

# Minority Voices

## Linking Personal Ethnic History and the Sociological Imagination

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CHAPTER

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**Inclusion or Exclusion:  
One Immigrant's  
Experience of Cultural  
and Structural Barriers to  
Power Sharing and Unity**

BY JOSE ZAPATA CALDERON



*The author during high school standing alongside his parents in the barrio.*

This narrative looks at the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion as tied to my experiences as a first-generation immigrant of Mexican origin. In this context, it is about being stigmatized and marginalized by a dominant group who has benefited from forced migration and colonization. It is about coming to this country in search of a better life but being forced to accept the dominant group's agenda of what it takes to succeed in this society. It is about power relations and the forces that shape identities in their own image through public institutions and through the visual and printed media. It is about the meaning of being an immigrant in a society where a dominant group imposes its language, values, culture, and institutions. As much as it is about this author's life, it is also about the life of the Mexican-origin people in the United States and their struggles for social justice and democratic rights.

There has been a tendency for some social theorists to view the issues of social justice and democratic rights in the context of the assimilation of all racial and ethnic groups (Park, 1950; Gordon, 1964). The term implies that Chicanos and other people of color are like European immigrants and that if they only follow their same road, they too will receive the fruits that the society has to give. The assimilationist view "blames the victim," and basically says that our problems are related to our culture, to our family ties, to our lack of accepting the American way. What the assimilationist view fails to point out is that we have a different history than European immigrants. Like Asian Pacific, African, and Native Americans, we were not voluntary immigrants to this country (Steinberg, 1981). The reality is that we were a people dispossessed of our land and forced to become wageworkers in the mines, on the railroads, on ranches, and in farm fields.

For Chicanos, the historical roots of these trends are found in two early historical developments: (1) the United States' annexation of the Southwest in 1848, and (2) the penetration of Mexico by U.S. capitalist interests.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was supposed to protect privileges that came from customs, languages, law, and culture. Property rights were also guaranteed (Acuna, 2000). However, after 1848 the treaty was broken and the Chicano people were faced with discrimination and oppression in all spheres of life, including loss of land and democratic rights. Hence, although the Chicano/Mexican people will constitute a majority in the Southwest and be part of a Latino population that now numbers 35 million

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people in the United States, and although the estimated 20.6 million Chicano/Mexican people living in the United States have made gains in some areas, they are still faced with historical factors that make them poorer, more prone to unemployment, and faced with generally less opportunity than the rest of the population.<sup>1</sup>

While we are a multicultural and multiracial country, the issue in this debate is the issue of power and who has it. Although stratified in the lower levels of the economic ladder, we have had a long history of resistance. This has been a tradition among the Chicano/Mexican people and will continue until the issues of denial of land, cultural, and democratic rights are resolved.

Our lives and their intersections are rooted in the past, guide our actions in the present, and help provide a vision for the future. It has been this way with my life: a lived experience influenced by the past and present history of the Chicano/Latino people.

## Exclusion as Lived Experience

I was born in Madera, Chihuahua, Mexico, and migrated with my grandparents (whom I called *Madre y Padre*) to the United States as a 6-year-old in 1954. We moved into a one-room house in a small farm community of northern Colorado called Ault. We lived on the east side of the tracks in a farm worker *barrio* that was close knit and where everyone knew and cared for one another. Our neighbors paid no attention to having someone come over and ask for salt or tortillas. This was the norm. If someone was sick or someone passed away, the entire *barrio* would know about it.

There were aspects that were related to the two cultural worlds that we were now living in. On the one hand, as a family in a lower socioeconomic level, we were beholden to the institutions that surrounded us. As a day laborer, my father had to sell his labor to the farmer for whatever wage they decided to pay him. There were years when my father did not earn over \$2,000 in one year. In order to survive, my father had to negotiate a charge account with the nearby grocery store.

On Saturdays, my father got paid by the farmer he worked for. We would always wait until he brought the check home and then we would walk to Johnson's Grocery Store together and do the weekly shopping. Actually, my mom would do all the shopping. I would tag along with my mother while my father waited outside until we were done. When we were finished, I would go get him and he would come and sign his check.

