to communication, which draws from both African (animation, loud, and colorful) and European ways (direct, overt, and straightforward), flies in the face of what is considered appropriate communication style among Hispanics. In comparison to American Blacks, Latino communication style is less animated, less direct, and has a much greater focus on face-saving. Since few Latinos understand Black communication style, most of them generally perceive Blacks as rude and disrespectful.

An almost similar cultural ignorance about Latinos is equally present in Black America, where many Blacks are both unaware of the Latino struggle for justice in America, but more importantly, do not understand Latino cultural patterns and communication styles. Latinos, for example, place a great deal of emphasis on respect for the elderly, and this respect is reflected in how language is used. There is also a relationship between one's status or hierarchy and the level of respect one receives from subordinates. Furthermore, there is a strong religious faith in Latino culture shaped by a Catholic tradition. The common phrase *Uno nunca se olvida de Dios*, "One should never forget about God," guides how one relates to self and to others. The loud, outspoken person, and the one who talks about his or her accomplishments and how

good the individual looks, is looked down upon in Latino culture. Modesty then is the soul of communication in Latino culture. Few Blacks recognize and understand this fundamental cultural pattern and communication style of Latinos, and sometimes view Latinos as too cagey to be trusted.

## Misconceptions and Stereotypes

Under the present dispensation, ethnic misconceptions and negative stereotypes about each group have found expression and welcome in candid conversations in both communities. Anti-Black and anti-Latino sentiments and prejudices, including the use of racial slurs, now abound on both sides of the ethnic divide. It is not uncommon in the Latino community (especially in California) to hear such racial slurs as *may-die* (the Spanish term for the *n* word) hurled around in reference to the Black community. The racial skirmishes in our nation's public schools among young Blacks and Latinos reflect the increasing level of distrust in both communities. And while most Blacks supported Villaraigosa in his 2005 mayoral election, such support for a Latino candidate is by no means "the sign of a full-scale coalition" given the purely competitive relationship between the two groups.<sup>11</sup> At the hub of the growing pain in Black-Latino relations is the political explanation.

## A Political Explanation

In the last two decades, Blacks have perceived the tremendous growth in Latino population as a threat to Black political power. This may explain why many Blacks voted against Villaraigosa in 2001. Even more startling was Black opposition to unchecked or unregulated immigration when many Blacks in California voted for the famous Proposition 187. Exit polls showed that 56 percent of African Americans and 64 percent of Whites voted in favor of Proposition 187. About 31 percent of Latinos, according to exit polls, also voted, surprisingly, for the proposition. Proposition 187 barred illegal immigrants from receiving public support throughout California's public education system, and required public educational institutions to verify the legal status of both immigrant students and their parents. Proposition 187 also required all providers of publicly funded, non-emergency health care services to

verify the legal status of persons seeking services in order to be reimbursed by the state. In addition, Proposition 187 made the production and use of false documents a state felony, and required all service providers to report suspected illegal immigrants to law enforcement authorities and to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

Proposition 187 was based on the simple premise that denying public services to illegal immigrants would discourage them from coming to the United States. We know that most of the illegal immigrants to California that were to be affected by Proposition 187 were Latinos. Most came from Mexico, and many of them worked as migrants in farms and garment shops. That many Blacks ironically voted for Proposition 187 was not so much because they were, in principle, opposed to the goals of the proposition—that illegal immigrants were draining state resources needed for other areas of governance, but they voted for Proposition 187 merely because of anti-Latino feelings on what was perceived as the emerging threat to Black political strength posed by a growing Latino population in California. The feelings are the same in several southern and midwestern states where there is a growing Latino population. Thus the politics of numbers have outweighed any serious effort at controlling or managing the complexities of illegal immigration in the country.

As we have seen since the passage of Proposition 187 in California, denying public services to illegal or undocumented immigrants has not been an easy proposition. Many public agencies refused to comply with its verification requirements, fearing that Proposition 187 affected innocent people. How does one, for example, deal with the U.S.-born child, children, or family members, all U.S. citizens by law, of a so-called illegal immigrant now living in the United States? While Proposition 187 was presented as an honest attempt to address a serious federal problem, the motivations became muddled in accusations that the proposition was racially or ethnically tainted.

There is a deep-seated feeling in Black America today that Hispanics (and other groups) have benefited too much from the spoils of the freedom struggle without making any substantive contribution to the struggle. While Blacks have fought hard, more than any other group in America, for affirmative action, public housing, and desegregation in public schools, they worry that groups whose history and experience do not compare to the Black experience are now benefiting at the same level

from the gains won in these areas. Any growth in Latino population is therefore viewed in the context of what it means to the Black share of the national cake.

Syndicated columnist Julianne Malveaux, an African American, captured this feeling well in a series of questions she posed in her analysis of the election of Assemblyman Cruz Bustamante as the Lt. Governor of California, the first Latino to hold this position in more than a hundred years. "What happens," she asked, "when demographic shifts suggest that gains African Americans fought hard for must now be shared? Are we interested in offering the same affirmative action for which we have long fought? Or will we emulate Whites in forcing our Latino brothers and sisters to wrest gains from us."<sup>12</sup> There is an undercurrent of feeling in Black America that these gains cannot be shared. There is also a perception in Black America that Latinos think that they are next to White because of their fair skin. Related to this perception is the politics of race in America that had historically (rightly or wrongly) classified Latinos as White because of their skin color. The consequence of this is the emergence of the feeling in Black America that Latino light skin has provided certain White-skin privileges to American Hispanics that have been denied to Blacks. But this argument is illogical because it ignores the fact that light-skin Blacks have also benefited from certain White-skin privileges, and they have not been denied access to the gains of the freedom struggle.