After bringing the groceries home, my father would go and play pool with some of his friends in one of the bars downtown. He would stay all day and often return somewhat drunk after midnight. My mother would stay up and wait for him while I fell asleep. As soon as he arrived, she would jump up, help him inside the house, take off his shoes, and put him to bed.

There was a traditional gender division of labor in our home that had some of the characteristics brought over from Mexico but that also fit into some of the norms of U.S. culture. My mother carried out all the household chores. She would cook, wash and iron our clothes, sweep the floors, and make the beds.

Since we had a wood stove, I was expected to do most of the wood chopping. Now and then, some of the area farmers would drop off huge tree trunks in our yard and I would spend days helping my father saw them into manageable logs.

At the same time, I grew up in a distinct cultural pluralist environment of two worlds: the world at home with its roots in Mexican culture and the world at school that stressed learning the ways of the dominant Anglo culture. At home, with my parents, I spoke only Spanish, prayed to the patron saint of the poor, San Martin de Porres, listened to *corridos* (Mexican ballads) on the radio, and celebrated Mexican holidays (such as Mexican Independence Day and Día de los Muertos). Although our home was within the city limits, we raised chickens, rabbits, and pigs. We also grew a garden that included corn, beans, vegetables, and chiles (lots of very hot chiles). All these products helped to get us through the cold winters. In addition to canning the products from the garden, my mother used the natural foods from the garden to make enchiladas, tamales, chile rellenos, and refried beans. Hence, a lot of our diet was based on natural foods.

The world at school demanded English only. Since I couldn't understand a word that my first-grade teacher taught, I turned to ditching school and playing in a nearby feedlot. A friend of my parents, Mel Martinez, would always find me and take me back. The next day I would hide once again. This went on for six months until a teacher, Mrs. Elder, realized that there was nothing wrong with my speech patterns and began to tutor me after school. We negotiated the idea that she would learn to speak Spanish and that I would learn to speak English. She stayed after school pointing to the window, the desk, the door, the wall, and whatever was around us. I repeated after her: "window, table, door, wall." I would follow the same pattern by asking her to repeat the words "ventana, mesa, puerta, pared." By the time I was in sixth grade, I had learned English so well that I placed second in the county spelling contest. Looking back on this experience, I credit my knowledge of the Spanish language in helping me to sound out words that I did not know. Although I was one of the lucky ones who learned English, some of my other classmates from the barrio weren't as fortunate. Six other Mexican students dropped out before the sixth grade.

"Making it" in U.S. society, I later discovered, meant that one had to give up being part of oneself. I did not know it then but the world at school, much like the larger society, was shaping my identity and knowledge of who I was.

I remember being laughed at by white students who looked down on me for speaking Spanish at school. There was an unwritten law not to speak it. When I brought my mother's burritos to lunch, my classmates made fun of them. Although I laughed alongside of them, I decided to never bring my lunch again. On snowy days, I went without eating.

Language became a powerful tool of cultural and structural oppression in our history. The English language was not only used as a tool to enact racist treaties and policies, it also allowed for the writing of a history that excluded our Chicano people.

I remember the games that I played with my friends in the barrio after school. We would pretend that broomsticks were horses. We were as brown as the ground, as Indian-looking as you could be, but we fought over who would be Tonto and the Lone Ranger. The meaning of who we were was already being shaped by television. Everyone wanted to ride the big white horse and wear the big white hat. Everyone wanted to play the part of Kemo Sabe and resisted the idea of being called Tonto. For my barrio friends, the word *sabe* implied a person who was smart or "knowing." What the television never taught us is how the "all-American cowboy" actually had its roots back with the cattle raising vaqueros of the 1800s. Many of the techniques, tools, language, styles,

and methods that were used to describe the American cowboy were actually appropriated from the Mexican vaquero (McWilliams, 1968:144–156). Some of the earliest “American cowboys” were ex-slaves with African roots (Porter, 1994:158–167).

I remember that there were no brown faces on television. No, I take that back. On all the Western programs of the late 1950s and early ’60s, we were portrayed as drunkards, murderers, and robbers—dozens of us shot down by one cowboy with a six-gun that never ran out of bullets. The TV programs also decided the meaning of “beauty” for us. We never saw a Latina in any of the facial advertisements. It was always a rich blonde in a Mercedes-Benz with push-button windows selling us pimple cream.

The books in the classroom were no different. We learned about Spot, Dick, Jane, and the all-time hero, Tom Sawyer. We never heard the names of Juan, Maria, Jose, or Patricia. If these names appeared in a class roster, they were quickly changed. The name on my birth certificate read “Jose Guillermo Zapata Calderon.” By the time that I graduated from high school, it had been changed to “Joe William Calderon.” I am sure that they would have changed the name “Zapata” also, but it did not sound right to call me “Shoes” Calderon.

When we did hear about our people, it was in a bad sense. We were told that the Mexicans outnumbered the “heroes” in the Alamo ten to one and that is why the Mexicans won. We were supposed to feel sorry for Davy Crocket, Daniel Boone, and some of the others who helped “develop” this land: Billy the Kid, Kit Carson, and General Custer. The Mexican heroes, such as Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, were merely portrayed on television as “frito” banditos (bandits who always stole the chips and ran).

We were taught that the United States “bought” from Mexico nearly one-third of its territory from Mexican president Santa Ana and that we have been a downtrodden people with little social mobility ever since.

They didn’t tell us about the many that resisted lynching, murders, theft of land, and resources. They didn’t tell us about Joaquin Murrieta who, in 1850, fought the land takeovers resulting in his death and that of his wife (Gonzalez, 1999). They didn’t tell us about Juan “Cheno” Cortina, who organized to defend the rights of Mexicans guaranteed by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Acuna, 2000:72–74).

The history books left out the role of Chicana women altogether. They were merely portrayed as “the malinche” who passively sold out her people. They didn’t tell us about women leaders in the Mexican revolution such as Dolores Jimenez y Muro and Carmen Serdan, two women who joined the war against the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz.

We were told that our people were lazy, not willing to work, and without any incentive to go to school. I knew otherwise. As I moved from elementary to high school, I learned how hard my parents worked by working alongside of them in the fields. We would work from sunup to sundown, like squirrels, in order to save for the winter. My mother would be up before the sunlight to start the fire in the stove and to cook breakfast. Then she would be with us working the same long hours and come home at sundown to cook dinner and wash the dishes. When I tried to help my mother by washing the dishes or making tortillas, my father would call me a *maricon*.

I didn’t know that this was a derogatory term that was later used against anyone labeled as being from a different sexual orientation. All I knew was that this type of

work was something that I was not supposed to do. I became a professional at chopping wood, vaccinating sheep, thinning beets, weeding onions, and stacking hay. But I didn't know a thing about sewing, washing clothes, or cooking. These tasks were considered "women's work" and men were not supposed to do them. Anyone who went outside these roles was considered different.

In the summer we worked, and in the fall I would cross the tracks to the west side of Ault, back to school, and back to learning.

The books in school never mentioned that in the 1900s, together with Chinese and Irish workers, we helped build the railroads, recruited by the thousands, making up a majority of the workforce on the western railway lines (Takaki, 1993). When the railroad companies were through exploiting our labor, they left us living in old railroad cars on the east side of the tracks (the birth of the barrio).

We worked in the mines all over the Southwest and created billions of dollars in profits but we remained excluded from union organizing by the copper and silver barons (Acuna, 2000:127–129). They didn't tell us about the leaders who organized to change these conditions, as in San Antonio when thousands of Mexican workers went on strike protesting their wages of \$1.50 for a 54-hour week in the pecan industry (Acuna, 2000:243–245). We were never taught that the leader of that organized strike was a woman named Emma Tenayuca.

Our payment in the 1920s was "immigration population control" and Americanization activities. The norm for success became assimilation with standardized IQ and achievement tests used to measure our success. English oral proficiency became a requirement for immigration as did English literacy for voting. Segregated Mexican schools were maintained (Estrada, Garcia, Macias, & Maldonado, 1981).

Although the school I attended wasn't openly segregated, it was evident that many of the Mexican students from the east side of the tracks didn't fare well in the school system. When I was a senior at the University of Colorado, I went back to find many of the Mexican students who had started in the first grade with me. I kept asking, "Why I had been able to graduate and go on to college while six others from the east side had dropped out?" After interviewing them, I realized that the school system had turned them away because they could not "fit in" to the dominant culture and because of their lack of understanding English. As I learned English and got involved in sports, I was much more accepted by the teachers and other students. The price for this "acceptance," however was immense. Through my four years of high school basketball, my parents never showed up to the annual "parent's honor night" sponsored by the school. At halftime of an important game, each one of the players was introduced alongside their parents. My parents refused to go, always excusing themselves by sharing that they did not have the proper clothes for the occasion and that they did not know anyone there.