The root of some of the anti-Black sentiments in the Latino community can be found in this sad state of affairs. Writes Malveaux: "I'll never forget sitting on a panel with a Latino brother who exonerated African American leadership for taking all of the political spoils and leaving 'crumbs' for Latinos. Strident and angry, the man went down a list of our best and brightest, pronouncing them all insensitive and corrupt. 'Wait until we get our turn,' he spat."<sup>13</sup>

## CONCLUSION: COMMON PROBLEMS, COMMON SOLUTIONS

Black America and Hispanic America cannot afford to wait until each gets its turn to hurt the other. Black and Latino historical struggles for freedom and justice are so intertwined that separation and divorce cannot

be the most genuine pathway for progress in America and for creating a new vision of community in America. First, both groups must transcend the narrow vision about their common historical struggle. The vision of a common feeling about "the enemy" without anything substantive for sustained and lasting friendship, must end. Second, both communities must begin to build a culture of respect for each other. Building a culture of respect begins with closing the culture gap between both groups and removing long-standing negative cultural stereotypes that have become the perceptual lens through which each community has filtered the other for years. Third, genuine cooperation and partnership must guide Black-Latino relations.

In point of fact, there have been a few examples in which both groups have come together over common problems. In 1986, for example, when Cesar Chavez, the charismatic labor leader, went on a 36-day fast to fight for migrant farm workers' rights, the Reverend Jesse Jackson and several activists came on board to participate. But the struggles for justice in both communities are often narrowly perceived in ethnic terms, rather than in terms of a broad-based coalition for change. The sentiment present but often not expressed is that "It's not really my problem, I'm only here to help you." In this context, the farm workers' struggle for justice is seen solely as a Latino struggle. The struggle for civil rights is seen solely as a Black struggle. Sadly, when Blacks or Latinos or other groups become involved in these causes, they do so because they simply want to help. There is not a feeling of ownership in the involvement.

The fact of the matter is that a farm worker's right is not just a Latino struggle, and civil rights should not be seen as a Black struggle either. The origins of the struggles are certainly ethnic. But ethnic claims to ownership for these causes do serious damage to the struggles for justice. These struggles are purely struggles for human rights. We must cease to view them with ethnic lenses.

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## Concepts and Questions

1. What are some of the reasons behind the rise in the U.S. Latino population? Why has this rise created tensions with Black Americans?
2. What does the term "Hispanic" mean to you? Do you think this term generalizes or specifies people's cultural origins?
3. How can different historical experiences create different worldviews? What is the American historical experience of your ethnic group and how has it shaped your worldview?
4. What do you see as the major differences and the major similarities between the Black American and Latino American historical experiences?
5. Do you agree or disagree with Nwosu's assertion that one's native language can provide a feeling of comfort and belonging? Why?
6. How does language serve as a means of maintaining group identity?
7. Discuss and contrast the communication styles of Black Americans, Latinos, and Euro-Americans. What areas carry the greatest potential to create misunderstanding and produce conflict?
8. What measures can you think of to alleviate the fear of many Black Americans that the gains they have made in civil rights can not be shared with other minorities?
9. Nwosu suggests that one way to lessen tensions between Blacks and Latinos is to "close the culture gap." What does he mean by this? Can you think of other "culture gaps"?

Brathwaite, Brathwaite "Which Is My Good Leg?": Cultural Communication of Persons with Disabilities 207

# "Which Is My Good Leg?": Cultural Communication of Persons with Disabilities

DAWN O. BRAITHWAITE  
CHARLES A. BRAITHWAITE

## UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Jonathan is an articulate, intelligent, 35-year-old professional man who has used a wheelchair since he became paraplegic when he was 20 years old. He recalls inviting a nondisabled woman out to dinner at a nice restaurant. When the waitress came to take their order, she looked only at his date and asked, in a condescending tone, "And what would he like to eat for dinner?" At the end of the meal the waitress presented Jonathan's date with the check and thanked her for her patronage.<sup>1</sup>

Kim describes her recent experience at the airport: "A lot of people always come up and ask can they push my wheelchair. And, I can do it myself. They were invading my space, concentration, doing what I wanted to do, which I enjoy doing; doing what I was doing on my own. . . . And each time I said, 'No, I'm doing fine!' People looked at me like I was strange, you know, crazy or something. One person started pushing my chair anyway I said [in an angry tone], 'Don't touch the wheelchair.' And then she just looked at me like I'd slapped her in the face."

This original article first appeared in the eleventh edition. All rights reserved. Permission to reprint must be obtained from the authors and the publisher. Dr. Dawn O. Brathwaite is William Cahier Professor and Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Dr. Charles A. Brathwaite is Director of International Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.