Through the four years of high school, I excelled in football, basketball, and track. In my sophomore year, I also lettered in baseball. During these years, my father did not have to worry about employment in the winter. For the first time, we were not in debt and we were able to save a little money. However, once I graduated and went to a junior college, the farmers quit coming around in the winter months. For a while, I blamed it on the hard winters and the economy. I even helped my father buy a pickup



truck so that he could travel to the farmer's houses to ask for jobs, but nothing changed. My father went back to accepting the conditions that existed before my four years in high school: a day laborer finding few jobs in the winter. Slowly, I came to the conclusion that my contributions to the sports teams were rewarded through jobs in the winter for my father.

What was consistent throughout the life of my father was the constant harassment by immigration officials. Although my father was born in Los Angeles, his parents took him to Chihuahua when he was five years old. He didn't return to the United States until the 1950s as a farm laborer. Since he never learned English, INS officials always mistook him for an undocumented worker. They would pick him up at the bars or at his work. I remember waking up many times late at night to find my mother rummaging through suitcases to find my grandfather's legal papers. On two different occasions, my father came very close to being deported.

In the history of the Mexican-origin people in the United States, the threat of deportation was always used as another means of domination. This was especially true when the economy went downward and our labor was not needed. At least half a million of our people, including U.S. citizens, were put on trains during the Depression and deported back to Mexico (Acuna, 2000:220–225; Gonzales, 1999:146–149). In the early years of the Depression, any Mexican-origin person who applied for welfare, unemployment, or any type of social services was forced to leave the country under the U.S. government category of “voluntary repatriation.” Approximately half of those deported were U.S. citizens, a clear violation of both their civil and human rights.

When the economy got better and the United States entered World War II, the doors at the border were opened once again. The *bracero*, or Emergency Labor, program was established in 1942, as a bilateral agreement between Mexico and the United States, to meet U.S. labor shortages in agriculture (Acuna, 2000:285–289; Takaki, 1993:391–392). The program was extended after the war as Public Law 78 and was justified as a means of meeting labor shortages caused by the Korean War. The program ended in 1964 with five million Mexicans used in the peak years between 1954 and 1962. With the establishment of a regulated labor pool, the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service began a massive drive known as Operation Wetback to deport undocumented immigrants to Mexico. Operation Wetback grossly violated the civil rights of many Mexican-origin people, as did the repatriation project of the 1930s (Barrera, 1979:116–130). Hundreds of Chicanos were arrested and harassed. They were threatened and forced to produce “proof” of their citizenship. Only a few of the thousands of those deported had formal hearings. When the project ended, more than a million persons had been deported to Mexico.

We were present in World War II when half a million of us served in the Pacific, North Africa, and Europe. We won twelve Congressional Medals of Honor but, after the war, we were met back home with hostility, attacked as “pachucos,” as zoot suitors, and not allowed to bury our dead in cemeteries labeled “White Only” (Gonzales, 1999:161–164; Acuna, 2000:268–273, 280).

As I moved from junior college to the University of Colorado, I became aware of the war in Viet Nam and the draft. I learned that we were not only wanted for our cheap labor but that we were also wanted for the military service. Because I was in col-

lege, I was not drafted. One of my best friends, Louis Renteria, was not as lucky. I met Louis when I was a freshman in high school. My track coach took me to the state track meet and told me to watch this "Mexican boy." I noticed that he didn't have any track shoes or a uniform like the other runners. I watched him as he ran the first 880 yards of the mile run. He was not impressive to me until the last 440 yards, when he took off running as though it were the hundred-yard dash and won the race. In the next three years until he graduated, Louis broke the state record and held it until he was drafted into the military. I had the opportunity of speaking with Louis after he returned from boot camp and a few days before he was sent to Viet Nam. When he came to visit me, I was working at an all-night gas station. He stayed there all night reminiscing about his family, childhood, and high school memories. Before leaving, he raised doubts about whether he would return alive, and I consoled him with visions of how he would return to attend college and to continue breaking mile-run records. Twenty-five days before his nineteenth birthday, on October 28, 1966, Louis was killed in combat. He returned, like many of our young people who fought in previous wars, to be buried, and later to be forgotten. Although comprising only 11 percent of the population according to the 1960s census figures, they disproportionately represented 20 percent of those who died on the front lines in Viet Nam (Gonzales, 1999:211–213).

## Organizing for Inclusion

In the 1960s, our communities benefited from struggles to obtain lost land in New Mexico, voting rights through La Raza Unida Party and the Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project, and union rights in the fields of Delano, California. There were walkouts in the schools to protest the lack of Latino teachers, principals, bilingual education, and Chicano studies in the curriculum.

Because of the gains made from those movements, I was not shut out like others previously and was able to go to college. At the University of Colorado, I became more politicized through my involvement in student government and in protests against the war in Viet Nam. As a leader in student government, I helped lead a strike of 10,000 students to protest U.S. war policies and the unjust killing of four college students at Kent State by the National Guard. We shut the campus down.

After graduating from the University of Colorado, I had planned to go to law school. Instead, the course of my life was changed when I learned that the Nixon administration, in 1969, had ordered the Defense Department to increase their purchase of California table grapes. The Defense Department eventually purchased ten thousand tons of grapes and sent more than two thousand of those tons to Viet Nam (Del Castillo & Garcia, 1995:92). When I learned about this, I felt angry because I knew that the farm workers were simply asking for better wages, clean drinking water, and bathrooms in the fields. I remembered the years of working in the fields without proper drinking water or sanitation. I remembered the long sugar beet rows and the culture of turning our heads when someone had to "go" in the fields. I thought about how 40 percent of those dying on the front lines in Viet Nam were disproportionately black and Latino and how many of these soldiers were probably the sons of striking

farm workers. Like other young Chicanos from farm worker backgrounds, I began to question the meaning of fighting for justice abroad when the U.S. government was supporting the denial of basic rights for farm workers in the fields.

It was from this questioning that, with only \$57 in my pocket, I caught a bus that took me to experience the organizing efforts of the United Farm Workers' Union in Delano, California. Upon arriving at the UFW national headquarters, called "40 acres," I heard a speech by Cesar Chavez that influenced the rest of my life. In that speech, Cesar Chavez said:

There is only one thing for sure in life—and that is that we will one day die. In that space between now and when we die, we have the choice of throwing away our lives or to fully use them by sacrificing in the service of others. Because life is so precious—every minute, second, hour, week, month, and year truly count. You can easily throw your life away on drugs, alcohol, and selfishness or you can use your life in service to others. Those who truly use their lives and minds, when compared to the average human being in this country, may live the equivalent of a thousand years.

A combination of my experiences with the farm workers and Cesar Chavez's words led me to return to northern Colorado in 1971 to organize farm workers, undocumented workers, students, welfare mothers, and migrants as part of an emerging movement for democratic rights. This movement had various trends that, up until the present, have affected my life and have continued to affect the development of the Chicano/Latino people and their position in U.S. society.

First is the "democratic rights" trend. I remember that the early Chicano struggles were focused on issues having to do with bilingual education, community control, welfare rights, Chicano studies, and demands for Chicano teachers and principals in the schools. Although many Chicana women were involved in those early struggles, I remember that they were primarily assigned the roles of doing the typing, making food for fund-raisers, making leaflets, and organizing day care. The men were usually the leaders who made the speeches, held the press conferences, or carried out the security for demonstrations. I remember conferences where some Chicana women were criticized for espousing any kind of feminism on the basis that it was related to the middle-class white women's liberation movement. During this period, tensions between women and men were hardly addressed. "Adelita," from the revolution in Mexico, was played up as the model for women. However, she was usually portrayed in the image of supporting the Mexican men in battle.

The second trend involved finding the commonality of class and gender. I found the significance of class through various experiences revolving around a workers' strike at a meatpacking plant. With other community organizers, I remember making the mistake of primarily organizing Chicano meatpackers in a strike for better working conditions. The bosses used this strategy to divide the Chicano workers from the white workers. The strike was lost. I learned that all workers have the commonality of owning their hands and their minds and having to sell that ownership as labor for wages to survive.

I also began to understand the deep significance of chauvinism. In 1976, I married a Chicana whom I had met in the course of various campus and community educational struggles. It was during this period that I had to confront my own chauvinism

as it related to roles in the household. I was running around organizing all over the state and attending conferences in various parts of the nation. Rose would attend some of these conferences with me. However, when we had our first child, I tried to maintain the same schedule, but Rose was left with primary responsibilities in the household. At a certain point she argued, "If this is what the movement is all about, I want no part of it." Eventually, as our sons grew up, we developed a culture of holding family meetings and dividing up all the household work. Our sons grew up helping with everything from cooking to dusting, washing dishes, sweeping, and getting on their hands and knees to clean the toilets.

In addition to the family roles, our community organizing efforts were also tied to the family. When we first moved to California, we developed a parents' club in the day care our son attended. Subsequently, the parents' club played a role in helping to elect the day care director to our local school board. As our sons grew older, Rose and I helped to form various multi-ethnic coalitions that united parents around common issues in the high schools and in city hall.<sup>2</sup>

I learned, though, that just being involved together or creating a division of labor in the household is not enough. In our family, there are daily contradictions that arise and that we work through. There is still the larger system out there and a dominant culture that promotes male dominance, that treats women as sexual objects and advances those images to our children, that tracks children into specified gender roles, and that promotes sexism and homophobia. Our sons sometimes bring some of these tendencies home with them from school, from friends, or from the mass media influence. To deal with these issues that arise, we have learned to communicate about them. We have learned to talk about sexism and homophobia when we see it on the tube or when we see it in practice. Certainly, writers such as Gloria Anzaldua have taken the lead in critiquing both the sexism in the dominant culture as well as in the Chicano/Latino culture. Her refusal to "glorify those aspects of my culture which have injured me and which have injured me in the name of protecting *me* signals a new agenda for our communities" (Anzaldua, 1987).

The third trend has been finding the commonality that we have as Latinos. The fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population today is the Latino population, increasing from 35.3 million on April 1, 2000, to 38.8 million on July 1, 2002 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). The emergent "narrow trend" has tended to divide Mexican-origin Chicanos and Latinos from other peoples of Latin America. However, we have a lot of commonalities with Puerto Ricans, for example, who also find themselves living primarily in segregated communities. Their historical experience of subordination has also largely been determined by the colonial relationship between the United States and the island of Puerto Rico. It was the creation of a one-crop agricultural society dominated by U.S. sugar companies that originally created a large group of agricultural workers seeking other work. With the later industrialization of Puerto Rico, under the auspices of large multinational firms, many Puerto Rican workers become part of a growing surplus labor population, one that was forced to migrate from the countryside to the cities and from the island to the U.S. mainland (Gonzalez, 2000:246–267).

In recent years, there have been some concrete examples of Latino unity. For example, a conservative campaign to require a constitutional amendment making English

the “official” language was largely defeated by the coalition efforts of Latino groups throughout the United States. Similar campaigns have been waged to fight various anti-immigrant initiatives, including Propositions 187, 209, and 227. The various Latino groups were also able to fight historical gerrymandering and elect Gloria Molina, the first Chicana Los Angeles county supervisor in history. They had to go all the way to the Supreme Court to prove that the county supervisors had historically and consciously drawn districts in such a way as to divide the Latino vote.

## Inclusion for a Multicultural Society

This brings me to a contemporary fourth trend. Every country in the world, right now, is being faced with the question of whether they can raise the level of technology and production to the highest levels possible without destroying the world. For destruction not to happen, it will take the types of values that give more weight to the quality of human life than to the quantity of profit, greed, and exploitation.

If we are to survive, we must be able to harness the great advances that have been made in many social, political, and economic fields and combine them with values and interests that are committed to empowering our communities and ourselves. Unfortunately, there is a vacuum of leadership on a global scale. Hence, there is a rise of racism, protectionism, and chauvinism.

The fourth trend espouses an appreciation of our diverse historical experiences. However, there is no getting around that U.S. history had its origins in laws and ideologies that were used to justify the varied stratification of different groups through conquest, slavery, and exploitation (Almaguer, 1994; Omi & Winant, 1994; Steinberg, 1981; Takaki, 1993). If we don’t absorb and appreciate this aspect in all its manifestations, there is the danger of our accepting an ideology that simply blames the victim.

For example, there are the myths that immigrants, and particularly Latino immigrants, come to this country and steal jobs and social services. The reality is that the labor force participation rate for Latino immigrants is much higher than for native-born Americans, that immigrants in this country contribute to U.S. society in taxes and Social Security, and that the undocumented have actually improved local economies. Because of their willingness to work for lower wages, it has rejuvenated the profitability of ailing industries and prevented further job losses in many localities.

Another myth is the one propagated by some of our political leaders that Asian Pacific Americans are succeeding at the expense of Latinos, African Americans, and other groups. This is particularly prevalent in southern California, where the Latino and Asian Pacific groups are becoming a majority in various cities. While Asian Pacific Americans have achieved in the realms of education, there is a tendency to categorize this achievement as that of being a “model minority” example that others can follow. The “model minority” myth is used to place tremendous pressure on those groups that are having difficulties in our schools. If Latinos do not perform to the standards prescribed, the tendency is to think that something is wrong with them. This becomes a real problem for both Asian and Latino immigrants who cannot speak English and for those who find that English Only laws have been aimed at them. The use of this myth

by the state, by growers, and by white workers afraid of losing their privilege has resulted in the existence of a divided and weak working class in this country. Every time there has been the potential of workers from diverse backgrounds to unite, the "model minority" myth has been raised. Recent studies, instead, have shown that while there are some Asian Pacific American successes in respect to education, income, and employment, African Americans and Latinos are equally successful and that the Asian community has a large poverty pool with high levels of disenfranchisement (Blackwell, Kwoh, & Pastor, 2002:86–115; Daniels, 1997; Hing, 1997; Ong & Hee, 1994).

Today, the "model minority" myth is used to cover the significance of race. What is proposed is that if Asian Americans "can do it," other groups can too. With this type of thinking, the issue of race is not seen as an obstacle. All one has to do to achieve the American dream is to work hard, abandon one's old cultural ways, and learn to speak good English. For those categorized into a "model minority category," it becomes a no-win situation when they are criticized for not assimilating to the dominant culture but condemned when they are viewed as being too successful.

This aspect of the "model minority myth" does not apply simply to Asian Pacific Islander groups; it also applies to Latinos and other people of color. A good example occurred in the city of Pomona, California. Similar to the demographic changes taking place in Los Angeles, Pomona's overall population has grown from 131,723 in 1990 to 149,473 in the year 2000, a 13.5 percent change (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990, 2000). The population changes between 1990 and 2000 have resulted in Pomona, like many other cities throughout southern California, being a "minority" majority city with Latinos, Asian Pacific Islanders, and African Americans now in the majority. In this city, even the mayor, Eddie Cortez, like many other Latinos (regardless of their class background), could not sweep away the results of racism and racial profiling. In an effort to improve his health, Mayor Cortez began a daily program of running in his exercise clothes through the streets of Pomona. Thinking that Cortez was just another Mexican running from the law, the Immigration and Naturalization Service stopped him—and because he did not have proper identification, picked him up and almost deported him.

While scapegoating and the model minority myth have served to divide us, it is important to point out some concrete historical examples of how groups have been able to overcome the use of race and divisive myths and teachings to build effective and strong coalitions. In the early 1900s, hundreds of Japanese American and Mexican American agricultural workers joined forces to protest the working conditions in the agricultural fields of California. They formed a union, the Japanese-Mexican Labor Association (JMLA), in which meetings were conducted in Japanese and Spanish. Unfortunately, denied support by the American Federation of Labor, this union only lasted a few years (Takaki, 1993:187–189). It did demonstrate, however, the possibilities for overcoming the pitting of one group over another by the growers and the state to build interracial coalitions. Another example, in the late 1960s and early '70s, occurred when Filipino and Mexican workers united under the banner of the United Farm Worker's union and made gains to improve the lives of agricultural workers (Griswold Del Castillo & Garcia, 1995).

A good example of collaboration that beat back the "divisive myths" took place in the city of Monterey Park, where coalitions developed around language and growth issues. The multi-ethnic Coalition for Harmony in Monterey Park (CHAMP) successfully

defeated an English Only ordinance in 1987 and laid the groundwork for a trend that advocated citizen input into city planning decisions and the appreciation of diverse cultures (Horton et al., 1995). These types of concerns have united African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and working-class people of all colors around numerous power-sharing efforts (Calderon, 1990; Horton et al., 1995; Pardo, 1998; Regalado & Martinez, 1991; Saito, 1993, 1998; Sonenshein, 1993). Such coalitions have been effective in winning political reapportionment and mutual empowerment battles throughout the country. In Chicago, for example, such political coalitions emerged to preserve black wards and to increase the number of Latino wards.

Another example that I have recently been involved in is with the development of a day labor center in Pomona. When the city of Pomona passed an ordinance to stop day laborers from looking for jobs on street corners, students and community leaders from diverse backgrounds organized to develop a community organization and center that could empower the workers through the establishment of employment training programs, language classes, health referral networks, immigration rights counseling, and biweekly leadership meetings.

A recent conference led by the Latino Round Table brought together over a hundred leaders in the San Gabriel and Inland Valleys of Los Angeles County to develop a long-term plan on issues having to do with education, immigrant rights, politics, labor, and art. The conference was a catalyst for community-building and power-sharing initiatives in the region that are having an effect in changing institutions and in electing political representatives accountable to the community. These coalitions have had the distinction of advancing a new style of leadership that is challenging the traditional dominant power hierarchy and giving more weight to quality-of-life issues.

A genuine multiracial society based on power sharing will strike at the heart of gender, race, class, and sexual inequalities. It will be inclusive of the contributions of women, Chicanos and Latinos, African Americans, Asian Pacific Americans, Native Americans, gay and lesbians, and working people of all colors. Most important, it will build unity and power through focusing on the larger structural issues that are causing our institutions to decay.

While struggles in this decade have revolved around basic rights issues such as language rights, cultural rights, and the right to political representation, the struggles today are also grappling with the larger structural issues involving the need for educational reform and curriculum transformation; the need for access to the public health system; and the need for greater government investment in housing, education, and job development. In this trend, it is not enough to be in support of multiculturalism or multiracial unity. While the calls for multiculturalism and multiracial unity are an advancement on the politics that advance nativism, they can also be used as conflicting strategies to obtain differing goals. The underlying economic class issues can be camouflaged by the state with token acts promoting superficial power and unity. That is why multiracial unity has to go beyond the rubbing of shoulders by different ethnic/immigrant groups to a unity that brings the various ethnic groups together around the larger structural issues that are dividing them.

The larger structural issues facing our communities go beyond appreciating cultures and even beyond local municipalities. With state and federal funding cuts, local governments are raising taxes and reducing social services. The challenge for commu-

nity leaders, as well as others, is to find creative new sources of revenue without, at the same time, relying on unbridled development and racial scapegoating as responses to these problems. Solutions to the larger structural issues are going to take a style of leadership that understands the interdependent character of a globalized economy; that seeks regional cooperation between policy makers; that pushes forward the process of empowering the community as a whole; and that advances the full and diverse participation of all ethnic/racial groups in the decision-making process. This means not just training people in the tools of leadership but building unity and power through collaborative initiatives aimed at advancing structural change.

What stands out in my research of the contemporary history of southern California is the importance of leadership in taking multiracial coalescing from a level of cultural and social interaction to one that involves all ethnic/racial groups in the process of creating structural change. From my experiences, the politics of exclusion can be replaced with the politics of inclusion by (1) combining the practice of participatory democracy at the grassroots neighborhood arena with policy making at the local and national governance levels, and (2) taking into consideration the particular history of each oppressed group in the United States while simultaneously building coalitions that focus on the underlying structural issues affecting all groups.

## NOTES

1. U.S. Department of Commerce estimates released on March 8, 2000, showed that nearly two-thirds (20.6 million) of Latinos were of Mexican origin; 14 percent (4.5 million) were of Central American and South American origin; 10 percent (3 million) were of Puerto Rican origin; 7 percent (2 million) were from

Caribbean and other countries; and 4 percent (1.4 million) were of Cuban origin.

2. See *Politics of Diversity* by John Horton, which illustrates some of our family's involvement in the building of coalitions in the city of Monterey Park.

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